

Sunday, October 7, 2001

FOCUS ON WINE



RAY & ELEANOR HEALD

Alsace features dry-style riesling at its very best

Riesling is one of the world's premier grape varieties. Surprised? The great grape of Germany, is also a stellar performer in the Alsace region of France, where dry-style rieslings are at their best.

Because many California rieslings are not particularly good, especially when grapes are grown in warm regions, most people mistakenly believe that all rieslings are sweet, Alsace wines have not been all that popular in the U.S. Until now.

They've been rediscovered and are on a popularity roll.

According to the Alsace Wine Council, sales of Alsace rieslings (Please don't say Alsatian; that's a breed of dog) in the U.S. were up by 36 percent in 1999, and in 2000. In addition, sales of all Alsace wines increased 22 percent.

■ **Picks of the pack:** 1997 Kunde Diamond Vineyard \$27. ■ **Cellar pick:** 1997 Beringer Private Reserve, Napa Valley \$300. ■ **Picks from Oz:** 1999 D'Arenberg Coppermine Road \$65 and 1998 Tchublik \$18. ■ **Pick from Chile:** 1999 Vina Tarapaca Reserva \$25. ■ **Picks from California:** 1998 Swanson "Alesia" Red Wine (Cabernet/Syrah) \$46 and 1998 Trinchero Family Selection \$13.

■ Best buys at \$8 or less: 1998 California; 1999 Tropicana; 1999 California Chiller; and 2000 Santa's x 120, Chile.

■ **Ceretto Wine Dinner, Tuesday, October 23, 2001, 6:30 p.m., Fonte D'Amore Ristorante, 2200 Phoenix Rd., Red Llinois (734)423-0770; \$76 per person includes tax and gratuity. Meet Federico Ceretto, taste his stellar Piedmont wines from a five-course dinner, followed by chef/owner Lucio Di Signore. With many area wine dinners much pricier, this is a very good deal. Reservation required.**

Alsace wines?

The best Alsace wines come from 50 designated Grand Cru vineyards, where only gewürztraminer, pinot gris, muscat, and riesling, all harvested by hand, are allowed to grow. Unlike other French wine regions, Alsace wines are labeled with the grape name, so they're easy for Americans to understand.

According to Jean-Louis Vezier, director of the Alsace Wine Council, "The riesling varietal has reached its peak in Alsace." These wines have become such sought-after exports that the total acreage planted to riesling has almost doubled in the last 30 years.

Part of the appeal of Alsace rieslings is the price. Another is their versatility with food. And while we prefer to drink most white wines three to five years from harvest, good vintages of Alsace riesling age beautifully for 10 years or more. Riesling typically has fresh, green apple aromas and flavors with a crisp acidity, which helps it pair well with fish, seafood, poultry, and white meat. The citrusy character of riesling cool the palate after tasting a spicy curry or Thai dish and make a great choice with Asian cuisine including gushu.

F.E. Trimbach

F.E. Trimbach is one of our favorite producers of Alsace wines. This is principally due to the fact that Trimbach emphasizes dry wines, even in years when a warmer growing season would allow production of a preponderance of sweet, dessert-style.

Over the last few years, Alsace has enjoyed a series of very good to excellent vintages. In a recent tasting of Trimbach's very classy whites from 1999, 1997, and 1996, we were not

Please see WINE, D2

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Game dishes
- 2 Unique

INDIAN COOKING

Fresh spices heat up dishes

BY KEN ABRAMCZYK
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When food lovers think of Indian cooking, they think of curry powder. And when true Indian food aficionados think of curry, nothing beats a fresh homemade spice blend of coriander, cumin, pepper, ginger and turmeric to add a richer, fuller flavor to vegetables and other dishes.

Just not hot enough

Sumathi Kumar of Canton doesn't use the curry powder from the grocery store. The other curry "isn't hot enough for us," Kumar said.

"The spices are different in it," says Kumar. She likes to grind a chili powder into her spice blend to create a hotter curry powder for her and her husband, Anand, who both are originally from Madras, India.

Suresh Valsangkar of Westland does the same in making his own spice blend. He makes a blend of garam masala by roasting seeds of cinnamon, cumin, cardamom, cloves and peppercorns, then grinds them. "It gives you extra flavor," said Valsangkar. "Freshness is the key thing."

"I like it spicy, and the chicken curry is my favorite."

Valsangkar says Indian food has a unique taste not found in other cultures. "I like to make the spices from scratch, because at the store, all they do is sit on the shelf."

Generally most Indian vegetarian dishes are stir-fried. Valsangkar enjoys cauliflower, potatoes and tomatoes in his Ali-Gobi Curry dish.

Eggplant and okra, which are both grown in India, cauliflower and potatoes are also popular stir-fried dishes. "Sautéed onions are in many dishes and then tomatoes are added," Kumar said.

Similar to other ethnicities

Dishes featuring coconut and curry powder also are popular. Prominent ingredients in dishes are cumin, coriander, ginger and garlic, which all sounds a lot like a Thai dish.

"I like to put cilantro in basically any dish," Kumar said. "We like the flavor. I chop it and use it in most dishes."

Cinnamon and cloves also are used in main dishes. Indians use a variety of lentils, seasoned of course, with curry powder. It is also flavored with tamarind, a fruit that tastes like lemon juice that is sold as a sour-flavored paste. A drop is usually put in a dish of Sambar, a blend of lentils and vegetables.

"Usually we have lentils," Kumar said. "Lentils have a lot of nutritional value with rice." Then a stir-fry of vegetables can be served as a side dish with bread.

Bread consists of whole wheat flour with a little bit of salt and water.

Pulao is a dish of Basmati rice, with garlic, ginger, cinnamon and cloves, ground in a paste.

Indian cooking may not be associated with hot weather, but just like foods originating from other hot climates, the dishes themselves



Hot stuff: Indian cooking features vegetables, herbs and spices, including jalapeno peppers, ginger, garlic, curry leaves, cinnamon sticks, cumin seeds, cloves, red chili peppers and bay leaves.



Stir-fry time: Sumathi Kumar of Canton stirs okra before adding fresh spices. The prepared okra, far left, can be served with rice, below.

are spicy. There are "cooler" dishes to cut the heat of the spices. A cucumber dressing for the Pulao features cucumbers, seeded and shredded, with yogurt, cilantro and salt.

Cooks also make a mint chutney with coconut, tamarind and dried red chili. Chutney is generally served with rice cakes in India, not with lamb or pork as chutney is generally served here.

Various chutneys include cilantro, zucchini and tomato. "The tomato looks a lot like salsa, but it's cooked," Kumar said.

Amosa is a pasty filled with vegetables, all-purpose flour, and potatoes with curry powder, which is deep-fried.

"We use only fresh ingredients. We don't like to use anything from a can," Kumar said.

Kumar opens the windows even when she's cooking, even when the temperatures soared into the 90s this summer. "The house gets filled with the smell, flavor and odor," she said. "It sticks around. We have to open the windows to get the smell out."

But the taste is well worth it.

For more information and Indian recipes, visit www.milinda.com. For more recipes, see inside Taste.

RICE PILAF

1 cup Basmati rice
2 cups water
1 teaspoon cumin seed
1 teaspoon curry powder
1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 tablespoon butter

Cook 1 cup rice with 2 cups water and set aside.

In a skillet over medium heat, heat olive oil and butter, then add cumin, curry powder and salt. When cumin seeds splatter add the cooked rice. Stir until all ingredients are mixed well with rice. Serve hot.

OKRA STIR FRY

1 pound okra, cut into small pieces
1 small onion, finely chopped
2 teaspoons salt
4 tablespoons cooking oil
2 teaspoons chili powder

Preheat oven to 400° F. Coat okra with 2 tablespoons cooking oil and bake uncovered at 400° F for 45 minutes.

Please see RECIPES, D2

