

DAILY NEWS

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Wine drinkers get sweet on versatile Rieslings

By: Mary Ewing-Mulligan

Could it be that Riesling is finally taking off? Wine experts recognize Riesling as one of the world's best white wine grapes, but wine drinkers have favored Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Grigio wines instead. But suddenly, Rieslings from California jumped 26% in sales last year.



Riesling is a fabulously versatile wine, delicious by itself and great with really flavorful foods such as Asian dishes or dishes that have fruit in them. You can find bone-dry Rieslings, but many of the wines - even those labeled "dry" - have a barely perceptible sweetness. Don't let that put you off; it's part of what makes Riesling so easy to drink.

Riesling is tricky to grow in California because many of the state's vineyards are too warm to give the wines the crisp acidity they need. Two iconic California Rieslings come from special areas: Trefethen Dry Riesling (\$18), from the southern, cool part of Napa Valley, and Smith Madrone Riesling (\$20), from high-altitude vines. **New York's cool Finger Lakes region makes excellent Rieslings, such as Hermann Wiemer (about \$20), Dr. Konstantin Frank "Salmon Run" (\$14), Fox Run (\$13), Standing Stone and many others.**

Washington's vineyards are not cool climate sites, but their cool night temperatures help to make good Rieslings. A favorite is Eroica (\$23), a fairly dry Riesling produced by Chateau Ste. Michelle Winery in partnership with a great German producer, Ernst Loosen. Poet's Leap (\$23) is another Germany-Washington collaboration, an off-dry, substantial Riesling wine with rich flavor.

In a recent blind tasting, I found three very affordable Washington Rieslings:

- # Covey Run "Quail Series" Dry Riesling 2005 (\$8) has nice, firm texture and lots of flavor-fruity and floral notes combined with a steely, mineral character.

- # Covey Run "Quail Series" Riesling 2005 (\$8) is a bit sweeter, and I prefer it slightly to the dry version; it's very flavorful with notes of peaches, apples, citrus and flowers. A bonus is its low alcohol, only 11.5%.
- # Hogue Riesling 2005 (\$9) is midway between the two Covey Run wines in its sweetness; it has vibrancy, fresh, fruity flavor and a bit of spiciness.

Another value from my tasting is Wakefield 2005 "Promised Land" Riesling from South Australia (\$13), a slightly fuller, softer, medium-dry wine, with typical lime-candy notes to its flavor.