

HAUTE LIVING

Kenzo Tsujimoto Opens Kenzo Estate with Thomas Keller Food Pairings



Kenzo Estate, a new winery which took \$100 million to complete, is opening in the Napa Valley this season, with a tasting menu created exclusively by Sir Thomas Keller.

The winery is the culmination of 20 years work by Kenzo Tsujimoto, founder and chairman of game maker Capcom Group. The 68 year-old business leader, who is based in Japan but maintains company headquarters in San Francisco, purchased the 4,000-acre property atop Napa's Mount George when it was an equestrian center known as Wild Horse Valley Ranch.



Kenzo Estate makes a variety of wines at different prices but its flagship wine is Rindo, a red blend which costs \$75. The vines are being grown under the supervision of renowned viticulturist David Abreu and the wine is being overseen by consulting winemaker Heidi Barrett.

When Kenzo Estate officially opens July 1st, 2010, visitors will be able to enjoy the winery and hospitality center as well as 20,000 square feet of wine caves. It's located off Monticello Road, about a mile up a winding, tree-lined road on Mount George.



Kenzo Tsujimoto

Tsujimoto himself maintains living quarters on the part of the estate accessed from Wild Horse Valley Road, where he recently sat down for a quick chat after having just met with Thomas Keller's team. He spoke with us with a translator.

Haute Living: You just came back from a tasting with Thomas Keller's people. What is Thomas Keller's involvement with Kenzo Estate?

Kenzo Tsujimoto: We're a winery but it's nice to have some food to create a better experience for the customer, and Thomas Keller has been a friend for 15 years.

Haute Living: How long has it taken you to create the estate?

Kenzo Tsujimoto: I've spent about 13 years into building the estate. I purchased the property 20 years ago, but in the first 7 years I was trying to find what is the best way to enhance the property. The actual wine-making has been 13 years.

Haute Living: Do you live at the estate as well?

Kenzo Tsujimoto: When I am in the United States, in the Napa area, I live at the estate, or when I have a meeting in San Francisco. I come about 8 times a year for about one week. And in the Summer, up to a month.

Haute Living: Why did you decide to do the winery?

Kenzo Tsujimoto: I believe wine is the best thing to drink, of any drink. It's my favorite thing to drink.

Haute Living: Why did you decide to work with David Abreu and Heidi Barrett?

Kenzo Tsujimoto: First of all, I really love wine. And I would like to really achieve the best and finest quality that I can. And when I started to meet people, obviously this master and the queen of winemaking came into the picture. We've been working together since 1992. I've been blessed that the quality has been excellent, and I've been drinking it every day.

Haute Living: What is the name of the wine?

Kenzo Tsujimoto: We have a sauvignon blanc called Asatsuyu. We have three red wines, Rindo, Murasaki, and Ai, which is a cabernet sauvignon. Right now the total production is 90 percent going to the Japan market, but it is eventually going to 50/50 in this year or next year, because the US market is just starting this spring.

Haute Living: Do you have a favorite?

Kenzo Tsujimoto: I enjoy everything. I start dinner with Asatsuyu and go to the Rindo. I finish up with a very strong cabernet, Ai, which is 90 percent cab.

Haute Living: It sounds like you have a lot of exciting things coming up. Many people are looking forward to the opening of the tasting room and going to the winery. When is the opening of Kenzo Estate?

Kenzo Tsujimoto: The official grand opening is July 1st. But we're taking reservations now.

Haute Living: What is your hope for the future of the winery?

Kenzo Tsujimoto: Wine should be enjoyed often. Not just wine, but fine wine. And I would like to have my wine not sleeping in the cellar, but enjoyed as a part of the general lifestyle. That's why, even though the main brand, Rindo, is \$75 — I want my wine to be enjoyed by more people.

Haute Living: It will be!

The Kenzo Estate tastings, conducted on a picturesque patio overlooking the valley, range from \$30 to \$50 per person, with the Thomas Keller wine-paired sandwich lunch costing \$60 per person.

Keller creations include beef brisket on pretzel brioche with horseradish-Dijon aioli, red mustard greens, fontina, house pickles and pickled red onions; a tuna Nicoise on paladin bread; or French Madrange ham and tangy gruyere on a baguette.

You can also order charcuterie, such as an assiette of Saucisson Sec Basque salami, gentile pork salami, and rosette de Lyon French pork sausage with pickled garden vegetables, Edmond Fallot mustard and epi baguette; or rillettes of fresh and smoked salmon atop toasted croutons.

Finish with a tarte au citron (\$11.50), chocolate bouchons (\$10), macarons (\$12), or a cup of Bouchon Blend Equator Coffee (\$3).

Open for tastings by appointment only seven days a week from 10 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Kenzo Estate, 3200 Monticello Road, Napa, 707-259-5408, kenzoestate.com