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## New York wines leave lasting impression

By **FRED LEBRUN**, Staff writer  
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In the ever-expanding world of top-dog Rieslings from New York, every year seems to bring a surprise or two at international competitions.

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This year, it's a silky, hugely aromatic semi-dry 2006 Riesling (\$15.99) grown at Rooster Hill Winery on the east side of Keuka Lake. This wine was one of four sweetness-level category winners in the Riesling championship, pitted against wines from all over the world.

The Riesling championship is part of the respected 32-year-old International Eastern Wine Competition held in late May in Watkins Glen and underwritten by Vineyard and Winery Management Magazine. More than 2,200 entries from 13 countries, 38 states and three Canadian provinces were evaluated by 32 judges.

Riesling honors were dominated this year by Washington state's mega-producer Chateau Ste. Michelle, as the overall championship winner with its 2007 Eroica semisweet (\$22), and by winning the dry category with its 2007 (\$12) as well. Best sweet Riesling went to Mission Hill Family Estate Winery of the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia for its 2006 Ice Wine (\$59.99).

### Ice wine surprise

Another competition surprise was that a Riesling did not win the overall best dessert wine designation, as is usually the case.

Instead, a 2005 Vidal Ice Wine (\$34.99) from Casa Larga Vineyards in Fairport, a Rochester suburb, took that honor. The French-American vidal grape has emerged as a major dessert wine contender in the Finger Lakes in recent years, and Casa Larga, which grows its own grapes on 45 acres in the lee of Lake Ontario, has done well with it.

"Actually, we're having a terrific year. In the last month, we've won six major international awards with this wine," says Stacey Kurtz, director of marketing for Casa Larga. "It's got powerful aromas of pineapple and honey, a luscious, very viscous mouth-feel and an enormous apricot finish." And, for a dessert wine, it offers value.

Rooster Hill owners Amy and David Hoffman left the world of high-tech industry to start their boutique winery six years ago, the same year they planted the two acres of Riesling clone 239 that produced this year's off-dry award winner.

"We knew we had something special with the 2006," says Amy Hoffman. "The nose, the fruit was so intense, and just kept getting better."

Luckily, Rooster Hill winemaker Barry Tortolon, Fresno State educated, made lots of it -- by boutique standards. There are 450 cases waiting for customers. As a start-up, Rooster Hill made an early mark for itself with a zesty, fruity dry seyval blanc. "But we're phasing the seyval out in favor of traminette and chardonnay," says Hoffman. And not surprisingly, more Riesling.

Other best-of category winners at the International Eastern Wine Competition were Viansa Winery from California's North Coast for a big, fruity 2004 cabernet sauvignon (\$21), Fosters Wine Estate of Australia for best sparkler, Yellowglenn Pink (\$12), and Holmberg Orchards of Connecticut for best fruit wine, a nonvintage apple (\$10.99).

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