



Deconstructing the Wine Glass

Does the new stemless design knock wine off its pedestal?

BY CHRIS AMMON

Maximilian Riedel wants to make drinking wine more hip. As an 11th-generation heir to Austrian crystal maker Riedel Glas, the 20-something designer just introduced a set of wine glasses aimed at the cool crowd: stemless glasses called the Riedel "O" series.

This minimalist design is said to cater to the younger set simply through its informality. But I suspect it courts them subliminally, like most marketing. A stemless glass tacitly permits a hipster to partake in something as tradition-steeped as drinking wine while retaining some semblance of rebellion. It's a way of saying, "I may be drinking wine, but I subvert the dominant paradigm of conventional wine glasses." Or, "Whatever."

The wine industry, which courts consumers through pretentious advertising and a general air of exclusivity, has consistently alienated Generation X. So ratcheting down the pomp-factor attached to wine is a smart move on Riedel's part. Something needed to change. But does stemless glassware remove this pretension? Or does Riedel's invention just irritate gimmick-weary Gen Xers?

In Europe, wine is an everyday beverage, served at lunch and dinner like water. It holds no aura of pomposity. Of course you'll find the folks who love to talk about the grapes, the year and its weather, and show off their wine knowledge. But it's still the drink of the common man. And it's more frequently served in short round glasses a little larger than tea light candle holders than in delicate, long-stemmed beauties.

I recently attended a winetasting at Ashland's Lithia Springs Hotel. Most of the people I knew there were fairly young and quick to point out that they got in the door with free tickets. They milled around tables lined with oysters-on-the-half-shell and stabbed

toothpicks into chunks of cheese.

"Who cares?" said Dana Goldfarb distractedly. Then the 34-year-old flashed a grape-tinted grin: "Besides, why drink it from a glass when you can drink it straight from the bottle?"

Standing on the hotel's breezy patio, Derek Volkart insisted that he's happy drinking wine out of anything, including a plastic cup or a ceramic mug. He said fretting over glassware was frivolous and indicative of "the extremely pretentious and affluent lifestyle that Americans prefer to lead."

Despite such cynicism, the \$20-a-pair stemless glasses aren't aging on retail shelves. "We sell a ton of 'em," said Steve Baker, manager at Sundance Wine Cellars in Eugene. He said people of all ages buy them, adding that the glasses are dishwasher safe and less prone to breakage.

Brook Fuller, the wine buyer for Marché restaurant, acknowledges the glasses are a nice novelty, but said he prefers traditional stemware for the restaurant. Fuller explained that in stemless glasses, the temperature of the hand warms the wine — a common criticism. "This all may be wine geek stuff," he said, "but to truly enjoy wine, they are the antithesis of what you want."

As a Gen X wine lover, stemless wine-glasses leave me feeling conflicted and inconclusive. Given the troubles of the world — old-growth logging, the tsunami — it seems uncool to become absorbed with the minutia of vintages, wine lingo and stemware. For me drinking wine is so much about bonding with friends and savoring sensory nuances, it often feels like an expression of gratitude, a simple affirmation of life. In the end, hip or not, what I like most about the humble architecture of this new glass-without-a-stem is that it brings wine a little closer to the ground, to its origins and to the earth itself.

EW

NOW OPEN!

Sweet Basil Thai Cuisine

Have it wild or have it mild!

Open for Lunch & Dinner

Sun-Thurs: 11am-9pm

Fri-Sat: 11am-10pm

*Sweet Basil Bar
Open Late Every Night*

941 Pearl • Eugene

541-284-2944

www.sweetbasilor.com

AVAILABLE AT:

BROADWAY
MARKET

JEFFY
MARKET

&
MARKET
OF CHOICE

pinotnoir@hotmail.com

THINK GLOBAL
DRINK LOCAL