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For July 4th, wines with an independent streak

Edward Deitch finds some refreshing thinking by American winemakers

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TODAY

updated 2:57 p.m. PT, Tues., July 1, 2008

msnbc.com



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The Fourth of July is an ideal time to reflect on American wine and some notable independent streaks that have caught my attention recently, including the viewpoint of a maverick California winemaker, and why riesling — yes, riesling — is among the most exciting American wines right now.

Another notable new release, bearing the Columbia Valley appellation (specifically Horse Heaven Hills), is the 2007 Wallula Vineyard Riesling (\$20) from Pacific Rim, which was spun off a couple of years ago by California's Bonny Doon Vineyard and is now making excellent Washington rieslings under Nicolas Quillé. The Wallula Vineyard wine is one of several new Pacific Rim single-vineyard selections (as opposed to blends of grapes from several vineyards). This one is elegantly restrained and balanced with lively acidity and exceptional fruit that includes apple, peach, lime and a slightly spicy note. Both rieslings are enjoyable to sip on their own (not too cold, please) and will match superbly with all manner of Asian foods.

Our conversation turns quickly to Big California Wine, how Bursick is on a crusade against it and is not afraid, I discover, to buck the movement publicly. For one thing, he observes that young wine consumers in this country are very impressionable. "We're used to big things hitting us, big flavors," he says, "and winemakers are catering to this." He's not