

Celebrate the 'Summer of Riesling'
By Doug Noble
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MADRONA VINEYARDS' RIESLING pairs well with muscles at the Amerikan Ichi Sushi restaurant in Placerville. Democrat photo by Pat Dollins

Riesling the Summer wine

For the past two years the International Riesling Foundation, created to promote riesling as the world's most noble and versatile white wine, has sponsored the "Summer of Riesling."

This year from June 21 until Sept. 22 some 300 wine bars and top restaurants in 32 states, joined by more than 100 fine wine shops, are participating in the three-month celebration. The wine bars and restaurants are featuring at least three rieslings by the glass along with bottle offerings.

Additionally, for the first year the event has gone international, with participation by restaurants in Canada, Germany and the United Kingdom.

Madronña Vineyards, a member of the foundation, is carrying on this event locally, featuring two riesling wines in its tasting room, at local restaurants and at one or possibly more winemaker dinners during the month of August.

These wines are the winery's off-dry (1 percent residual sugar) 2010 vintage from its Hillside series and its dry 2010 vintage from the Signature series.

At a recent sampling of wines with a variety of different sushi dishes at Amerikan Ichi Sushi on Broadway in Placerville, Paul Bush, owner and winemaker at Madronña Vineyards said, "Riesling is the perfect summer wine. Not only is it full of flavors, it goes well with a large number of foods."

Delights the senses

Riesling wines can be highly aromatic with apple, peach and pear at the forefront mixed with delicate floral undertones and often honey and spice on the nose.

On the palate, rieslings echo the apple, pear and peach along with citrus and tropical nuances. Rieslings also tend to pick up a noticeable "minerality" from their native soils, explaining why hints of slate or limestone can be exhibited.

Bush describes his 2010 Hillside Series Riesling thusly: "Mountain honey characters burst out then meld into tart green apple, finishing with a Riesling minerality that almost makes the wine seem dry."



The 2010 Signature Series (Reserve) Riesling, he said, “has evolved over the years, emphasizing the unique fruit characters of hillside vineyards while celebrating the variety’s incredible acidity. With each year, we have refined our style, fermenting the wine drier while embracing its tart brightness. To our amazement, the result has been an incredible marriage of intense California fruit with European structure and style.”

Riesling rediscovered

Riesling wines originated in Germany’s Rhine and Mosel river valleys. Now, they are produced in numerous locations around the world and are experiencing a new “birth” as more and more people discover and enjoy them.

The derivation of the word Riesling is still not clear. One theory connects it to the characteristics of the vine’s dark, deep grooved wood, “russ” meaning dark wood and “rissig” being the root word for deep grooves.

However, the most likely connection is a negative characteristic of the riesling, namely, its poor flowering propensity in cool weather which is described by the German words “verrieseln” or “durchrieseln.”

The riesling grape’s origin is also a mystery but it is believed to be indigenous to Germany.

Interest in the varietal probably began in the early 14th century with the gradual shift of plantings from red to white grapes, when it was found that the transparent German red wines could not compete with the deeply colored French wines.

Although there are many other contenders for the honor of the “first planting” of riesling grapes, some claiming it as far back as 1232, the first documented evidence of the varietal was a sale that took place on March 13, 1435.

The cellar log of Count Katzenelnbogen at Ruesselsheim shows that Klaus Kleinfish sold the Count six vines of Riesling for 22 solidi.

As was done earlier this year when both Madroña’s New World Port and zinfandels were each featured for a month, in preparing for this celebration, Madroña Vineyards met with a number of local restaurants and asked them to feature a dish or dishes during the month of August, using one or both of the featured rieslings.

The list is continually growing but presently the following restaurants have decided to pair one or more of their dishes with a selected wine:

Placerville Brewery – 2010 Signature Riesling with fish tacos; Powell’s Steamer Company and Pub – 2010 Hillside Riesling and 2010 Signature Dry Riesling with Powell’s grilled tilapia; Kobe Sushi – 2010 Hillside Riesling and 2010 Signature Dry Riesling with miso marinated black cod; Bricks – 2010 Hillside Riesling with diver scallops and chipotle barbecued shrimp; Cold Springs Golf and Country Club – 2010 Hillside Riesling with fish tacos and spicy chicken wings; Snooty Frog – 2010 Hillside Riesling with Pacific Rim salad and smoked salmon tortellini alfredo; Los Pinos – 2010 Hillside Riesling with lomo de puerco and pollo Cozumel; Smith Flat House – 2010 Hillside Riesling with spicy special pizza and white night pizza; Cozmic Café – 2010 Hillside Riesling with thymely tuna and nut burger; Amerikan Ichi Sushi – 2010 Hillside Riesling and 2010 Signature Riesling with its signature Placerville monro roll; River Shack – 2010

Hillside Riesling and 2010 Signature Riesling with its swimmer sandwich, Artie sandwich and hot mama; Sierra Nevada House – 2010 Signature Riesling with its cheese and olive plate, grilled prawn cocktail and mango chutney pork chop; Zia’s Gelato – 2010 Hillside Riesling with fresh summer gelatos; Chantara Thai Cuisine – 2010 Hillside Riesling with spicy chicken salad and Thai cashew nut chicken; Café Luna – 2010 Hillside Riesling with fresh salmon filet dusted with Caribbean spices and Thai style chicken; Cascada – 2010 Hillside Riesling with carnitas alenas and camarones Santa Fe; and Heyday – 2010 Signature Riesling and 2010 Hillside Riesling with a pastry wrapped brie with cherry apricot rosemary chutney.

The winemaker’s dinner, with winemaker Paul Bush and Chef Dakota Lee Thomas, will be at Amerikan Ichi Sushi, 1234 Broadway in Placerville, on Thursday, Aug. 16 at 8 p.m.

The menu includes: first course — 2008 Signature Zinfandel paired with barbecued shiromaguro (albacore tuna) and hamachi (yellowtail tuna); second course — 2003 Dry Riesling paired with ikura (salmon roe), barbecued unagi (freshwater eel) and tobiko (flying fish roe); third course — 2010 Hillside Riesling paired with grilled wasabi salmon and seared maguro (blue fin tuna); fourth course — 2010 Signature Riesling paired with “Placerville Monroe Roll,” Chef Dakota’s signature roll; and the fifth course — 2007 Select Harvest Riesling paired with petit fours dessert and tiny pastel cake.

The cost is \$55 per person and reservations should be made by calling the restaurant at 530-621-2100.

For more information on the celebration of riesling and events in the tasting room, call Madroña Vineyards at 530-644-5948.

Dakota Lee Thomas

A 21-year-old Placerville resident, Thomas acquired his baking and pastry degree at American River College and then moved to Las Vegas, where he obtained his degree in Culinary Arts at Le Cordon Bleu.

Moving back to Placerville to be near his family, he worked on perfecting his technique at Zachary Jacques for a year and then found his way to Amerikan Ichi where he is restaurant manager and sushi chef. He prefers the atmosphere of a sushi bar over being in a kitchen, because it allows for more artistic creativity and personal contact with his customers.

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