



# Tim's Wine Market

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We begin 2023 with two exemplary wines that will hopefully push you into some new territory with your wine consumption. The first is a dry Riesling, a first for the Explorers Club. Often customers think all Riesling is sweet, but the reality is the vast majority of wines made from the grape are dry. The tide changed in the late 1990s toward only dry examples. The second pick is a fantastic Rioja that also graced our selections twice, once in 2006 and again in 2014. However, in those years the wine was labeled as Loriñon, but the Montaña family started shipping their eponymous label a few years ago. Their 2018 Crianza continues the tradition of over delivering.

## **Rieslingfreak Riesling No. 44 2022 - \$22**

Rieslingfreak is a winery project in Australia's Eden Valley, located northeast of Adelaide and surrounded on all sides by the world-famous Barossa zone. Though predominantly known for warm-climate red wines, particularly old-vine Shiraz, the Barossa zone is home to a varied array of climates and soil types. The Eden Valley's higher altitude (up to 2,000 feet above sea level) and limestone soils help set the region apart from its geographic neighbors, and provide an ideal growing environment for Riesling and other cool-climate varieties.

Given the name of this particular wine, it should come as no surprise that winemaker John Hughes has nurtured a life-long passion for Riesling. Growing up in the neighboring Clare Valley, where Riesling first gained popularity in Australia, John was equally fascinated by dry and sweet examples of this variety and began to collect both. Taking inspiration from German winemaking traditions and local winemakers alike, John started the "Rieslingfreak" label in 2009. Today, the Hughes family is joined in the winery by their close friend Mark Thomas and produce a wide variety of Riesling styles, sourced from across South Australia.

The "No. 44" cuvée is sourced from three different growing sites, including two from the high altitude Flaxman's Valley sub-zone. John and the team work carefully with their partner winegrowers, many of whom practice sustainable and low-intervention viticulture. Great care is taken at each partner winery to ensure quality and avoid over-ripeness; for this reason, the fruit is harvested at night, away from the intense heat of the afternoon.

Once the fruit arrives at the winery, the Rieslingfreak team does not press the grapes after sorting, instead letting gravity do most of the work to ensure gentle extraction. John uses a unique method in which the team spins the press, much like a salad spinner, to collect as much juice as possible without damaging the fruit. After fermentation in stainless steel, the wine is naturally cold stabilized and filtered before bottling. Only 224 cases are produced.

When you open this wine, you will want to serve it chilled, but not ice-cold. Simply pull it out of the refrigerator for about 15 minutes before serving. In addition, it will benefit from a brief decanting in order to bring out the natural aromatics of Riesling. On the palate, notes of lime zest, Meyer lemon, peach pit, jasmine, and wet stones make this a well-rounded wine that will pair with a wide variety of foods and even benefit from some bottle age. Drink now through 2029 with grilled bratwurst, Nicoise salad, or shrimp and grits.

## **Montaña Rioja Crianza 2018 - \$18**

There is no wine region more iconic in Spain than that of Rioja. Located in the Cantabrian Mountains in north-central Spain, the region has a history of wine production and trade with the Phoenicians that started as early as 500 BC. In the 20th century as Spain organized their wine regions in an appellation system similar to France and Italy, it was Rioja that was awarded the highest designation, Denominación de Origen Calificada or DOCa for short. Despite the high esteem in Spain I often find that the most classic examples are very hard for American consumers to understand. Their color is very light, often almost orange, and the bouquet can be very unusual by comparison to our own California wines. All of these

characteristics relate to the way the wines were made and aged by classic producers, mostly in an effort to compensate for the deficiencies of their grape of choice, Tempranillo.

As major grape varieties go, Tempranillo is very difficult to grow. It is a thin skinned which makes it susceptible to rain and hail and it ripens very early. This means that unlike other major varieties, such as Cabernet Sauvignon or Syrah, the grapes lack deep color and the flavor compounds that develop in the layers of the skin. To compensate for this deficiency the producers in the region rely on extended aging in barrels to develop flavor and complexity. Also, unlike almost all European wine regions that prefer the subtle flavors of French oak barrels, in Rioja they have an affinity for the stronger flavor of American wood. The final piece of the traditional Rioja winemaking puzzle is that producers often do not “top off” the barrels as they age. Because barrels are porous they allow about 1% of their volume to evaporate each month, which over time leaves a gap that exposes the wine to even more oxygen. This allows for the development of acetic acid, or vinegar, which was traditionally thought to be a component of complexity in Rioja.

The reason I selected Montaña is because I consider them an “enlightened traditionalist.” They produce a very authentic, classic style of Rioja but also work with modern technology and understanding to produce wines that are clean and stable. Here the Tempranillo is hand harvested and destemmed, then fermentation is conducted in stainless steel tanks with an extended period of skin contact to extract extra color and tannin. The wine is then moved to large, 500L new French oak barrels for malolactic conversion. After this is complete it is moved to American oak barrels where it aged for fourteen months, then bottled and held an additional year before release.

Many true modernists produce a Rioja that expresses a bigger sense of fruit and color than this wine, which is why I chose it for this feature. When you open this wine you will definitely want to decant this for a half hour before you pour a glass. Once you do it reveals a classic Rioja nose of marzipan, fresh cherries, toasted coconut, tamarind paste, allspice and gingersnaps. When you take a sip you will probably be surprised by the fairly big, firm sense of fruit wrapped by firm tannins and lowish acidity. Good now, you can easily cellar this wine for up to five years. Serve with rich yet subtle dishes like braised pork shoulder over rice or roasted chicken.

## **Crispy Pork Ramen**

I find that Riesling and Tempranillo based wines work well with Asian dishes. This recipe from Half Baked Harvest packs an umami punch and the rich flavors of soy, miso and pork fat work so well with the subtle sweet flavor of the pork that you may want to have a dinner party just to drink them at the same time.

**2-3 medium yellow onions, thinly sliced**  
**2-3 pounds pork butt, cut into cubes with the thick veins of fat removed**  
**6-8 cups low sodium chicken broth**  
**1/4 cup tamari or soy sauce**  
**2 tablespoons white miso paste**  
**2-4 tablespoons Gochujang or chili paste**  
**1 tablespoon Chinese 5 spice**  
**1 tablespoon chopped fresh ginger**  
**2 cups sliced cremini mushrooms**  
**2-3 teaspoons honey or brown sugar**  
**1 cup canned coconut milk**  
**1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil**  
**4 squares ramen noodles**  
**soft or hard boiled eggs, for serving**  
**toasted nori sheets, candied jalapeños, green onions, and chili oil, for serving**

1. In a large soup pot set over medium heat, combine the onions with 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Cook until softened, about 10 minutes. Add the pork butt/chicken, broth, tamari, miso paste, chili paste, Chinese 5 spice, ginger, and mushrooms. Cover and cook over low heat for 1-2 hours, adding water if needed to keep the pork covered.

2. Preheat broiler to high. Remove the pork and place it onto a baking sheet. Break into a few chunks. Drizzle each with honey. Broil until caramelized on top, about 5-8 minutes, but watch closely.

3. Meanwhile, skim as much fat from the top of the cooking liquid as possible, then stir the coconut milk and toasted sesame oil into the soup pot. Add the noodles and let cook, uncovered, for 5 minutes.

4. Ladle the broth, mushrooms, and noodles into bowls. Top with crispy pork. Top as desired with eggs, green onions, jalapeños, and chili oil. Serve immediately.