

Three of the five flights were presented in Riedel's Superleggero Series, a "super light," lead-free, hand-made glass series that is perfectly balanced and created for sommeliers.



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Maximilian J. Riedel's Private Selection

AN EVENING MARKING 260 YEARS OF ENJOYMENT by Deborah Parke Wong

THERE'S NO QUESTION THAT GLASS-ware can alter our perceptions of wine. It's a phenomenon experienced by every resourceful consumer who has pressed a plastic cup into service when a wine-glass wasn't close. While the proliferation of shapes intended to complement or enhance specific wines has been met with skepticism from certain corners, without empirical evidence to the contrary, simply increasing the measure of enjoyment that's obtained from a glass of wine has validated the practice and the efforts of Austrian glassware maker Riedel.

wineglass than glass master Maximilian J. Riedel? Riedel, who is marking the 260th anniversary of his family-owned company, professes he hasn't scientifically tested their stunning glasses for superiority, but he was willing to demonstrate it in a tasting of truly extraordinary wines—the kind that need no incentive to be appreciated to their fullest—held at Auberge du Soleil in Napa Valley.

Designed as a blind tasting, five flights of wines representative of those found in Riedel's personal cellar, thus Private Selection, were paired with the Riedel glass design created to showcase them to their best advantage. Tasters—including the husband-and-wife winemaking duo Bo and Heidi Barrett, the *San Francisco Chronicle's* Esther Mobley, my fellow WSET educator Christian Oggenfuss and others—were prompted to determine the variety, origin, producer and vintage of the wines, ranging in age from 1982 to 2007. No small task even for the most worldly and circumspect of tasters, but the collective response was an immediate "game on." We were set to taste each flight with a five-course tasting menu created under Riedel's direction by Executive Chef Robert Curry.

The tasting opened with a Nebbiolo flight, presented in the machine-made Riedel Veritas New World Pinot Noir glass; it included a 1982 Gaja Costa Russi Barbaresco, 1989 Cannubi Paul Scavino and 1990 Conterno Cascina Francia. At least one savvy taster was able to get the ball rolling and identify the flight. Curry's dish of black truffle cappelletti and seasonal greens reflected the lightness and intensity of the wines, having reached their seasoned prime.

Riedel's Superleggero Bordeaux Grand Cru glass held 1990 Bordeaux from Angélu,

Haut-Brion and Cos d'Estournel; these wines, which belied their age and were pre-Parker in style, raised questions around the table but were eventually pegged by region. A dish of Paine Farm squab sent us back to the glasses for further investigation.

The Syrahs were the most readily apparent wines of the five flights, with a 1995 Guigal Côte Rôtie, 1998 Chave Hermitage J.L and 2005 Clos Saint Jean Châteauneuf-du-Pape Deus Ex Machina showing splendidly from the Superleggero Hermitage/Syrah glass. Never better than paired with lamb, the wines sang in harmony to a chorus of fennel puree, English peas and pancetta.

The dramatic black-stemmed Sommeliers Black Series Bordeaux Grand Cru glass proved a perfect vehicle for California Cabernet Sauvignon-dominated wines: 2001 Shafer Vineyards Hillside Select, 2005 Verité La Joie and Bond Vecina. Once the table settled upon Napa as the origin, the names of cult producers flew fast and furiously until the field was narrowed to those selected by Riedel. An umami-driven dish of Cabernet-braised short ribs mirrored the intensity and complexity of wines, which were just a few short miles from their points of origin.

The final flight of the evening spanned the 1980s with a 1982 Château Figeac, 1986 Penfolds Grange Hermitage and a 1989 Château Magdelaine Saint-Emilion, which accompanied a sublime dessert of Valrohna Illanka crèmeux, cassis-soaked devil's food cake and tarragon ice cream. In an unusual move, Riedel selected the Superleggero Viognier/Chardonnay glass, one that created a lasting impression of the contribution his namesake glassware made to the evening and to the fullest enjoyment of the wines. **SJ**



Maximilian Riedel.

Science has already provided empirical evidence that makes a case for the superiority of wine glasses for the appreciation of wine. Using a thermal imaging technique, Japanese researchers have captured pictures of ethanol vapors volatilizing from a wine glass in a ring-shaped pattern, with the area of lowest alcohol in the center:

This "donut hole" effect allows for greater appreciation of volatile aroma compounds without the added interference from ethanol. When wine was tested from a Martini or straight glass it didn't exhibit a ring shaped-vapor pattern, proof enough that wine glasses are the best tool for appreciating wine—but then we already knew that from firsthand experience.

Who better to discuss the merits of a

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