

## THE CHRONICLE WINE SELECTIONS

### Domestic Riesling

Riesling is gaining ground in the United States. This white grape variety performs best in very cool climates that are similar to Germany's. U.S. producers have discovered Riesling-friendly regions, and therefore are better able to make wines that retain good acidity, while minimizing the tropical fruit character of grapes grown in warmer climates.

We last tasted domestic Rieslings early last year. There were 37 wines from California, Oregon and Washington. This year's tasting ballooned to 111 submissions (including a handful of late harvest and dessert wines) from which we selected our favorite 26, which offers a wider selection of dry wines than has been previously available.

The quality as well as quantity of Riesling continues to rise, driven by increasing consumer recognition and appreciation of this versatile, extremely food-friendly wine.

— Lynne Char Bennett

### DRY

★★ 2007 Bergstrom Winery Dr. Bergstrom Willamette Valley Riesling (\$28) Warm, spicy Pfalz-like nose with tropical fruit, papaya and a hint of smoke; fuller body and some tautness. Palate has length and edginess to its ripe, rich fruit density.

★★ 2007 Chateau Ste. Michelle Dry Riesling Columbia Valley Riesling (\$9) Faint apple, ripe pear, wet stone and talc aromas with a nice dry palate backed with fresh citrus and perhaps a hint of spritziness. Nice for the price.

★★ 2007 Holloran Chehalem Mountain Vineyard Willamette Valley Riesling (\$20) This wine's fruit has some botrytis and is vinified in a dry style. Honeycomb, fresh pear and tree fruit on the nose. Stony grip, slight pith on palate; somewhat lean and tart with a rigid structure. Very limited production.

★★½ 2007 Holloran Le Pavillon Vineyard Dundee Hills Oregon Riesling (\$21.50) More honeycomb than its sibling, plus some petrol and mineral aromas; similar flavors with crisp lemon and a stony, grippy finish. Very limited availability.

★★ 2007 J. Christopher Willamette Valley Riesling (\$20) Dry and light with some slaty grip that follows tangerine rind, green apple and lime. One panelist likened this wine to having an oily nose and an almost Saar-like steeliness and grip. Very limited availability.

★★½ 2007 Jana Leelanau Peninsula Riesling (\$28) The lone entrant made with Michigan fruit. Subdued floral nose with hint of pineapple that leads to ripe apple and almost red fruit on the more substantive palate. Tangy and balanced with lengthy finish. Limited production.

★★½ 2006 Navarro Vineyards Anderson Valley White Riesling (\$18) White flower, lime zest, fresh orange and mineral aromas and flavors; intense and focused; crisp, balanced finish.

★★ 2006 Pacific Rim Winemakers Columbia Valley Dry Riesling (\$11) Lives up to its billing with a dry, stony mineral character that also shows lime pith, unripe pear and a hint of ripe citrus on the finish.

★★ 2007 Pey-Marin Vineyards The Shell Mound Marin County Riesling (\$24) Sue and Jonathan Pey have made their third vintage of dry Riesling. Snappy mineral, talc, ripe peach and green apple; crisp and clean with almost razor-sharp acidity.

★★ 2007 Stony Hill Vineyard Napa Valley White Riesling (\$21) Fresh aromas of stone fruit, pear, yellow apple and mineral. Palate has touch of soft, creamy texture, which dampens the acidity.

### OFF-DRY

★★ 2007 Clos du Bois California Riesling (\$12) Floral, sweet pear, almost pineapple aromas with a light touch of vibrant citrus and nectarine. The juicy palate is crisp and tart with just enough sweetness to balance. Nice underlying mineral note. Widely available.

★★ 2007 Columbia Crest Two Vines Washington State Riesling (\$8) Floral hint to the apple-sauce, papaya, stone fruit and lemon candy. There is balance to this wine. One panelist thought it had mineral and a touch of botrytis, which added a bit of depth. Good value.

★★ 2007 Evergreen Vineyards Spruce Goose Oregon Riesling (\$17) Delicate but taut, with white flowers, stone fruit, juicy apple and pineapple, plus tart lime on the focused finish. Balanced and nicely done.

★★ 2007 Firestone Vineyard Central Coast Riesling (\$15) Warmer fruit in a simple, riper wine. Soft pear, slight floral and musky notes on the nose. Bright, intense palate of mandarin orange, with alcohol and tangy acidity on the finish. One panelist thought it a bit unbalanced.

★★ 2007 Kiona Vineyards Washington State Riesling (\$10) Fruity nose, slightly spritzy, peach and talc with a citrusy note. Good texture in this straightforward, fresh, slightly off-dry style.

★★½ 2007 Montinore Estate Almost Dry Willamette Valley Riesling (\$10) Stone fruit of apricot, lime and tangerine and what can be imagined as a petrol hint and mineral on the ripe nose and bright, linear palate. Especially good for the price.

★★½ 2007 Pacific Rim Biodynamic Wallula Vineyard Columbia Valley Riesling (\$32) Round, fruity aromas of pear, peach blossom and warm mineral segue to tart, nicely textured palate that is barely off-dry. Food-friendly acidity on the finish.

★★ 2007 Poet's Leap Columbia Valley Riesling (\$20) Firm aromas and flavors that are sharp, bouncy and lively with juicy apple, orange and peach. Pretty and barely off-dry.

★★ 2007 Robert Mondavi Private Selection Monterey County Riesling (\$9) Ripe tree fruit, orange blossom and brown spice — reminiscent of honeyed, spiced Gewurztraminer to one panelist. More concentrated juicy fruit palate, with weightier and slightly soft fig and lime zest. Straightforward with a vibrant finish.

★★ 2007 Snoqualmie Winemaker's Select Columbia Valley Riesling (\$8) Engaging but subtle nose. Edgy citrus, apricot, warm spice and a juicy profile. Has the fruit, acidity and slight sweetness to take on some moderately spicy dishes. Well executed and a good value.

★★ 2007 Ventana Vineyards Arroyo Seco Riesling (\$18) Interesting nose with citrus and sweet-savory herb notes. Citrus, acidic crispness and some underlying fruit on the straightforward palate.

★★ 2007 Yamhill Valley Vineyards McMinnville Riesling (\$18) A mineral core supports the citrus, nectarine and Granny Smith apple in this fresh, lively wine, which has additional tropical notes.

### SWEET

★★★ 2007 Chateau Ste. Michelle Ethos Columbia Valley Late Harvest White Riesling (\$40/375 ml) Simultaneously oily and vivacious, this late-picked bottling from Horse Heaven Vineyard shows botrytized honey notes in the nose mixing with peach, ripe apple and a twangy mineral punch. Yet it's nervy, with a compellingly unctuous texture that never verges to syrupy.

★★★ 2007 Eroica Horse Heaven Hills Riesling Ice Wine (\$79/375 ml) Chateau Ste. Michelle and Dr. Loosen's consistently exceptional Eroica Rieslings include this limited production "stickie." Rich, luscious apricot, orange blossom honey and a hint of toasted nut enrapture both nose and palate; balanced with a long, almost lively finish.

★★★ 2007 Navarro Late Sweet Harvest Anderson Valley Riesling (\$39) Gorgeous nose of concentrated apricot, sweet green apple and honey, with floral notes. Focused, dense and almost limpid — definitely late-harvest sweetness, but with good balancing acidity.

★★ 2007 Pacific Rim Columbia Valley Sweet Riesling (\$11) Randall Graham's workhorse wine sees no oak or malolactic fermentation. Sweet pineapple, ripe stone fruit, 7 percent residual sugar and only 9 percent alcohol make this affordable bottling a great partner with salty or spicy food.

\*Panelists include: Lynne Char Bennett, Chronicle staff writer and wine coordinator; Ion Bonné, Chronicle wine editor; Pierre Gulick, sales representative, Dee Vine Wines. For additional recommended wines, go to sfgate.com/wine.

Key: ★★★★★ Extraordinary  
★★★ Excellent ★★ Good