

# The Oregonian

WINE *day*

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2007

WHERE THE VALUES ARE

## Part 1: Northwest rieslings rock for a new wave

**Part 2:** Five to try NV Pacific Rim Dry Riesling (\$9): If you're a pinot grigio drinker and don't think you like riesling, try this. It's dry, with a delightful orange-blossom nose. Smooth, citrusy palate with lemon-lime notes and ginger on the finish. Remarkably elegant for the price. Find it at any Fred Meyer, New Seasons, Whole Foods or Zupan's. (Note: There is no vintage or appellation on the current Pacific Rim releases due to U.S. labeling laws and the fact that these wines were made in California from grapes grown in Washington and Germany. With the opening of the new winery in Washington, future labels will be printed with appellations and vintage years.)

## Part 1

### Northwest rieslings rock for a new wave

Tuesday, September 04, 2007

**Katherine Cole**



KATHERINE COLE

What's the second-fastest-growing U.S. wine sales category? Hold onto your hat, because this may surprise you:

It's riesling.

(The first, by the way, is pinot noir, thanks to the film "Sideways"; the pinot producers of Oregon aren't complaining.)

Forget pinot grigio. The next great American white is the very same wine U.S. consumers dismissed in years past as too sweet and simpering for their macho tastes.

Why is riesling suddenly hip? Perhaps because the new wave of wine drinkers -- Generations X and Y -- doesn't remember the Blue Nun and "California Johannisberg Riesling" craze that peaked two decades ago (and still has certain grown men too embarrassed to order riesling in restaurants).

These chocolate-martini drinkers don't have the same sweet-drink stigma that their dry-martini

moms and dads do. And this new wave embraces cuisines from all over the globe. It's looking for a new kind of wine that will complement everything from corn-on-the-cob to curry to chiles rellenos.

Whatever the explanation for the riesling revolution, our neighbors to the north are ready for it. From 2004 to 2006, Washington's riesling vineyard acreage doubled, while chardonnay plantings declined. And just six weeks ago, Ste. Michelle Wine Estates in Woodinville hosted the first "Riesling Rendezvous" -- a three-day gathering that attracted international wine professionals -- thus planting Ste. Michelle's flag as the pre-eminent riesling producer from the preeminent riesling region in the country.

Nearly 20 percent of Ste. Michelle's production, or approximately 750,000 cases, is riesling. For a large American wine company, this is an unheard-of devotion of resources to this relatively obscure grape.

Under three winery labels, Ste. Michelle offers an array of value wines in the \$7 to \$13 range as well as \$18 to \$25 single-vineyard and reserve bottlings; a \$40 late-harvest (dessert) bottling; and the \$25 Eroica, an award-garnering collaboration with acclaimed German vintner Ernst Loosen.

And now, a winery devoted almost entirely to riesling has just opened in Washington's Tri-Cities area. Pacific Rim is already the top-selling American riesling in the \$9 to \$11 slot. It has now moved its base of operations from California, where it no longer buys grapes, to Washington, where it has long-term contracts with nine vineyards. (Its corporate offices, however, are located on East Burnside Street in Portland.)

Despite its low price, Pacific Rim is focused on quality. Winemaker and general manager Nicolas Quille takes the unusual step of blending a small amount of German riesling into his wines, to increase their acidity and minerality while lowering their alcohol level.

Quille has just produced Pacific Rim's first sweet riesling; it sells in the \$10 range like its flagship dry riesling and is also meant to be served with savory foods rather than dessert. He plans to release three single-vineyard bottlings from the 2007 harvest, including one from a certified biodynamic vineyard, all priced in the \$16 to \$20 range, as well as a sparkling riesling in the style of a German sekt in 2008. At approximately 110,000 cases, Pacific Rim is dwarfed by Ste. Michelle, but still has a formidable national presence.

Washington is uniquely suited to riesling due to "a combination of factors," says Joel Butler, director of wine education at Ste. Michelle Wine Estates. Butler compares the climate of eastern Washington -- with its cold winters and sun-soaked summers -- to that of Germany, where the best rieslings in the world are produced. "And the latitudes are similar: In comparison with California, for example, we have longer daylight hours in the summer combined with cooler temperatures in the fall," he points out.

It's difficult to definitively describe riesling because it can be made in so many different ways -- dry, sweet, very sweet and sparkling.

But if there's a Washington riesling style, says Butler, "Most of our wines are characterized by very bright, crisp citrusy acidity and framed by ripe tropical fruit flavors, slightly spicier characteristics and also a distinct minerality."

Here are some tasting notes on a few of the top Washington rieslings; next week, we'll explore the riesling revolution from the Oregon side of the border.

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## Part 2

**Five to try NV Pacific Rim Dry Riesling (\$9): If you're a pinot grigio drinker and don't think you like riesling, try this. It's dry, with a delightful orange-blossom nose. Smooth, citrusy palate with lemon-lime notes and ginger on the finish. Remarkably elegant for the price. Find it at any Fred Meyer, New Seasons, Whole Foods or Zupan's. (Note: There is no vintage or appellation on the current Pacific Rim releases due to U.S. labeling laws and the fact that these wines were made in California from grapes grown in Washington and Germany. With the opening of the new winery in Washington, future labels will be printed with appellations and vintage years.)**

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2006 Kung Fu Girl (Charles Smith Wines)  
Washington State Riesling (\$12): The name and label art appear to poke fun at Pacific Rim's vaguely Asian-themed packaging, which always includes a languid Venus arriving from the Orient on an oyster shell, menu and chopsticks in hand. But in all seriousness, this wine has interesting yellow plum notes on the nose and dry palate. Slightly spritzy with some delicate star anise spice to the finish. Find it at Food Front Cooperative Grocery; Fred Meyer Burlingame and Hollywood West; Haggen Oregon City; New Seasons Concordia, Sellwood, Happy Valley and Orenco Station; and Whole Foods. 2006 Chateau Ste. Michelle Cold Creek Vineyard Columbia Valley Riesling (\$14): Stones, minerals, papaya and tropical flowers on the subtle nose and palate. Slightly spritzy with a hint of sweetness; white pepper and nice acidity to the finish. Find it at any Fred Meyer, New Seasons, Whole Foods or Zupan's. 2006 Chateau Ste. Michelle Dr. Loosen "Eroica" Columbia Valley Riesling (\$25): Elegant lemon chiffon and orange blossom on the nose. Spritzy light palate with delicate lemon chiffon and orange-peel notes; white pepper and spices in the long finish. Worth seeking out. Find it at any Fred Meyer, New Seasons, Whole Foods or Zupan's.

NV Pacific Rim Sweet Riesling (\$9): Sweet, yes, but in a balanced way; this is a wine for dinner, not dessert. Clean nose of stones, tangerines and candied plum; mouth-filling palate with tangerine and candied lemon on the finish. Ideal with sweet Asian dishes. Refreshingly, just 8.5 percent alcohol by volume. Find it at any Fred Meyer, New Seasons, Whole Foods or Zupan's.

Note: These wines may be available at stores other than those listed; and you can always special-order wines through your local wine merchant.