

# Riesling Report

The voice of Riesling

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2001

## Riesling from the New World

*Promised land or wasteland?*

A light snow blankets the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia.

IN THIS ISSUE:

**British Columbia's  
Okanagan Valley**

**Pacific Northwest**

**Australia**

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### Neither snow, nor...

IT'S MY JOB, AFTER ALL, to do whatever is necessary in our holy pursuit of fine Riesling. So I never thought twice about driving around in near-blizzard conditions looking for Okanagan Valley wineries to visit. It was well worth the mildly hazardous duty, as it yielded a few gems to give us hope for New World Riesling.

We also found a few reasons to be optimistic closer to home in Washington and Oregon. Plus, we're thrilled to introduce Patrick Walsh, our new Riesling Reporter Down Under. He's got the latest hits from Australia, where a real Riesling Revival is under way.

This is our first New World issue, and we freely admit to having a European bias. In Germany, Alsace or Austria, when a Riesling is good, it's really, really good. In the New World, it's tough to find one that is merely good. Australia is the exception — they take their Riesling very seriously.

Still, the wines we've tasted so far are only a drop in the bucket of what's produced. We're always excited to discover something new and great, so if we've missed one of your favorites, please let us know. We'd love to try it.

—Kirk Wille, editor & publisher

### Riesling Report navigation

- The table of contents is linked to the pages within this magazine. Click on a title and away you go.
- Web sites and email addresses mentioned in this publication are linked to their Internet addresses. If you click on one, your default browser or email software will be activated.

It usually works best if you first download the magazine to your hard drive and then open it from the free Adobe Acrobat Reader application. If your browser has the PDF Viewer plug-in installed, you can read the magazine online, without downloading it, but it is often much slower. You are free to print the magazine locally, but reading it on screen will help save our forests.

### Pass it on

We encourage you to share our magazine with other wine lovers. All we ask is that you then encourage them to support the Riesling cause and subscribe. Hey, it's only 24 bucks!

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## Germany's "Winzer des Jahres"

THE MOSEL'S INDOMITABLE ERNIE LOOSEN has been named "Winzer des Jahres" — Winemaker of the Year — for 2001 in the annual *Weinguide Deutschland*, published by Gault Millau. "No other winemaker of the Middle Mosel has thrust himself so strongly to the top as Ernst Loosen in the '90s," says the *Weinguide*, which praised the Dr. Loosen wines for their brilliant structure, full-bodied power and fruit-driven complexity. The *Weinguide* also names a "Rising Star" every year and, citing a particularly successful string of vintages since 1993, added that Loosen was "like a Rising Star of the Decade."



Ernie Loosen

Gault Millau also selected the 1999 J.L. Wolf Jesuitengarten (a dry Riesling from the top-class Forster Jesuitengarten vineyard in the Pfalz) as its **Dry Riesling of the Year**. Loosen has been making powerful, sophisticated dry Rieslings at J.L. Wolf ever since he took over the estate in 1996.

The Gault Millau *Weinguide* has become probably the single most influential arbiter of who's hot and who's not in German wine. Started in 1994, it is written and assembled by Armin Diel, owner of Schlossgut Diel, and American wine writer Joel Payne. An English edition of the *Weinguide* was published in 1999 by Abbeville Press, but there are no plans to make the guide available in English every year.

With this award, Loosen joins a luminous group of past Winemakers of the Year: Wilhelm Haag (Fritz Haag, 1994), Dr. Carl von Schubert (Maximin Grünhaus, 1995), Dr. Manfred Prüm (Joh. Jos. Prüm, 1996), Wilhelm Weil (Robert Weil, 1997), Egon Müller (1998), Helmut Dönnhoff (1999) and Klaus Keller (2000).

Loosen has been on a remarkable winning streak lately. He's like a Tiger Woods of Riesling. Along with these two honors from Gault Millau, his 1998 J.L. Wolf Pechstein, another grand cru Riesling from the Pfalz, was awarded the Dry Riesling Trophy at WINE Magazine's International Wine and Spirits competition in London this past September. And in the New World, he has been getting rave reviews for the two Rieslings he's producing in a joint venture with Washington state's Chateau Ste. Michelle. The 1999 Eroica and the 1999 Single-Berry Select are two superb Rieslings that point to great potential for Riesling in North America (see our tasting notes on page 16).

## New World Riesling – Is There Any Hope?

**YES, THERE IS GOOD RIESLING** to be found in the New World, just like there is bad Riesling aplenty in all the famous regions of Europe. The difference is that in Europe, it's much easier to find top-quality wines from superior vineyards and dedicated producers. In the New World you have to work quite a bit harder just to find decent Riesling from an adequate vineyard site. The New World definitely has some winemakers who are just as dedicated and meticulous as their European counterparts, but their quality has not yet caught up. After all, the Old World did have about a thousand-year head start!

The biggest problem we see here in the New World is that very few winegrowers consider Riesling to be a serious contender in the fine wine arena. It's generally been consigned to the familiar "cheap and sweet" cash-flow segment of a winery's portfolio in hopes that it will serve as a springboard into the brand for neophyte wine consumers. Often, it works. Average folks buy this bland, lifeless stuff like crazy, which seems to vindicate the marketing department's belief that Riesling can't compete in a higher price bracket. It doesn't occur to them to use a good-quality, low-cost wine to bring consumers to Riesling itself, and then to their higher-quality, perhaps single-vineyard, Rieslings. But we're happy to say that this frustrating situation is changing — if ever so slowly.

While we didn't find a whole lot of wines from the New World that we liked enough to recommend in this magazine, we did find some encouraging signs. There is a lot of effort going into producing distinctive, ripe and concentrated Rieslings in the New World — especially in Australia, where the wine-drinking public has gone bonkers for big-time Riesling. Just north of us, in Washington state, Chateau Ste. Michelle is pouring an astonishing amount of time and cash into an ongoing matrix of experiments to determine the optimum conditions and techniques for growing Riesling in the Yakima and Columbia valleys.

So there is a bit of hope for Riesling in the New World. In this issue, we'll show what we've learned about the Rieslings from a few areas that show particular promise. They include the Okanagan Valley, Washington, Oregon, a little from New York's Finger Lakes area and Australia. We don't have many specific tasting notes from Australia in this issue (we'll be dedicating an entire issue to Australia and New Zealand later this year), but we have a special report from Patrick Walsh, our new Riesling Reporter Down Under.



Ice wine grapes in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley hang patiently, waiting for a good freeze. Ice wines from Canada are some of the more promising Rieslings from the New World.

# British Columbia's Okanagan Valley

**IN LATE NOVEMBER**, full of optimistic enthusiasm, I made my first trip to the Okanagan Valley, about a four-hour drive from Vancouver. The first thing I learned is that late November is really not the best time to go — snow and ice in the mountain pass made the drive rather nerve-wracking and slow going. Next year, I plan to go in early October when the weather will be nicer, the vines will be redolent of fall color and the annual Okanagan Wine Festival will be going on.

As it was, I ended up in the Okanagan for what were probably the only two days of snow all year. When someone mentions the name Canada, those of us who don't live there tend to think of one word: cold. Then, oh yes, perhaps also trees, mountains, moose, maple leaves. So it's rather surprising to learn that the southern half of the Okanagan Valley (below Okanagan Falls — see the map on page 6) is actually a desert, with cactus, rattlesnakes and everything!

With its unusual climate in mind, it's hard to believe that the Okanagan Valley is at the same latitude as Rheingau (50°). Normally that would be too far north for any kind of viticulture, but both areas work for viticulture because of their unique situations.

Rheingau (and the rest of Northern Europe) benefits from the macro-climatic warming influence of the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic Ocean, as well as the proximity of *der Vater Rhein* and the steep, south-facing exposition of its vineyards.

The Okanagan Valley also has south-facing vineyards, though not so steep as Rheingau, and the mitigating influence of the long, narrow Okanagan Lake. What makes the difference in the Okanagan is the incredibly warm 'pocket' desert at the southern end of the valley, where most of the finest grapes are grown. Last summer, I was told, they had several days that reached 130°F (51°C) on the valley floor — not exactly the image of Canada that I had in my head before my visit. Even in summer, however, the nights are usually quite cool, which is very important for Riesling because it helps the grapes retain acidity.

The biggest drawback in the Okanagan Valley is that the growing season can be fairly short compared to other wine regions around the world — even Germany. That often translates into moderately ripe wines without the hang time necessary to develop characteristics of *terroir*, something that is extremely important for a slow-ripening variety like Riesling. In cellar-speak, the Okanagan gets enough heat units to ripen most grapes, but they come in a compressed time frame.

Because of the long summer days that come as a result of their



Picturesque Okanagan vineyards sloping toward Vaseaux Lake and Blue Mountain. This is how it looks if you're smart and go there in spring or summer. [Photo by Hank Stefaniak]

## Southern Okanagan Valley Wineries

Contact information for the four producers we visited:

### Gehring Brothers

Road 8, south of Oliver  
800/730-9463

### Jackson-Triggs (Vincor)

Hwy 97, north of Oliver  
250/498-4981

### Inniskillin Okanagan

Road 11, south of Oliver  
250/498-6663  
[www.inniskillin.com](http://www.inniskillin.com)

### Domaine Combret

Road 13, south of Oliver  
250/498-8878  
[www.winesnw.com/  
domainecombret.htm](http://www.winesnw.com/domainecombret.htm)

northerly location, the region actually gets more sunlight-hours per year than any other viticultural area in North America. In addition, as Olivier Combret of Domaine Combret pointed out, “There’s no air pollution up here, and that makes the intensity of the sunlight much greater.”

As for soil, the Okanagan Valley is extremely varied, which you would expect of a valley carved out of the earth by a glacier. Like slicing through a seven-layer cake, the end of the last ice age exposed just about every type of geological deposit imaginable. In general terms, however, the soils in the north tend to be heavier silt and clay, whereas down south they are mostly lighter glacial gravel, often with a fair amount of granite.

All signs, therefore, point to the Southern Okanagan Valley as having the greatest potential for Riesling. My experiences there would seem to bear that out, but that’s not the kind of blanket pronouncement I can (or want to) make after just one brief, snow-hampered visit. There were several highly-regarded producers I was unable to visit and whose wines I failed to find for our tastings. For now, all I can do is recount for you my “Tales of the Okanagan, Part One,” and give you a brief glimpse into the Riesling Revival, Canadian-style.

### Southern Okanagan

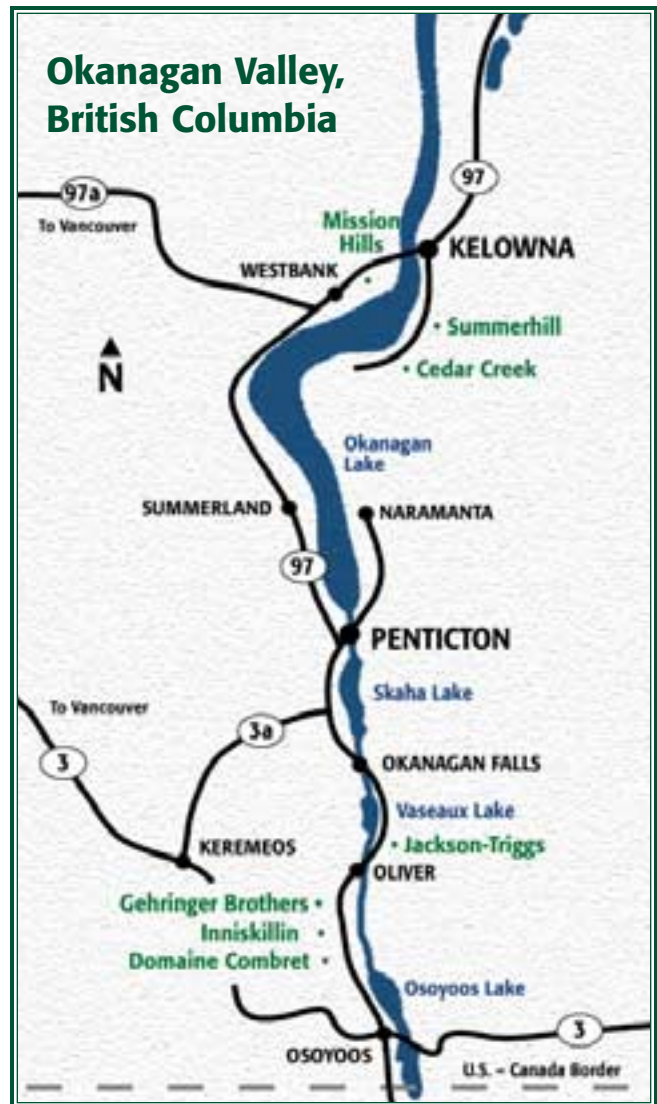
My first full day in the valley started out in blizzard conditions as I toured the Southern Okanagan. It was a dry snow, however, so driving was not as treacherous as it could have been. Amazingly enough, I made all of my appointments on time!

### Gehring Brothers

Walter and Gordon Gehring are the greatest proponents — and possibly the finest producers — of Riesling in the Okanagan Valley. Virtually everyone I asked in Canada (including a number of other winemakers) recommended Gehring Brothers as the place for a Riesling lover to visit first. I’m glad I took their advice.

Gehring Brothers is in the Southern Okanagan near the town of Oliver. Their winery and vineyards are located on a southeast-facing bench known as the “Golden Mile.” The brothers, born of German immigrants, both learned their winemaking skills in Germany. Walter graduated from the famous winemaking school in Geisenheim with an engineering degree in viticulture and oenology. Gordon studied the more down-in-the-trenches aspects of vineyard and cellar management at the wine school in Weinberg. Together, they make a terrific team.

As you might imagine, the style of winemaking at Gehring Brothers is decidedly Germanic. Walter is an intelligent, articulate man with the bright, alert eyes of a child and a staggering depth of knowledge about every aspect of wine. I knew he was my kind of guy when he said, “Riesling



### Northern Okanagan Valley Wineries

#### CedarCreek

5445 Lakeshore Road, Kelowna  
250/764-8866  
[www.cedarcreek.bc.ca](http://www.cedarcreek.bc.ca)

#### Summerhill

4870 Chute Lake Road, Kelowna  
250/764-8000  
[www.summerhill.bc.ca](http://www.summerhill.bc.ca)

#### Mission Hill

1730 Mission Hill Road,  
Westbank  
250/768-7611  
[www.missionhillwinery.com](http://www.missionhillwinery.com)

is really the only true food wine; everything else is just for drinking pleasure.” This remark came after a brief discourse on Riesling’s singular ability to accompany food, as well as to activate the salivary glands and aid digestion.

Walter and Gordon make four different Rieslings, starting off with dry and medium-dry wines in their “Classic” series. Both are made from the same base wine; the off-dry version gets dosed with a bit of sweet reserve to give it more body. The best non-dessert Riesling we’ve tasted from the Okanagan is Gehringer’s Private Reserve. It is made from a selected site with lower yields, resulting in a deliciously fruity and well-balanced wine that makes your eyes light up (maybe that’s where Walter gets the sparkle in his).

Lastly come the dessert wines. Every year the Gehringer’s leave a few plots unpicked, hoping for a freeze so they can make ice wine. In 1999, they also had occasion to make a Riesling they call “Select Late Harvest,” because one of their plots didn’t freeze. They didn’t harvest the grapes until Valentine’s Day — February 14, 2000 — and they picked only absolutely healthy fruit for a big, botrytis-free Auslese style of wine.

True ice wine, though, is what most of Canada’s fine wine reputation is built upon. In the opinions of many producers, this is the only style of Riesling worth the effort. Often they are correct. For most, making an ice wine is the only way to get enough concentration into the wine to balance the naturally high acidity. For the Gehringers, however, ice wine is just the natural summit of their full line of Rieslings.

### Jackson-Triggs

This huge winery in Oliver is owned by Vincor International, the fifth largest winery operation in North America. Vincor produces nearly half of all the wine made in Canada. It also owns Inniskillin, as well as several other estate wineries in the Okanagan, and is in the process of planting another 600 acres of vines north of Osoyoos Lake, across the valley from the Golden Mile.

Jackson-Triggs, named after CEO Donald Triggs and VP Allan Jackson, is the brand name Vincor uses for its VQA wines. The Riesling focus here is on big-time, award-winning ice wines. They also make a basic dry Riesling, but we recommend that you stick with their impressive ice wines.

### Inniskillin Okanagan

Inniskillin is a name very familiar to sweet-wine lovers because of the renowned ice wines made in Ontario. In 1996, Inniskillin established a partnership with the Okanagan Tribe of the Inkameep Indian Band, who have 265 acres of vineyards planted with *Vitis vinifera* varieties.

Until recently, most of the vineyards in the Okanagan were filled with native *Vitis labrusca* varieties or oddball hybrids. These varieties do the job for sweet, alcoholic beverages, but they cannot make interesting, well-



Walter and Gordon Gehringer busy at work during a final filtration of the 2000 Classic Riesling.

### The VQA Debate

The British Columbia Wine Institute was created by the provincial government to establish and enforce winemaking regulations. The result was VQA, the Vintner’s Quality Association.

So far, VQA rules are primarily concerned with accuracy on the label, such as variety, viticultural area, vineyard names and wine style (dry, ice wine, etc.). There has been no attempt to classify vineyards, set maximum yields, designate allowable varieties or set a standard of quality. A tasting panel can reject wines for flaws or lack of varietal character, but most are approved.

It may be too soon for British Columbia to establish true appellation standards. But as it is now, the VQA label does nothing to assure consumers they’re buying a high-quality wine. With pressure from non-VQA groups like the BC Winegrowers Association, however, perhaps this will be changing.

structured fine wines. Aside from a few early experiments, such as the first 20 acres planted by the Inkameep Band in 1968, most of the vinifera plantings have occurred in the past 20 years.

Inniskillin purchases grapes from the Inkameep Band on contract. It also owns the former Okanagan Vineyards, a 20-acre site on the Golden Mile bench, which was planted in 1990 by Hungarian immigrant Sandor Mayer. The soft-spoken Mayer is now Inniskillin Okanagan's winemaker and general manager. Here, too, the focus for Riesling is on ice wine. In fact, it's the only Riesling they make, usually in quantities of around 2,500 to 3,000 half bottles a year.

### Domaine Combret

Every wine region needs an iconoclast, and in the Okanagan, it's Olivier Combret, aided and abetted by his father, Robert. The Combrets came to British Columbia from Provence, where their family has been making wine since 1638. They were drawn to the Okanagan by the warm summer weather, which is "similar to Provence without the humidity," says Olivier.

Olivier and his father spent years researching the area before they settled on their 40-acre estate at the southern end of the Golden Mile in 1992. Olivier is adamant about using existing research data and common sense to determine what will work in a particular region. "It's crazy to ignore what's already known," he says, referring to the broad range of varieties and vinification techniques still being experimented with in the area. The Combrets have decided to concentrate on varieties that have been proven to produce excellent wines in similar soil and climate conditions. Their vinous palate includes Riesling, Chardonnay, Gamay Noir, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc.

Two Rieslings are made at Domaine Combret — the aggressively dry Riesling Réserve and a high-alcohol ice wine that has an amazingly dry impression on the palate. The common thread, you may have noticed, is "dry." The Combrets claim to be the first to make serious dry Rieslings in the Okanagan.

Another interesting thing about the Riesling Réserve is that the current release is 1994. Olivier wants to make Rieslings that will age for 30 or 40 years, and he believes the way to do that is with extended aging on the lees (up to four years) in large stainless steel tanks. A portion of the crushed fruit also undergoes a short maceration to extract vital nutrients from the skins. (This is a dry Riesling technique that we first heard about from Bernhard Breuer and reported in the November/December 2000 issue).

Whether you like the wines or not, you have to admit that the Combrets have developed a unique style. We didn't rate Combret's current releases highly enough to recommend them here, but I have a feeling we'll be talking more about Domaine Combret in the future as we come to understand their style better.



At Inniskillin Okanagan, winemaker Sandor Mayer samples ice wine grapes from the vineyard he planted a decade ago.



Olivier Combret, the energetic and outspoken winemaker at Domaine Combret

## Northern Okanagan

The second day of the trip I ventured north from my base in Penticton, which is conveniently located midway between the northern and southern ends of the valley. Penticton is an interesting place because it has two lake fronts: the long, narrow Okanagan Lake (170 kilometers long and only about 1.5 kilometers wide at the most) to the north and the much smaller Skaha Lake to the south. This is a quiet little mountain town (population 33,000) that swarms with outdoorsy vacationers in summer. Now there's even a casino for the terminally bored.

I was only able to visit three estates in the Northern Okanagan, and with disappointing results. At Cedar Creek, Summerhill and Mission Hill, Riesling does not appear to be a priority, losing out to the likes of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Merlot. It's a shame, too, because the people here are so unbelievably nice and hospitable that you really want to like the wines. They can be decent values, especially for U.S. citizens because of the favorable exchange rate, but I just can't recommend spending \$9 or \$10 for a merely pleasant New World Riesling when you can get a truly wonderful QbA from the Middle Mosel for about the same price.

All the same, these are fun and interesting places to visit if you ever make a trip of your own to the Okanagan. At Summerhill, for instance, you'll find a one-eighth-size replica of Egypt's Cheops Pyramid, in which the bottled wines are aged. Proprietor Stephen Cipes is a big believer in cosmic energies. He is convinced that wines age better when stored in the pyramid, which was built with no metals and aligned to true north.

The Mondavi of the Okanagan is Mission Hill in Westbank, opposite Kelowna, and is well worth a visit. Mission Hill's proprietor, Anthony von Mandl, has embarked on a massive construction campaign. He's turning what was already a large winery into a huge commercial facility and a tourist destination for food and wine lovers. We can't recommend the Rieslings here, but their breakthrough wine, the Grand Reserve Chardonnay, is sleek and elegantly oaked. The 1992 vintage was the first made by John Simes after he moved halfway around the globe from Montana Wines in New Zealand. That wine received the trophy for best Chardonnay at the 1994 International Wine & Spirits Competition in London.

## Inconclusion

Of the nearly 60 wineries in the Okanagan Valley, we were only able to visit seven, so it would be a little presumptuous of us to proclaim any hard conclusions about the region's potential for Riesling. Still, the best of what we tasted does point to a promising future for crisp, clean, fruit-driven Rieslings from this beautiful and picturesque slice of the New World.

In spite of a trade agreement between us, Canadian wines are difficult to find here in the states. That means another road trip is in store. I've heard good things about a number of other wineries, with names like Hawthorne Mountain, Tinhorn Creek, Hainle and Quail's Gate, and I'm looking forward to discovering their wines on my next expedition north. In the meantime, I've got to go out and get a new set of snow tires.

## OKANAGAN VALLEY INFORMATION SOURCES

### British Columbia Wine Institute

The VQA organization. They have a nice wine country map, available free by calling: 250/494-9772

### The Association of British Columbia Wine Growers

The non-VQA group of wineries. [www.winegrowers.bc.ca](http://www.winegrowers.bc.ca)

### British Columbia Wine Information Centre

Information on wines, wineries, tours and events. 888 Westminster Ave. West Penticton 250/490-2006

### BCWINE.COM

Articles, estate information and a few wine reviews. [www.bcwine.com](http://www.bcwine.com)

### British Columbia Wine Trails

Quarterly newsletter. 250/494-7733 [bcwinetrails@img.net](mailto:bcwinetrails@img.net)

### Vines Magazine

Bi-monthly glossy magazine. 888/883-3372 [www.vinesmag.com](http://www.vinesmag.com)

### Okanagan Wine Festival Society

Event and tourism information. 250/861-6654 [www.owfs.com](http://www.owfs.com)

### Wines Northwest

Informational Web site. [www.winesnw.com](http://www.winesnw.com)

# Washington State's Riesling Renaissance

**WASHINGTON'S VINEYARDS** grow in an area that is not dissimilar from the Okanagan Valley; in fact, they lie directly south. Rather than being confined to a narrow valley, however, the vineyard land in Washington stretches over a large expanse of rolling hills formed by the Columbia, Yakima and Snake Rivers.

It's a dry, arid land that could never sustain crops without the plentiful water supply close at hand. Thus, the science of irrigation is huge here and is the subject of much debate and study. Just as in the Okanagan, the days are hot (very hot!) and the nights are cold. For wine grapes, that adds up to very good ripeness and scintillating acidity.

## Washington's Dynamic Duo

The state of Washington has two dominant forces in the wine industry, Stimson-Lane and Corus Brands, both headquartered in the east-Seattle suburb of Woodinville. In fact, they're right across the street from one another. Nearly all of the Riesling in Washington and Idaho is controlled by these two corporations.

Stimson-Lane is the biggest single producer of Riesling in the world. Their flagship brand, Chateau Ste. Michelle, alone produces three million bottles of Riesling every year. In addition, they own the Columbia Crest and Snoqualmie brands. Through direct ownership and grower contracts, they control over two thousand acres of Riesling.

Retired CEO Allen Shoup initiated a Riesling enhancement program in 1997. Since then, Chateau Ste. Michelle's white-winemaker, Erik Olsen, has directed a complex array of vineyard and cellar experiments in an effort to improve overall quality and develop a true Washington style. This project took a big leap forward in 1999 when CSM formed a joint venture with Ernst Loosen of the Dr. Loosen estate in Germany.

The joint venture has added several more layers of complexity to CSM's experimental matrix. For the CSM/Loosen wines, every aspect of Riesling production is being scrutinized, from irrigation and deficit irrigation to vine training systems, leaf pulling, yield reduction and hand harvesting. The results so far have been extremely encouraging. The two



Most of the vineyards in Washington are in the dry part of the state, east of the Cascade Mountains, in the Yakima and Columbia River Valleys. [This map comes from Chateau Ste. Michelle's press materials]

## Washington Wine Information

### Washington Wine Commission

500 Union, Suite 945  
Seattle, Washington 98101  
206/667-9463  
[www.washingtonwine.org](http://www.washingtonwine.org)

1999 joint venture wines — Eroica Riesling and Single-Berry Select Riesling are two terrific wines. Early indications are that the 2000 editions will be even better, with exceptional ripeness and even higher acidity.

Corus Brands owns Columbia Winery (not to be confused with Columbia Crest), and has acquired a stable of smaller brand names that include Paul Thomas and Covey Run in Washington, as well as Ste. Chapelle (not Ste. Michelle) and Sawtooth in Idaho. Columbia's renowned winemaker, David Lake, is famous for his big, stylish reds, but his likeable Cellar-master's Reserve Riesling is still Columbia's largest single production, at 50,000 cases. It sells out every year, sometimes even before it's bottled.

The other brands aren't as interesting, and sometimes they're downright bad. It didn't rate high enough to include in this report, but I've had the Ste. Chapelle numerous times and have found it to be a decent, drinkable Riesling, especially considering its \$6 price. There's nothing distinctive about it, but it's a pleasant drink — and much better, by the way, than the wines from Covey Run and Idaho's Sawtooth Winery. We don't know exactly what's going on at these places, but the wines we tasted were unripe, unclear, unconcentrated and unfriendly.

Columbia Winery's Bruce Watson, a senior chemist in charge of quality control, sees it as a problem of perspective. "In this state, we have the problem that Riesling doesn't get the respect it should, so growers crop their vineyards too high," he explained.

### **Washington has non-mega-wineries, too**

There are a lot of smaller wineries in Washington, and many of them have a Riesling or two. Even some of the well-known Merlot and Cabernet producers, such as Hyatt and Woodward Canyon, feel compelled to make it, with moderate success. Of the wines we tasted, we found a couple from Hogue Cellars and Kiona Vineyards that were interesting enough to recommend. For the most part, though, Washington Rieslings are stuck in that same old cash-flow category.

With hope, the success Chateau Ste. Michelle has had with its Dr. Loosen joint venture will point the way for others and quality will continue to improve all over the state. When other producers see that it's possible to sell a distinctive, well-made Northwest Riesling for more than \$10 (Eroica goes for \$20), I think more of them will be willing to put a little more effort into it.

There will always be cash-flow Riesling — when you're pumping out hundreds of thousands of cases a year, you have to keep the price (and cost of production) low. But it sure would be nice to see some small part being dedicated to top-quality wines for serious Riesling lovers. Most of us wouldn't mind paying a few more dollars for a wine that's a truly memorable experience, rather than just another drink.



Washington's Chateau Ste. Michelle is the single largest producer of Riesling in the world.

## **Washington Wineries**

### **Chateau Ste. Michelle**

14111 NE 145th Street  
Woodinville, Washington  
425/488-1133  
[www.ste-michelle.com](http://www.ste-michelle.com)

### **Columbia Winery**

14030 NE 145th Street  
Woodinville, Washington  
425/488-2776  
[www.columbiawinery.com](http://www.columbiawinery.com)

### **Hogue Cellars**

Prosser, Washington  
509/786-4557  
[www.hogue-cellars.com](http://www.hogue-cellars.com)

### **Kiona Vineyards**

Benton City, Washington  
509/588-6717

### **Ste. Chapelle**

(Owned by Corus Brands)  
Caldwell, Idaho  
208/459-7222  
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# The Riesling Scene in Oregon

**UNSURPRISINGLY, THERE IS VERY LITTLE RIESLING** grown in Oregon, as most of the old vineyards have been replanted with Pinot Noir. White wine production is, of course, focused on the tiresome and ubiquitous Chardonnay, though there are a few other relevant grape varieties proliferating here.

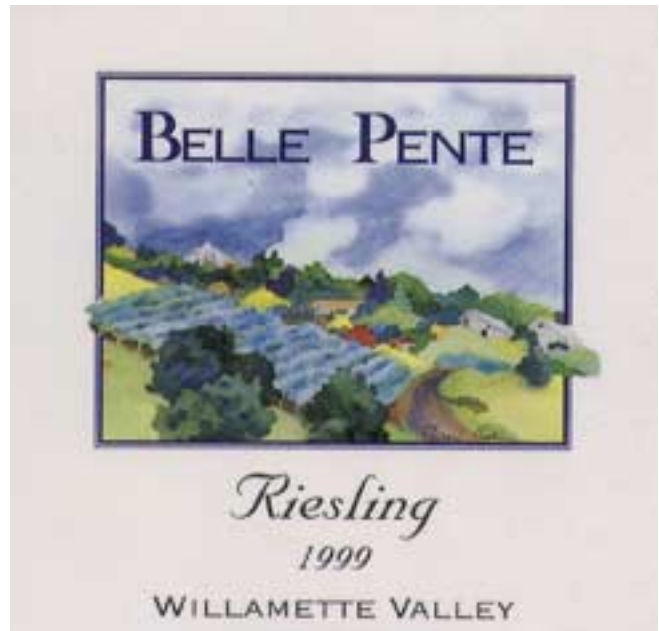
Pinot Gris is the most popular and the most successful, made in a generally delicate style that is more reminiscent of Northeast Italy than of Alsace. Top names include Sineann, Evesham Wood and Chehalem. Pinot Blanc is less consistent, often left with an imbalance of residual sugar and lacking in character, but it can also be pleasantly crisp and refreshing. Look for 'Giovanni' by Cameron Winery, which has attained a near-cult status in the Northwest. Ken Wright Cellars also makes a delicious example.

In the esoteric category, Evesham Wood may be the only producer in the United States actually making Rieslaner, even if it is only in miniscule quantities. And David O'Reilly of Sineann has recently obtained cuttings of Grüner Veltliner to be planted this year!

Amidst all of this, a few producers in Oregon are taking a renewed interest in quality Riesling. Most Oregon winemakers cite Alsace as their model, which is not surprising, considering that Portland is one of the best markets for Alsace wines in the United States. Personally, I haven't found a single Oregon Riesling that bears much resemblance at all to the rich, dry-weather wines of Alsace. Many people unfamiliar with the world of Riesling automatically equate dry Riesling with Alsace, and certainly, in this market, a comparison to Alsace makes for a strong selling point.

Yet the inherent delicacy of Oregon's wines — a characteristic not only of Oregon's Riesling but also of its Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris and Chardonnay — seems to invite much better comparisons to German dry wines from regions such as the Pfalz or the Nahe. Oregon wines may not have the body or concentration of wines from those regions, but I suspect that this also has something to do with viticulture, as Oregon crops are notoriously high in general. As an example, Bill Holloran's experiments in 1999 with different crop levels in the same vineyard demonstrated convincing qualitative differences in the resulting wines, and I hope that more people will decide to follow his lead of quality over quantity.

The real issue, however, is most likely site selection. Oregon would seem to be prime Riesling country, with its diverse geology, volcanic



mountain ranges and relatively cool climate. But as in most places in the New World, it simply isn't profitable to plant Riesling in the best sites available. The existing vineyards were planted alongside other varietals in deep, fertile soils and on shallow hillsides.

In contrast, think of some of the best Riesling vineyards of Europe: Ürziger Würzgarten in the Mosel, Achleiten in the Wachau, or Rangen de Thann in Alsace, to name a few dramatic examples. The cost and effort involved to plant vines on steep, rocky slopes like these are nowadays prohibitive in the New World, especially considering the currently unfashionable status of Riesling in the market. The potential is there, but barring a dramatic Riesling Awakening in the general populace to create economic feasibility, it will probably never be realized. We can only applaud the few producers who struggle with what they have to explore the possibilities of Riesling here.

I have often wondered if the real potential of Oregon lies not in the Willamette Valley, but somewhere to the east. Oregon is basically bisected by the Cascade mountains, which restrict most of the rainfall to the western portion of the state. The eastern part is dry and even turns to desert as you move away from the mountain range. On the surface, this is not unlike Alsace, which is the second driest place in all of France because the Vosges mountains do exactly the same thing. Perhaps there is an area somewhere east of the Cascade mountains where there are steep slopes of volcanic and granitic rock, where the growing season is long and dry, with warm days and cool nights. The Clos St.-Urbain of Oregon? Unfortunately we'll probably never find out, since, again, it all boils down to the iron hand of economics.

## Oregon Wine Information

### Oregon Wine Advisory Board

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## British Columbia

The Okanagan Valley has been receiving increasing attention from the press, but our tastings were somewhat disappointing, with less than a third of the wines we tasted finding their way into our report. Naturally, our hopes were focused on the ice wines for which British Columbia has become renowned, but we found many of these to be top-heavy and ungainly, lacking the clarity, focus and balance of their German counterparts.

However, there were a few wines that demonstrated promising potential, both in dry and sweet styles. In general, I felt that the balance of acidity in the best Canadian examples was more impressive than most wines from Washington and Oregon. Besides the estates listed here, we also tasted wines from Cedar Creek, Domaine Combret and Summerhill Estate, none of which were rated highly enough to be included.

### Gehring Brothers

#### Dry Riesling Classic 1999

Perfumed grapefruit and white peach aromas, well-structured and well-balanced, with a nice twist of acidity for freshness. Lingers with harmonious persistence on a compelling finish. **85**

#### Riesling Private Reserve 1999

Flowery fruitiness encased in a sleekly taut and minerally structure, very stylish and self-assured. Fresh fig, melon and pear aromas, with impressive depth and length on the back end. **89**

#### Riesling Ice Wine 1998

Very big, and aggressively botrytized, packed with syrupy peach, orange candy and marmalade concentration. Just a bit diffuse, but this is reasonably well-made, with a persistent core of intensity. **86**

*Also tasted from Gehring Brothers:*

Riesling Classic 1999, Dry Ehrenfeller Classic 1999, Ehrenfeller Classic 1999, Select Late Harvest Riesling 1999

### Inniskillin

#### Riesling Ice Wine Dark Horse Vineyard 1998

Flavors of apricot, pear and orange marmalade, with concentrated intensity and quite a bit of weight. On the palate there is a persistent apple character that interferes with an otherwise clean and pure profile, but overall this is well-made and quite appealing, with a long and intense finish. **87**

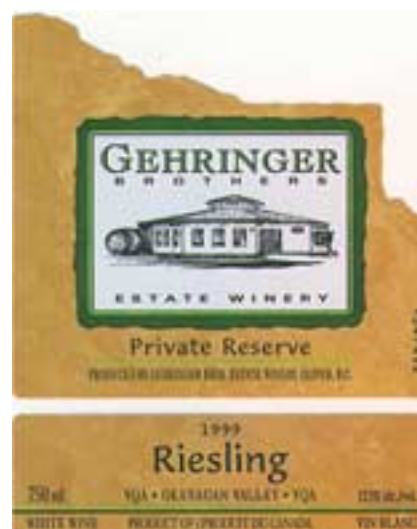
### Jackson-Triggs

#### Riesling Ice Wine Proprietor's Reserve 1999

Aromas of canned pear, fruit cocktail in syrup. Rich and intense, but balances its power with a nice level of acidity and real Eiswein character, even if there isn't a lot of real complexity. **86(+?)**

*Also tasted from Jackson-Triggs:*

Riesling Ice Wine Proprietor's Grand Reserve 1999



## Idaho

We found a couple of wineries making Riesling in Idaho, but the quality here was somewhat less than exciting, with only one wine making the cut. A rather poor wine from Sawtooth Winery was the other Idaho entry.

### Ste. Chapelle

#### Riesling Ice Wine Reserve Series 1998

Intriguing aromas of pickled ginger, cucumber and sweet rice vinegar – in fact, this resembles fresh kappa maki more than anything else, however odd that may seem. More straightforward peachiness and candied citrus flavors on the palate, with a slightly ditzzy bubble-gum element being the only detractor. Bizarre but intriguing. **85?**

*Also tasted from Ste. Chapelle:*

Sparkling Riesling American NV, Johannisberg Riesling Winemaker's Series 1999, Special Harvest Riesling Winemaker's Series 1999

## New York

With only a few wines tasted, we found some encouraging signs of Riesling life from New York's Finger Lakes area, and are looking forward to tasting more.

### Dr. Konstantin Frank

#### Johannisberg Riesling Dry 1999

Nicely perfumed tangerine and poached pear scents, flowery and moderately rich. Quite delicate on the palate, with a focused presence and lingering persistence. **86**

#### Salmon Run Johannisberg Riesling 1999

Fragrant blackberry and cassis notes, with a taut backbone of acidity that seems to carry and expand the aromas as they move back in the mouth. **87**

#### Johannisberg Riesling Semi-Dry 1999

Pear skins, green apple and fresh melon. Good ripeness and a fruity presence in the mouth, roundly appealing with a delicate sweetness. **85**

### Hermann J. Wiemer

#### Johannisberg Riesling Reserve 1997

Pervasive scents of dark berries, harmoniously balanced and nicely perfumed, if not terribly complex. **85**

#### Johannisberg Riesling Dry 1992

Tautly fragrant, secondary aromas, but like the 1997, this exhibits intriguing aromas of dark berries, here complicated by a touch of herbalness. A good balance of acidity keeps this focused and linear, and very pleasant to drink. **87**



## Washington

Besides those listed here, we also tasted wines from Covey Run, Woodward Canyon, Paul Thomas, Snoqualmie, Columbia Crest, Hyatt and Chateau Ste. Michelle, but none of them scored highly enough to merit inclusion.

### Chateau Ste Michelle & Dr. Loosen

#### Eroica Riesling 1999

Noticeably more concentrated than most Northwest Riesling, combining its depth with an elegant balance and finesse. Aromas of melon, guava and tangerine play on the palate, underlined by a hint of minerality. Impressive. **88**

#### Riesling Single Berry Select 1999

Immediately decadent nose of apricot jam, mandarin orange, crème anglaise and a dusty layer of botrytis. A lot of tension here, already showing a taut complexity. Viscous and velvety on the palate, but the balance of acidity is superb, holding everything together in sleekly penetrating concentration. This is so concentrated it feels like Eiswein, with its clean, firm acid spine. An impressive wine, especially considering it's the first effort by this joint venture. **93(+?)**

### Columbia Winery

#### Riesling Cellarmaster's Reserve 1999

Strawberry, dried fig, and orange candy aromas, with surprising depth in the mouth. The sweetness is very well balanced by a firm acidity that carries the flavors through the palate. **86**

### Hogue Cellars

#### Late Harvest White Riesling 1999

Pleasant nose of cinnamon, tangerine and apricot jam. Sweet citrus and candied apricot flavors on the palate, lightly sweet and carrying a surprising amount of acidity on the back end that keeps this fresh and drinkable. **86**

### Kiona

#### Late Harvest White Riesling 1998

Syrupy nose, just this side of cloying, with richly fragrant marmalade and dried apricot aromas. Pervasive flavors of dried Turkish apricots in the mouth, soft and billowy, but not unpleasant, even if it is sorely lacking in acidity to balance its sweetness. **85**

## Oregon

Many Oregon wines we tasted were disappointing, including Rieslings from Adelsheim, Flerchinger, Girardet, Henry Estate, Lange, Oak Knoll, and Willamette Valley Vineyards. But there were also several wines that demonstrated a great deal of promise, indicating a real potential for quality if crop levels are reduced and vinification techniques refined.

### Argyle

#### Riesling Dry Reserve 1998

This is from 25-year-old vines in the Knudsen Vineyard. Fairly simple in profile but well-balanced, developing some apple and citrus notes as it moves through the back end. Persistent aromatics keep this interesting. **85**



The first two wines from the joint venture between Chateau Ste. Michelle and Dr. Loosen seem to point to a bright future for New World Riesling.

## Belle Pente

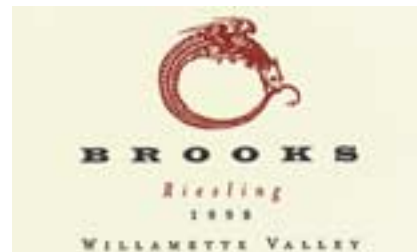
### Riesling 1999

Fresh aromas of apple and citrus, with a very nice acid structure that carries the flavors really well in the mouth. This is just missing a bit of depth in the mid-palate, but overall it's impressive, and certainly moving in the right direction. **87?**

## Brooks

### Riesling 1998

Upon first opening this bottle, there were extremely bizarre aromas of fresh yeast and bread dough, which subsided after about half an hour. As the fruit emerged, it began to show decent depth and balance, with aromas of tangerine, dried citrus peel, and fruit candy or fruit-flavored chewing gum. I would like to see where this wine goes in the next year or so, and will certainly be watching Jimi Brooks' Riesling endeavors in the future, but I find this wine difficult to assess now. ??



## Chehalem Winery

### Dry Riesling Reserve Corral Creek Vineyards 1999

Delicate floral-citrus nose, high-toned and slightly candied. Pronounced acidity in the mouth is a bit overwhelming for the light depth of fruit, but this is pleasant, showing some nice candied lemon and sour apple tones, and could be tempered by a little food. **85**

## Evesham Wood

Russ Raney is one of Oregon's top Pinot Noir producers, but on his estate vineyard, Le Puits Sec, he also has several white varietals planted, including a very tiny quantity of Rieslaner that is worth seeking out.

### Rieslaner Le Puits Sec Vineyard 1999

Aromas of peach skin, fresh apricot and pear, quite floral in tone. On the palate there is a guava-like tropical note that lingers on an impressively perfumed finish. **87**

## Holloran

Bill Holloran and winemaker Jay Somers have recently unveiled one of the most promising Riesling projects in Oregon. Holloran owns the Le Pavillon vineyard in the Dundee Hills, which includes 1.5 acres of 25 year-old Riesling vines. This fruit was formerly sold to Rex Hill Winery, but 1999 will be the first release of wine made by Holloran and Somers.

Convinced that crop levels are crucial to quality, Holloran divided his vineyard into two sections pruned at different yields. One resulted in roughly 3.5 tons per acre, which was bottled under the name Stafford Hill; the other was cropped at 2.5 tons per acre, and will carry the Holloran label. The difference in the two wines is pronounced enough to encourage them to continue reducing yields in the future.

### Stafford Hill Riesling 1999

Appley aromatics, backed by scents of figs, dried apricots and a pronounced earthiness. A good presence of acidity gives this a nice lift on the back end, finishing with balanced aromas and nice length. **86(+?)**

### Riesling Le Pavillon Vineyard 1999

Rich mouthfeel, noticeably richer than the Stafford Hill bottling, with complicated aromas of dried pear, ginger, white peach and citrus peel. Resonant aromatics persist on a fine finish. **88**

# Riesling Revival Down Under

## A Long time coming comes at last!

IT SEEMS AMAZING NOW, but less than 25 years ago, Riesling was the biggest-selling variety in Australia (including red wines). To this day, it remains the sixth most important wine. Overtaken by Chardonnay in the early '80s, it sat for a while there in the doldrums, but in the last half-decade or so it has started to claw its way back into our wine-drinking consciousness.

“The Riesling Revival,” as it’s become known, has been a bit of a catchphrase with wine folk for quite some time. All of a sudden it seems as though it has arrived. The reason for this is fairly simple. Australia, perhaps even ahead of Alsace and Austria, is “the one most likely” to make Riesling of the quality of great German examples. People like Ernie Loosen, Bernhard Breuer, Fritz Hasselbach and Helmut Dönnhoff have all been out here. Stuart Piggot’s been here. And they’ll all be back for the next ‘Riesling Summit.’ The game is up! Australia has a serious part to play in the global appreciation of our favorite white grape.

## Australian Riesling and its Regions

Perhaps the most exciting thing about Australian Riesling is that it is in a style all of its own. Where top makers of Chardonnay in this country have by and large set about emulating Burgundy, producers of Riesling have really given a unique definition of the variety. Invariably the style is bone dry, racy, crisp, steely and lively in its youth, giving rise to toasty, savory, nutty and sometimes oily characters with age. If you were going to draw a stylistic parallel, the closest thing I have come across would be Spätlese Trocken or Auslese Trocken from the Rheingau in Germany.

I did a tasting at Domdechant Werner in the Rheingau in 1999 and when I read back through my notes I realized that, particularly in the context of young wines, my thoughts on their '98s read like a tasting of top Clare Valley Riesling! Further investigation revealed that the climate and terroir of the two regions are not dissimilar.

Australian Riesling is made like no other on earth. Winemakers are hell-bent on juice preservation, oxidation is the enemy, neutral yeasts are used, and every effort is made along the way to preserve the pristine limey juiciness of the fruit. Early bottling completes the picture, and the results speak for themselves, especially with time. Remember those ultra-high-acid '96 wines from Alsace that just now are starting to flesh out and blossom? That scenario is repeated with regularity here. To the untrained palate, Australian Riesling is sometimes seen as lacking unctuousness, when in actual fact it is simply a tight rose-bud just waiting to burst open.

Where Australian Riesling really comes into its own is in the quality/value stakes. If you take Grosset Polish Hill as the benchmark by which others are judged, you can expect to pay AUS\$35. That’s about US\$18.



Based in Melbourne, Australia, Patrick Walsh is a sommelier, a wine importer specializing in German Riesling, a restaurant manager, a wine scribe, and now our resident Oz/NZ Riesling Reporter!

Top Australian Chardonnay is nudging AUS\$100 these days. So you pay two-thirds less, and you end up with a wine that will probably age three times as long.

Now that the Australian wine industry has sorted out all the issues — like calling wine actually made from Riesling ‘Rhine Riesling’ and allowing any old fruity white to be called ‘riesling’ — it’s ready to push forward. The fact that they’ve been having a go of it for a while means that there’s been plenty of time to establish just exactly where the best places are to grow the stuff. South Australia’s Clare and Eden Valleys lead the way, followed by a Western Australian region sometimes called the Great Southern, but more recently re-named the Frankland River region. (Just to put things in geographical perspective for a moment, the distance from Clare to Frankland River is about 2,500 kilometers — 1,550 miles. This is a big country!) After that there are the regions of Barossa Valley and Coonawarra (both in South Australia) and emerging regions in Tasmania and Victoria. The common thread between these (apart perhaps from the Barossa, which tends to produce fuller, bigger, broader and, for my money, less interesting Riesling) is a cool fall and a gentle ripening season. You won’t find hang-times as long as the Mosel or the Wachau, but the quality of the fruit can be superb.

### The Clare Valley in focus



South Australia’s Clare Valley wine-growing region is situated northwest of the city of Adelaide in the North Mount Lofty Ranges. It runs from Auburn in the South through the townships of Leasingham, Watervale, Penwortham and Sevenhill to Stanley Flat just north of the town of Clare. With the sub-regions Polish Hill River and Mintaro to the east, there are seven valleys or sub-regions in total in the Clare Valley. Average rainfall in the Clare Watervale area is 600mm (about 24 inches).

Tourism brochures will tell you that one of the joys of the Clare Valley is its proximity to other interesting villages and secluded spots in the Valley. Sevenhill, Penwortham and Leasingham, along with the Skillo-galee Valley and the Polish Hill River areas, offer both wine tasting and sales at the many wineries located here. It is undoubtedly one of the prettiest wine-producing areas in Australia. The vineyards covering

undulating hills, the rivers lined with Australian eucalyptus trees (known as Gums) and the attractive sandstone architecture of many of the winery buildings and town residences make a visit to the Clare Valley very pleasant. Wine has been grown and made here since the 1850s, so by Australian standards, at least, there is quite a bit of history in the place.

The first vines were planted in the sub-region of Sevenhill in 1852 by Jesuit priests. Sevenhill Cellars today is still associated with fine wines, but more so Shiraz than Riesling. At Leasingham Winery, established in 1893 and one of the oldest in Clare, a huge burnished copper still adorns

## Patrick's Top 20 Australian Rieslings

### Clare Valley, South Australia

GROSSET  
Polish Hill, Watervale  
PETALUMA Riesling  
MITCHELL Watervale Riesling  
KNAPPSTEIN  
“Hand Picked” Riesling  
PAULETTS  
Polish Hill River Riesling  
MOUNT HORROCKS  
Watervale Riesling  
PIKES Reserve Riesling

### Great Southern, Western Australia

HOWARD PARK Riesling  
FRANKLAND ESTATE  
Isolation Ridge Riesling  
ALKOOMI Riesling

### Canberra District, New South Wales

CLONAKILLA Riesling

### Granton, Tasmania

STEFANO LUBIANA Riesling

### Pipers River, Tasmania

PIPERS BROOK VINEYARD  
Riesling

### Eden Valley, South Australia

LEO BURING Leonay Riesling

### Mansfield, Victoria

DELATITE VS Riesling

### Central Victoria

MITCHELTON  
Blackwood Park Riesling

### Eden Valley, South Australia

HEGGIES Riesling  
ORLANDO Steingarten Riesling

### Canberra District, New South Wales

HELM Riesling

the wine tasting room and reflects well the displayed presentation of historic photography of Clare and its early wine making industry. The Quelltaler Winery at Watervale boasts a very fine winemaking museum, which is open to the public during cellar door opening times.

Every year, many of the wineries that form the Clare Valley Winemakers Association stage the Clare Valley Gourmet Weekend. Here, the unfinished current vintage wines are shown to the world at large. The Gourmet Weekend is held on a holiday weekend in May and encourages wine tasting on Saturday where visitors may sip, sample and discuss the new wines with the winemakers themselves. That same association was, however, recently behind something that will have more far-reaching effects for great Clare Riesling — the Stelvin closure issue.

### **The great screw-cap caper**

Jane Mitchell, Jeffrey Grosset and a group of Clare valley vigneron took the controversial and somewhat radical step of bottling part (or all) of their 2000 vintage under a screw-top or 'Stelvin' closure. Fifteen of Clare's wineries have taken part in this initiative coordinated by the Clare Valley Winemakers Association.

This decision was taken primarily to eradicate cork taint and a desire to reflect the high quality of Riesling that is produced in the Clare Valley. It will also allow the best examples to be aged for a long time with confidence. The feeling was that cork, being a natural product, results in a percentage of bottles suffering cork taint, which spoils the wine.

The collective of Clare Valley winemakers felt that, given Riesling's highly aromatic qualities, cork taint tends to be far more noticeable. A special bottle and a special capsule, both manufactured in France, were commissioned for the project. The bottle is a heavy, classy piece of glass, which replaces some of the romance sacrificed by the absence of the traditional closure.

## **The Top Five in The Clare Valley**

### **Grosset**

The Clare Valley in South Australia is home to the greatest number of top producers. Grosset is the obvious first cab off the rank, and it is fair to say that he is currently the brightest star on the Australian Riesling horizon.

Jeffrey Grosset is a meticulous individual who makes a whole line-up of stunning wines, but it is perhaps for his two Rieslings, namely the 'Polish Hill' and the 'Watervale,' that he is most praised. Interestingly, these wines are being refined in style all the time. These days they are picked at Spätlese Trocken levels of ripeness. Definitely wines for the long haul, they are seen as fantastic cellaring options. But don't think for a moment that the Clare Valley Riesling thing begins and ends with Grosset. The list is long and growing.



Clare Valley vineyards under a striking blue South Australian sky.

### **Why Stelvin?**

- Fine Rieslings exhibit wonderfully delicate floral and fruit flavors.
- Sometimes, traditional ways of sealing a wine bottle fail to protect these flavors.
- That is why the winemakers have decided to use a more reliable seal.
- **BENEFIT:** It ensures the quality and maximum freshness of every bottle of Riesling. Rieslings are delicate wines, and the Clare Valley is recognized as producing outstanding premium Rieslings.

(From the official PR materials about the Stelvin program)

### **Mitchell Watervale**

Andrew and Jane Mitchell have released a Riesling every year since 1977. Most still drink well, and in recent vintages they have really hit their stride. At a vertical tasting of Mitchell Watervale recently, the 1992 vintage was still very much a baby, all limey and zesty with just a hint of lemon butter on toast.

The 1997 was full, fresh and opulent, with delightful red berry and honeyed nuances, and still a decade of life ahead of it.

And the 2000 vintage, just released, was taught and impressive, with powerful lemon-lime flavors, still very early in its evolution but an obvious winner from a difficult vintage.

### **Petaluma**

Brian Croser is the man behind the Petaluma juggernaut. Even though, these days, he is at the helm of a wine company with half a dozen brands and half a million cases in production, ask him which wine he holds closest to his heart and he'll give you a very quick answer: Petaluma Riesling.

This is seen as a benchmark of Australian Riesling. The wine is sourced from a vineyard called Hanlin Hill at the northern end of the valley. With an altitude of some 500 meters, it's the highest vineyard in Clare. The soil is rich in slate, so much so that 'From Pure Slate' has been something of a marketing banner for the wine.

From the outset, the wine has been made in a later-picked style. Again, drawing a parallel with Rheingau, this wine can look somewhat dumb in its infancy, but with time, it starts to lose its self-consciousness and evolve into what is this country's most expressive example of the grape.

The just-sold-out 1999 vintage was, for my money, the best Riesling produced in Australia from the vintage. It has concentrated, explosive citrus blossom and lime zest aromas, and a multi-layered palate with nuances of stonefruits, strawberries, chalk and steel. If you want an introduction to Australian Riesling, this is the one!

### **Pauletts Polish Hill River**

Something of an unknown beyond these shores, Pauletts is a regular producer of mighty fine Riesling very much in the tradition of Classic Clare Riesling. Vibrant, fresh lime and raciness in their youth evolves into dry toast and lemon curd characters with age, very much in the Grosset ilk.

### **Mount Horrocks Watervale**

Fruit from 25-year-old vines, clever vineyard management, and a handy sounding board in partner Jeffrey Grosset make Stephanie Toole's Mount Horrocks label one of the greats in Clare. The wine is powerful, deep and immensely concentrated. Stephanie is as driven as Jeffrey is meticulous. And make no mistake — this is very much her own wine. It's worth seeking out.

# Rating the wines

**WINES ARE ASSESSED BASED ON THEIR** perceived total potential lifespan. In an ideal world, prose would be the only language required, but of course we humans have a penchant for categorization and qualitative organization. Therefore, despite its flaws, we have chosen to include a numerical score in our notes, based on a hundred-point scale. We stress that the text of the tasting notes is the matter of importance, and that the score apart from the text is divested of meaning. A (+?) indicates the potential for an increased score.

Tasting notes are by individual tasters, and not composites of a panel. We document who is tasting the wine, where, and when the wine is being tasted, as all three of these elements are crucial to the contextual understanding of the notes. In addition, lot numbers are provided whenever possible, and especially AP numbers for German wines. In general, unless otherwise noted, all tasting notes are Peter's.

Because of extreme variability around the world, we have decided not to include prices, except for the auction wines.

## Next Issue

# Germany's 1999 vintage

**OK, I KNOW WE PROMISED THIS LAST TIME**, but our samples were stuck in Germany, so we'll give you our annual review of the currently available vintage in the March/April 2001 issue. We'll have lots of tasting notes for you from our travels and from big tasting events like the German Wine Information Bureau's annual vintage presentation.

In addition, we'll report on the achievements — and shortcomings — of Germany's association of top winegrowers, the VDP. And we'll have Estate Reviews of the two Wilhelms of the VDP: Wilhelm Haag, owner of the Fritz Haag estate and president of the VDP-Mosel; and Wilhelm Weil, of Robert Weil, president of the VDP-Rheingau.

## THE RIESLING REPORT RATING SCALE

- 95–100 Classic.** A perfect example of its type. The holy grail of all wine lovers, these are wines that stop time and transport you to a higher plane of existence.
- 90–94 Exceptional.** A superbly crafted wine with extraordinary attributes.
- 85–89 Above average.** Wines showing character, distinction and interest.
- 80–84 Average.** A drinkable wine, but without any special distinction.
- 75–79 Below average.** An underachiever.
- 75 or less Poor or flawed.**

Only wines rated 85 or better will appear in this magazine. These are our personal recommendations. More tasting notes can be found in Library within the **Members Only** area of the Riesling Report Web site: [www.rieslingreport.com](http://www.rieslingreport.com)

