DOLCE | Liquid Gold *from* Napa Valley

AN EXPLANATION OF BOTRYTIS CINEREA

Oakville, CA – Botrytis cinerea is a parasitic fungus that, when suitable weather conditions occur, attacks grapes, concentrating sugars, flavors and maintaining acids, to produce an ethereal and complex sweet wine. Called pourriture noble (noble rot) in France, botrytis cinerea produces some of the greatest sweet wines of the world, including Sauternes from France, Edelfäule from Germany and late harvest wines like Dolce from California.

Usually occurring late in the harvest, after dry table wine grapes have been picked, botrytis first penetrates the skin of the fruit without breaking it or exposing the interior to harmful bacteria or air. The botrytis starts turning the golden fruit to pink and purple tones, and the grape begins to wither and desiccate, thus concentrating the remaining juice. The water in the grape evaporates, yet no bacteria can get inside and ruin the juice. Eventually, a fine, gray fuzz develops on the exterior of the grape, while the glycerin and sugars inside the grape concentrate quicker than the acid, leaving a more balanced juice. Botrytis cinerea seems to bring forth exotic and tropical fruit flavors.

A clean botrytis cinerea infection is difficult to attain, demanding a period of high humidity in which to grow and spread, followed by drying conditions to concentrate sugars and flavors. If the temperature rises too high, the fungus will be killed. In some climates, the grapes develop gray rot and spoil. Also, the delicate skins of the infected grapes could be affected by rain, thus ruining the crop. At the end of this uncertain and difficult process, the juice that remains in the grape makes only a small amount of wine.

Since so much fruit becomes desiccated and unusable in the process of growing a late harvest wine, as little as one ton of grapes per acre is picked, when the vineyard actually produces four-to-five tons per acre. In addition, grapes are lost by developing the wrong molds that create a sour flavor in the fruit, and to pests such as yellow jackets, which feed on the sweet juices contained in the grapes.

To learn more about botrytis cinerea and view the lifecycle of the mold in the Dolce vineyard, visit the Dolce Web site at http://www.dolcewine.com.

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