

Riedel Matters

By Katy Budge



Georg Riedel

What a difference a glass makes. That was the lesson learned by attendees to two very special seminars presented by Georg J. Riedel, the tenth generation of the Riedel crystal dynasty. The events were held September 23 and 24 in Paso Robles, and marked the premier North American presentations of the company's "Vinum Extreme Red Wine" series.

The Riedel family began manufacturing glassware some three centuries ago. In 1961, the company introduced a bold, new concept based on the work of Claus J. Riedel, who realized that the bouquet, taste, balance, and finish of wines are significantly affected by the shape of the glass from which they are enjoyed. Up until this time, wineglasses were primarily the same bowl shape, with size as the only variable.

"The glass is the translator of the wine," said Georg Riedel, "and we take advantage of this. When wine is served in the right glass, it just blossoms." The Riedel philosophy of design is a complex system based on physics, a good deal of experimentation, and "attention to how aromatics are presented. For me, the fruit is what you really need to protect," he said, "and the excitement of wine is in the finish."

Each glass in the series of four red wine Vinum Extremes was specifically crafted for a particular varietal: Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Zinfandel, and Shiraz/Syrah. (The newest addition to the lineup, the Shiraz/Syrah glass was developed in conjunction with the winemaking team at Penfolds Wine in Australia.) The glasses all feature a different bowl size, and although the Cab, Zin, and Shiraz/Syrah glasses share roughly the same shape, the seminar proved that each one accentuates very different characteristics of the wines.

In each of the seminars, examples of the four different wines were tasted in each of the glasses, and the differences were often remark-

able. In their custom-designed glasses, all eight wines were excellent representations of their varietal, but often showed considerable flaws when tasted in the other glasses. For example: a Pinot seemed oxidized in the Cab glass, a well-balanced Cabernet with great back cherry notes tasted far too minty and astringent in the Pinot glass, a rich Syrah showed a bitter minerality in the Zin glass, and a Zinfandel basically lost its fruit to alcohol in all but the Zin glass.

The first seminar on September 23 was open only to members of the local wine and restaurant industries. Held at the elegant Park Ballroom in downtown Paso Robles (the use of



Robert Hall, owner, Robert Hall Winery; Georg Riedel; Don Brady, winemaker, Robert Hall Winery

which was donated by owners Jim and Terry Saunders), this trade-only gathering was sponsored by Hospice du Rhône, which uses "about 10,000 Riedel glasses for our event," said Executive Director Vicki Carroll. "Riedel has been one of our sponsors for the past six years, and their involvement immediately elevated our event to a level that would have taken us much longer to get to on our own."

For more information about the complete lineup of Riedel crystal stemware, go to www.riedel.com.