**SMITH-MADRONE 2016 RIESLING COMPILED REVIEWS**

**Terroirist, Isaac Baker, January 25, 2020**

Spring Mountain’s Smith-Madrone has long made incredible, age-worthy, unique wines, and their new Riesling delivers oodles of goodness for not much money.

93 points: Medium yellow color. So fresh on the nose, which pops with peaches, limes, pineapple, mixed with white flowers, hay, honey, crushed shells and sea spray. Brisk and focused on the palate with racy acidity, yet plenty of depth in texture. Tastes near dry, but shows lots of richness. Pure lime and papaya fruit mixed with mountain stream, honey and some crushed shells. This is another excellent Riesling from Smith-Madrone, one that should age beautifully. Crazy value.

**International Wine Review, Don Winkler, January 22, 2020**

91 points: Showing the ripe, sun-blessed fruit of California, this is dry, fruity Riesling showing lively scents of green apple and citrus that give way to a dense, stony palate of Meyer lemon and lemon curd with hints of stone fruit and bright, assertive acidity. Finishes very long with lingering lemon drop notes.

**Washington Wine Blog, Owen Bargreen, January 8, 2020**

One of the great older houses out of Napa that you may have never heard of, Smith-Madrone has gained a national reputation not only for their typical varietal wines, but for their Riesling wines. Smith-Madrone wines are sourced from the winery's dry-farmed estate vineyards surrounding the winery on top of Spring Mountain in the Napa Valley. Stuart Smith chose specific slopes with different exposures for specific varietals when planting the vineyards: eastern exposure for Riesling, southern and western exposures across flat stretches for the Cabernet Sauvignon and the coolest north-facing slopes for the Chardonnay. The soil is mostly deep-red Aiken Stoney Clay loam, and is primarily volcanic-based, well-drained and deep for mountain soils. The estate is a 200 acre ranch, partly planted as vineyard over a century ago. California black bears and other wildlife once thrived here as did 120-year-old Picholine olive trees which frame a path and view down to the floor of the Napa Valley.

I recently had the chance to review the wines from this historic estate in Napa and was hugely impressed with the quality of wines from the warm vintages of 2015 and 2016.

91 points: The 2016 Smith-Madrone Riesling is amongst the best Rieslings made in this region. Fantastic now, the wine will cellar well at least for another five years. A whiff of petrol and white flowers immediately takes you to the old world rather than Napa. Beautifully texture and lithe, showing good poise, the wine delivers ripe green apple, wet stone and shades of kumquat zest that mingle together on the palate. This is truly one the best I have had from Napa. Drink 2019-2025.

**Santa Rosa Press Democrat, Peg Melnik, January 7, 2020**

Wine of the Week: 5 stars: Floral, with flavors on the palate of stone fruits, mineral and a quench of lime. This riesling rides on crisp acidity and has perfect balance; everything is in check. This Alsatian-styled riesling is gorgeous.

At Smith-Madrone Vineyards, when it comes to riesling, you’re tasting the naked grape, hailing from vineyards steep in volcanic soils. “You’re tasting the pure essence of the grape in a way that doesn’t occur with other varietals,” said vintner Stu Smith. “There’s no oak aging, no malolactic fermentation, no lees stirring or blending with other grapes.”

Smith and the naked grape are behind our wine of the week winner — the Smith-Madrone 2016 Spring Mountain District Napa Valley Riesling at $34. It’s floral, with flavors on the palate of stone fruits, mineral and a quench of lime. This Alsatian-style riesling rides on crisp acidity and has perfect balance; everything’s in check. The vintner said the St. Helena enterprise is a team effort. He also credits his older brother, Charlie Smith, and his son, Sam Smith, for the caliber of this riesling.

“We all decide on the blends, do the harvest together, and none of us gets out of bottling,” Stu Smith said. Stu Smith founded the winery in 1971. Charlie Smith joined in 1973 and Sam Smith, in 2010. “Charlie, Sam and I care,” Stu Smith said. “We’re trying to make the very best wine humanly possible. To do that, you have to have a mindset that wine quality is the singular focus and that all those thousands of decisions that are made unconsciously are uncompromisingly for quality and not quantity or dollars.”

The winery adheres to dry farming as much as possible, Stu Smith said. Dry farming means vineyards are not irrigated and rely solely on water nature provides. “Using as little water as possible is still a laudable goal, and one my industry should be embracing,” Stu Smith said. The heat spell over Labor Day weekend in 2017 forced Stu Smith to rethink his commitment to dry farming. Today, he opts for moderation.

Limiting irrigation produces smaller berries with a higher skin-to-juice ratio. Because the skin contains all the flavor, he said, it produces a more intensely flavored grape. “I see this as not only a way to make better wine, but also something that demonstrates that we are being responsible neighbors by not wasting such a precious resource.” During his college years at Berkeley in the 1960s, Stu Smith enjoyed wine more than beer.

“There was a bottle of 1961 Chateau Lafite at the wine store Jackson’s Party Service for sale for $27. Like Dr. Strangelove, I’d reach for that bottle and my other arm would reach out and pull my hand back. A bottle priced at $27 was beyond my reach.”

Today, Smith is smitten with riesling. “We give it the respect that it deserves. We believe that riesling is one of the four most important varietals in the world — along with cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay and pinot noir. “We don’t believe it’s just one of the most important ‘white’ varietals in the world.”

**Santa Rosa Press Democrat, Michele Anna Jordan, January 7, 2020**

This Indian dish, Channa Dal, pairs well with the Wine of the Week, Smith-Madrone 2016 Napa Valley Spring Mountain District Riesling.

There is something quite beguiling about our Wine of the Week, the Smith-Madrone 2016 Napa Valley Spring Mountain District Riesling. You could call it a quirky beauty, with an abundance of mid-palate fruit that is never overwhelming and does not create impressions of sweetness.

It is this beautiful overlay of fruit that makes the wine a standout. You’ll notice white peach and nectarine, yellow peach and nectarine, baked apple and pear, with hints of tart citrus zest.

There is a beautiful flourish of minerality, too, which you notice best on the finish, especially when you take a deep breath just after swallowing a mouthful.

The wine takes its style from Alsace, France, and as you would expect, it is wonderful with some of the region’s foods. A simple fondue or raclette with potatoes and cornichons is a seductive partner.

The wine also provides a refreshing contrast to some of the classic gratins of the region, including a stunningly luscious cabbage gratin.

But the wine also crosses geographic borders. It is outstanding with many Indian and Thai curries, provided they don’t have too much heat (the wine can take a little without turning bitter).

You may also enjoy it with white, yellow and red lentils as well as young chickpeas, which are the inspiration for today’s pairing.

Although dal, as Indian lentil soups are called, is often served in small portions at the beginning of a meal, this version is hearty enough to be a main course.

**Talk-A-Vino, Anatoly Levine, December 28, 2019**

Top Wines of 2019: …if you want to try the best Riesling made in the USA, go get it. Does this sound like a bold claim? Maybe it does, but if your hallmark of Riesling excellence is Grosset Polish Hill Clare Valley in Australia, then you will easily understand me. If you like Riesling, this is the wine you need to ask for by name. Yes, now.

**Elin McCoy, Bloomberg, December 16, 2019**

The Best 50 Wines under $50: Every year I sample thousands of wines, and I'm always on the hunt for great bargain bottles. Happily, I found more delicious and affordable wines than ever in 2019…The Smith brothers have been making seriously complex Alsace-style rieslings on Napa's Spring Mountain since 1977. The latest release is superb.

**Cori Solomon, San Francisco Chronicle, November 26, 2019**

At this time of the year, most of us wonder about the best Thanksgiving wine to serve with our holiday feast. Because of the flavors, we savor during our holiday meal, a wide variety of wines that will suit the occasion. This year I am thinking about whites to complement our dinner fare. We can choose a more aromatic white, a unique white, or if your preference, a reliable standby, there is Chardonnay. Here are some selections of wines that have crossed my path recently. They are excellent options to grace your table this Thanksgiving….The grapes grow on steep hillsides in the Spring Mountain District similar to those in the German Riesling regions like Mosel. Aromas of white flowers and citrus give way to flavors of lime, stone fruits and pear. I found this to be a very dry Alsatian styled Riesling that is bright and lively with some creaminess and minerality.

**Grape-Experiences, Cindy Rynning, November 19, 2019**

The choices reviewed below are produced at family-owned wineries in beautiful Napa Valley. Each wine expresses the unique terroir of the landscape and spirit of the people who are its stewards…Having visited Smith-Madrone Vineyards & Winery last year during which I had a lovely, kick-back birthday lunch with friends and the Smith family, it was a clear choice to include two of their wines, some of my favorites, on this year’s list. Their latest release of another favorite wine, Smith-Madrone 2016 Riesling, expressed everything I expect from this family who has been a foundation of Napa Valley viticulture and the St. Helena area for decades. Lively aromas of white peach flesh, white flowers, lemon zest, freshly-cut pineapple and lime were clean and sharp. On the palate, dry and creamy with vibrant acidity, flavors of white pepper, kiwi, lime and herbs paved the path to a luscious and lasting finish.

**James Melendez, James on Wine, YouTube review, August 11, 2019**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zdzhu4GaKl8&t=18s>

**James Melendez, James on Wine, YouTube review, August 28**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zdzhu4GaKl8>

**Wine Enthusiast, Virginie Boone, December 1, 2019**

95 points, Editors' Choice: Opening with a lovely mix of apricot, green apple and petrol, this wine offers enviable structure, complexity and balance. Lush on the mid-palate, it never loses focus, retaining mineral-like stoniness and linear, fresh acidity.

**Vinography, Alder Yarrow, November 2, 2019**

This week included a few perennial favorites. Let's get started with the Smith-Madrone Riesling, arguably the finest (and one of the very few) Rieslings made in Napa. Made high up on Spring Mountain, this wine always delivers classic varietal character with a nice balance between fruit and mineral components, and will age nicely.

Light gold in the glass, this wine smells of honey and citrus oil. In the mouth, a hint of paraffin, citrus pith and honeysuckle have a delicate acidity and nice wet pavement minerality. Pretty.

**WineReviewOnLine, Rich Cook, October 22, 2019**

94 points: Once again, the Smiths have produced a beautiful Riesling that shows off its high elevation in the glass. This vintage is quite forward on the nose, with white flowers and stone fruit sweetly fragrant and enticing you to drink. The palate translates the aroma profile in a dry style, with a round texture mid-palate and a crisp, mouth-watering finish with excellent push of all the flavors. The fruit seems riper than previous vintages, providing a creamy tip of the hat to Alsace. Insider tip – you can get this in a hock magnum, which will add a fine festive touch to your holiday table. I'm ordering mine now!  
**Washington Post, Dave McIntyre, October 4, 2019**

Napa Valley is the land of cabernet, but Smith-Madrone, on Spring Mountain at the Valley’s northern end, steadfastly maintains some of its higher-elevation vineyards with riesling. And riesling fans know its quality is reliably outstanding. The 2016 offers flavors of ripe peach and apricot, with a dash of wild herbs, and a mouth-filling texture that refuses to quit.

Riesling is arguably the most misunderstood wine. Sommeliers, wine writers, people who spend too much of their disposable income on wine, tend to love it. And yet, “I don’t like riesling — it’s too sweet,” is a common refrain from casual wine drinkers, whenever I rave about it.

That’s understandable. Generations of Americans favored sweet wine, and riesling fit the bill. Whether inexpensive plonk from Germany or generic white wine from California, we drank lots of it. But somewhere along the way, we learned that “dry” wine is supposed to be better. Chardonnay and sauvignon blanc eclipsed riesling in U.S. vineyards and American imaginations.

Today there’s a bit of a riesling renaissance in the United States. Riesling shines in certain regions, such as New York’s Finger Lakes, Michigan’s Old Mission Peninsula and Washington state’s Columbia Valley. Some dedicated winemakers are crafting exceptional riesling in Oregon’s Willamette Valley, and there are a few notable holdouts in California.

Here are five things to know about riesling and to encourage you to explore this exciting wine.

1. They are NOT all sweet!

Riesling is a versatile wine, because it can be racy and bone dry, unctuous and sweet, and everything in between. That’s why consumers can be confused — we don’t know what we’re buying unless the label tells us. And it doesn’t, usually. But there are clues.

Rieslings from Austria, Australia and New Zealand are almost always dry, and the rare dessert wines are usually marked as such. Dry German rieslings may be labeled as “trocken,” and the top bottlings called “erste lage” or “grosses gewachs” are always dry. U.S. wineries may make a range of styles. These may be labeled as dry or semi-dry, to indicate moderate sweetness, which I prefer to call fruitiness. Ripe fruit, after all, tastes sweet.

The back label may sport a scale indicating dry, medium dry, medium sweet or sweet. This scale was developed by a group or wineries called the International Riesling Foundation, and it’s a little more complex than it sounds. A wine’s perceptible sweetness is not just a question of how much sugar is left in the wine after fermentation. The IRF scale factors in sugar, acidity and the wine’s pH level to give us an indication of how sweet or dry the wine will taste.

2. Riesling is a great food wine.

A food-wine pairing maxim pitches sweeter wine with spicy Asian foods, because the sugar in the wine moderates the food’s heat. Riesling fits that, especially a semi-dry version. But the wine’s key is really its fruitiness and acidity, a combination that equal versatility.

“Riesling can be made in many different styles, from low to high alcohol, from dry, to off-dry and then the many dessert styles,” says Stu Smith, winemaker at Smith-Madrone Vineyards on Napa Valley’s Spring Mountain. Smith-Madrone planted its riesling vineyard in 1972 and is now celebrated as one of the few riesling holdouts in the land of cabernet sauvignon. “It goes with just about any food, meat, soup or cuisine — or all by itself.”

Riesling is great with smoked fish, salads, curries, even braised beef — one of my most memorable meals was beef braised in riesling, with spaetzle. It may have helped that I was in Germany, of course. And if you buy a bottle that turns out to be too sweet for your taste, save it for a salty cheese or dessert.

3. Riesling is a megaphone for terroir.

A conversation with a German winemaker can turn into a dizzying discourse on how a riesling from a vineyard on blue slate soils tastes different from one grown on red slate. But you don’t have to be a geologist to appreciate riesling’s ability to express its origins.

4. Riesling ages well.

Wine lovers who are still collectors should keep a stash of riesling in their cellars. We tend to consider white wines at their peak just a year or two after the vintage, but riesling’s acidity gives it a potential for long life.

“Why do I keep making riesling?” Smith asks. “Because I love drinking it while it’s young, and savor it when it’s aged.”

5. They are NOT all sweet!

Delicious riesling is grown in many areas throughout the United States.

**VinePair, Edward Deitch, September 26, 2019**

Like many Napa Valley wineries, Smith-Madrone produces first-rate Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay, the two most planted varieties in the region. But unlike most of its counterparts, Smith-Madrone also grows Riesling and has done so since 1972.

Although there is a long history of Riesling in California, these days the variety is basically a footnote, which is a shame because wines like Smith-Madrone’s 2016 Riesling demonstrate the character the wines can achieve in the region.

Key to that in Smith-Madrone’s case is the location of its 38 acres of vineyards, which are dry-farmed (they’re not irrigated) in volcanic soils at the top of Napa’s Spring Mountain.

In the winery’s 2016 Riesling, we get both opulent California fruit and the refreshing acidity that is characteristic of Riesling. The wine, which is made slightly off-dry (as most great Rieslings are) but is by no means sweet, is on the same level as some top Rieslings from Europe or New York’s Finger Lakes.

And it is simply delightful to drink, with ripe fruit notes of green apple, white peach, and apricot, accented by wet stone and petrol that round out the profile of this complex and delicious offering.

For me, the Riesling is always the new release I anticipate most among Smith-Madrone’s wines. With moderate alcohol of 12.8 percent, it’s a versatile wine for food and is great to sip on its own. This is a California classic that will expand your thinking about Napa Valley wines.

**Napa Valley Register/St. Helena Star, Wine of the Week, Catherine Bugue, September 9, 2019**

Aromas of heady, red apple fruit have you the minute you put your nose in the glass. Memories of crisp summer apples, their juice running down your fingers as you take a crunchy bite quickly come to mind. Yet the red apple fruit is just the beginning of your aromatic journey with Smith-Madrone's Riesling. They draw you into this wine's delicious depths, adding Asian pear, guava, crushed stones, mineral, and a wisp of zesty lemon as you continue along its sensory path.

Only very special wines, while seemingly inanimate in the glass, draw you into their story as you sip, and this one's crispness, freshness and complexity is an ode to Spring Mountain roots, volcanic soil depth, and winemakers who cherish these natural influences and let them shine.

**Doug Wilder, Purely Domestic Wine Report, Volume 7.4, September 2019**

93 points: The nose is a fresh green apple acidity with whiffs of blossoms and ripe peach. The palate offers a bright, crisp and bone dry apple with a fragrant oiliness in the core. Excellent focus and clarity on the finish. Drink 2019-2028.

**The Bohemian, James Knight, August 7, 2019**

Holy honeycomb-lanolin gelato! Sounds sweet? It's not sweet. Riesling can develop scents that seem tantalizingly dulcet, yet the wine remains crisp, dry and refreshing. The lanolin note is like a softer version of the "petrol," or mineral oil, aroma that aged Rieslings (and some younger ones) may show, and there's a tinge of herb, as well—though it's not as "würzy" as Gewürztraminer. Dry Riesling is great with seafood—like, say a shrimp off that barbie.

**Terroirist, Isaac Baker, August 24, 2019**

…Smith-Madrone’s Spring Mountain wines are consistently some of my favorite from Napa, and I love their Chardonnay and Riesling in particular. So, since I tasted these wines sighted, I tried to approach them with as much skepticism as possible. That said, the 2016s showed wonderfully. Crystal clear, pristine wines, and both are worthy for serious cellar time. Especially considering the price, I’m still amazed these wines exist.

93 points: Light yellow color. Gorgeous nose of salted limes, apricot, pineapple, with dusty, chalky, sea spray notes. Laser-like focus on the palate, quite dry and vibrant. Juicy yellow and green apples with limes, and a complex mix of limestone, ocean spray, mountain stream and crushed shells. Such a lively, complex, balanced and age-worthy Riesling. Smith-Madrone does it again, and this vintage is a stunner for the cellar.

**Nittany Epicurean, Michael Chelus, August 23, 2019**

The wine showed a light golden color. Pear, lemon curd, apple, stone fruit and whiffs of petrol all arrived on the nose. Pear, pithy lemon, apple, candied citron, apricot and hints of petrol followed on the palate where the citrus was bright and abundant. The wine exhibited good acidity and balance, along with good structure and length. This wine would be an ideal aperitif and would also pair well with steamed lobster or crispy pork schnitzel.

**Dottie Brecher, Grape Collective/Instagram, July 27, 2019**

If you love Riesling, look for this. If you don’t think you love Riesling, definitely look for this

<https://www.instagram.com/p/B0bkYrgHlpz/>

**Debbie Gioquindo, Hudson Valley Wine Goddess/Instagram, August 2, 2019**

Grown on steep hillsides in the Spring Mountain District of Napa Valley. Notes of jasmine, citrus and stone fruit with some petrol notes in the distance. Nice minerality on the palate with notes of apricot and a hint of lime and orange crush with acidity that hits you from behind. A very pleasant and refreshing wine. Note: as the wine warmed up in the hot summer sun notes of green apple appeared.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/B0qpBcxlRrd/>

**Ellen Landis, EllenOnWine, July 30, 2019**

Smith-Madrone Vineyards & Winery was one of my first Napa “wow” wine experiences. I visited them in my early years of wine study and appreciation while traversing Napa Valley with colleagues and savvy wine collector friends. It was an enlightening afternoon there, and the wines showed incredibly well, impressing the knowledgeable group assembled. Founded in 1971 by Stuart Smith, the vineyards are situated at the top of Spring Mountain, on steep slopes at elevations up to 2,000 feet. All their wines come from fruit rooted among their estate dry-farmed vineyards. Today, brothers Stu and Charlie, and Stu’s son Sam, manage the property and tend to the winemaking, and they remain at the top of their game.

Current releases left a lasting impression: The classic petrol and citrus blossom aromas simple scream what is in this glass—a beautifully crafted, irresistible dry Riesling. Unwinding with enchantment are layers of sun-ripened peaches, lemon basil, nectarines, fresh squeezed lime juice, and a solid thread of minerality creating a kaleidoscope of vibrant flavors on the palate. Vitalizing and elegant with immaculate balance, and the finish soars.