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The Gentle Giant

Northern Spain awakens from a long siesta

Mi Vino es su Vino

An official appellation since 1932, the Spanish region of Montilla-Moriles remains unknown to most of the world

Stem Ware

With certain styles tailored to different styles and grape varieties, wine lovers now have a variety of glassware to choose from

Plus: Over 70 wines reviewed



If the GLASS FITS

Form and function have happily married by top glass makers, all in an effort to make your favourite vintage look and taste its best.

BY CINDA CHAYICH

There was a time when putting out your best wine glasses meant dusting off the fancy cut crystal – some pre-soup pieces picked for its pretty form, not its practical function.

It was an Austrian glassmaker, the late Claus Riedel, who began the quest for the perfect wine glass. In the 1960s, he developed the Riedel Sommer series of glasses, which has become the benchmark for tasting top wines. By combining the physiological study of how we taste, with a keen interest in engineering, Claus Riedel created specific glasses for specific wine glasses.

designed to deliver each grape's typical flavours to particular tasting zones of the tongue, to emphasize the best qualities of any particular grape and style.

While there are now several companies taking this approach to making wine glasses – including Spiegelau and now Ravenscroft – Greg Riedel remains in the forefront of this work, continuing his father's study of the relationship between varietal and glass shape, hosting workshops and tasting panels with winemakers around the globe.

"This glass is the enemy of wine," says

Riedel, holding a chunky, flared wine glass he dubbed the "joker," a glassware sentiment he conducted in Canada. "This glass is hard to dry, easy to move and joggle, but it is an unfair glass. The intensity of aroma is very diminished. It destroys your perception and enjoyment of the wine."

Riedel design glasses to emphasize a wine's harmony, not its faults, and has pioneered the study of how the shape and size of a glass can help its job.

It's the balance of fruit and sweetness, acidity, alcohol and tannin that make a wine appealing. Based on the physiological science of tasting – that we taste sweetness at the tip of the tongue, acidity along the sides, and bitterness at the back, and the fact that we prefer sweet, fruity flavours over tart, tannic ones – Riedel's glasses are designed to optimize the equation. The shape and size of the glass forces the drinker to tilt the head to a certain angle to avoid spilling. That angle determines where the liquid will first fall as it enters the mouth and how quickly it flows over those different flavour receptors on the back of the palate.

Find a wine glass that not only looks good, but will make your favourite vintage taste its absolute best.

everything from the French classics to more obscure Cortes, Rose Yelland or Blauwonder wines. Many of the shapes are appropriate for several types of wines, but these things continue to change over time, as the country continues to research.

For example, the Alsace glass, introduced in 1971, was once suggested for all Sauvignon Blanc and Gewürztraminer-based wines (as well as Chablis Blanc, Palamino and Sore), but more recent refinements have resulted in the new Loire glass made specifically for Sauvignon Blanc.

become unrecognizable. The biggest Riedel Bordeaux Grand Cru glass (which holds 12 ounces) is designed to give a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot lots of room to breathe and release its layers of aroma.

The similarly shaped, but significantly smaller, Mature Bordeaux glass de-emphasizes the aromas of age and accentuates an older wine's delicate tannins to keep the wine in balance.

Sometimes a glass designed for one wine can enhance another. At Riedel, a California Cabernet from a difficult year – tight and a little green rather than typically fruity and structured – actually became more palatable when served in the Pointe Neve glass, which radiated its acidity and emphasized its fruit.



RIEDEL CRYSTAL

This Austrian-made glassware is the benchmark for varietal specific stemware, first introduced in 1961 and now made by the 10th generation of this glass-making family.

Riedel has pioneered the study of how the shape of a glass allows its to smell and taste a wine's classic components. Riedel has several lines of glassware, from the hand-blown, water-washed, Sommer series (\$15-\$60 per stem) to the machine-made (from the brand selling glasses at \$10-\$15 each) and Vinum Extreme series (more extreme, more concentrating shapes at \$44 each), and the new "T" collection of hand-blown, the shape of the Vinum Extreme but in plain glass, with its stems, at \$10-\$15. Riedel's top Sommer and Vinum glasses are 24 per cent lead crystal – this gives the glass brilliant clarity and a coarse surface which lifts aromas, but also makes the glass softer, more easily scratched, delicate and subject to breakage. www.riedelcrystal.com

SPIEGELAU CRYSTAL

Spiegelau makes its crystal stemware in the town of Spiegelau in the heart of Germany's Black Forest. Spiegelau has several lines of stemware – from the hand-blown Grand Palais glassware (about \$65 a stem) to the delicate, oval-shaped Adria line (at \$10-\$18 each) and the machine-made Beverly Hills line (\$20). The 1% lead crystal is strong, making Spiegelau stemware a popular choice for restaurants and hotels.

Spiegelau operates a "glass center" in Germany, offering tours where you can see their glass blowers at work. www.spiegelau.com

RAVENSCROFT CRYSTAL

Made in Poland, Ravenscroft is the latest player in the technologically-developed stemware world, arriving in Canada in 2001 and just beginning to be available across the country. With both a classically shaped Summer line of glasses (10 to 40% lead) and a more angular Amplifier series (four extreme shapes) designed to intensify aromas and flavors, Ravenscroft specializes in lead-free crystal products, which they say don't leech harmful traces into wine and spirits. The hand-blown glasses are reasonably priced, often less than locally machine-made glasses in comparison. They're bringing from \$14 to \$32 per stem. Company VP Robert Scherke says lead was long part of all "crystal" glass – added to give it higher refractive indices – but Ravenscroft uses other elements to make its glass reflective. While very fine and lightweight, she says, the lead-free glass is further and more difficult to break, so can be used in commercial establishments. www.ravenscroftcrystal.com

TASTING A BORDEAUX-STYLE BLEND:

#1 VINUM BORDEAUX Ravenscroft
Size: oversized, large bowl
Shape: classic tulip shape, 24 per cent lead crystal, machine made
Price: \$35
Taster's comments:
• Colour is similar to Spiegelau, but wine looks brighter in this glass, sparkles.
• More typical dark fruit aromas, a little fresh apricot undertone, more cedar and coffee up front.

#2 BEVERLY HILLS BORDEAUX Spiegelau
Size: oversized, large bowl
Shape: elongated tulip shape, 5 per cent lead crystal, machine made
Price: \$22
Taster's comments:
• The shape makes it easier to see the colour when you tilt this glass on its side – the wine falls off into an elongated oval where you can clearly see the edges – lovely garnet colour.
• Tasted most elegant of the Bordeaux glass shapes.
• User-friendly shape for the nose. One taster found it enhanced the acidic aromas – more clear cherry, plum – while another still found more leather, a earthy notes than in the Riedel version.

#3 SOMMELIER BORDEAUX Ravenscroft
Size: large bowl
Shape: classic tulip shape, lead-free crystal, hand-blown
Price: \$18
Taster's comments:
• The bowl shape and size is an exact knock-off of the Riedel, with a slightly smaller opening.
• The wine colour is not the same in this glass – the lead-free crystal makes the glass very slightly milky (you can detect it in the stem) which slightly masks the sparkle/clarity.
• Despite the similar shape, the wine tastes very different when compared with the Riedel glass. The Ravenscroft enhances the acidity in the wine, flavors of fresh plums, truffles with an intense orange peel aroma which we didn't detect in any other glasses.

#4 AMPLIFIER BORDEAUX Ravenscroft
Size: large, oversized bowl
Shape: broad base and narrow top, lead-free crystal, hand-blown
Price: \$10
Taster's comments:
• The glass is large, diamond-shaped with wide base and shallow opening.
• Amplifies all of the aromas in this wine – food more of the gamey, meaty, umami notes and the peppery, tobacco flavors come through

TASTING A SONOMA CHARDONNAY:

#1 AMPLIFIER CHARDONNAY Ravenscroft
Size: medium-sized
Shape: wide waist and very narrow top, almost diamond-shaped, lead-free crystal, hand-blown
Price: \$20
Taster's comments:
• Wine appears bright, good clarity.
• This glass truly amplifies the aromas and flavors the wine, harmonizing the flavors and aromas.
• The wine really jumps out of the glass, more of the floral and lemon drop, pear and tropical fruit aromas appear.
• The wine tastes bigger, riper and more integrated in this glass. Two tasters liked the wine best in this glass, another felt it increased the perception of alcohol and tannins.

#2 BEVERLY HILLS CHARDONNAY Spiegelau
Size: large sized bowl
Shape: classic tulip shape, 5 per cent lead crystal, machine made
Price: \$22
Taster's comments:
• Wine has nice clarity but more colour in this glass – darker straw colour than in any other glass.
• This glass brings the fruit forward, more citrus, apple, pear and vanilla notes.
• The large glass is nice to drink from, like the size and height of this glass, it looks professional.

#3 VINUM CHARDONNAY Riedel
Size: medium-large sized bowl
Shape: classic tulip shape, 24 per cent lead crystal, machine made
Price: \$15
Taster's comments:
• Wine looks bright, pale in colour with a fringe of green, good clarity.
• Glass seems to subdue the aromas and flavors, softens the wine.
• Glass is slightly smaller than the others, elegant shape delivers wine to the front of the mouth, reducing perception of acidity and wood tannins, but softening all flavors in the process.

#4 SOMMELIER CHARDONNAY/MATURE RED Ravenscroft
Size: medium-sized
Shape: classic tulip shape but with the largest opening of the glasses, lead-free crystal, hand-blown
Price: \$15
Taster's comments:
• Wine appears bright and pale in the glass, with overall tone.
• The wider opening lets more of the volatile aromas escape when the wine is swirled, get more citrus and acidic aromas at the surface, then more subdued on the nose.
• Flavors of citrus and more mineral characters appear. One taster found the flavour metallic.