

# Riesling Report

The voice of Riesling

JULY/AUGUST 2002

## Discovering New York's Finger Lakes

*Riesling fights its way  
to prominence in the  
land of Concord and  
Catawba.*

Taughannock Falls, at the edge of Cayuga Lake. A spectacular sight that puts the many strata of Finger Lakes shale on full display.

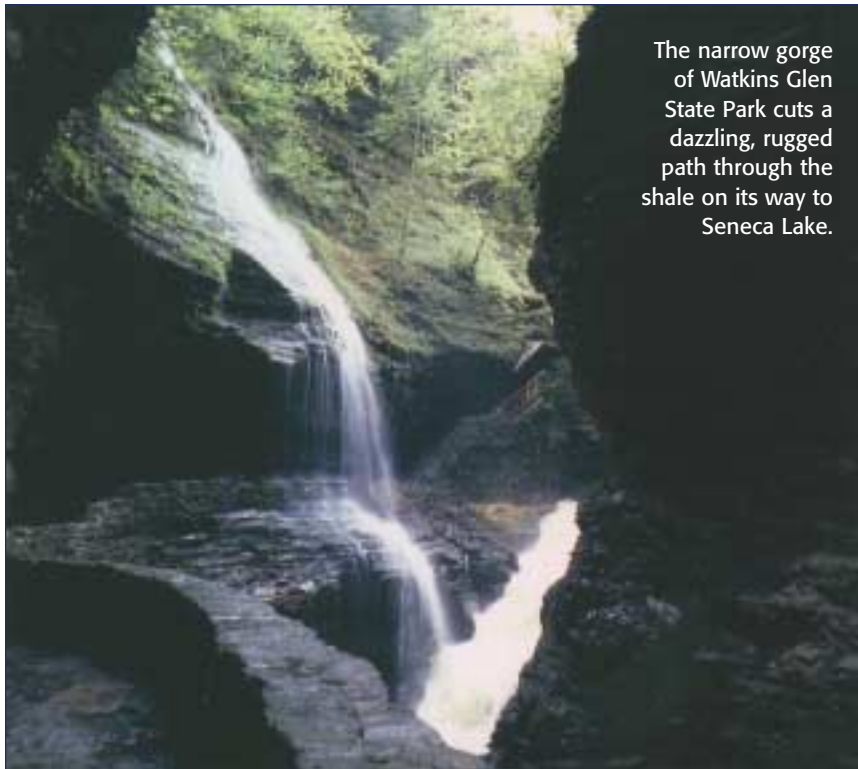
ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:  
**Wine Australia 2002**  
**World Riesling Championship**  
**Vintage Report: Australia 2002**

[www.rieslingreport.com](http://www.rieslingreport.com)

# CONTENTS

---

<b>RIESLING EVENTS</b>	Wine Australia 2002	<b>3</b>
<b>JUDGING RIESLING</b>	International Eastern Wine Competition	<b>5</b>
<b>ON THE COVER</b>	Discovering New York's Finger Lakes	<b>8</b>
<b>VINTAGE REPORT</b>	Australia 2002	<b>19</b>
<b>RIESLING TASTINGS</b>	F.E. Trimbach in London	<b>22</b>



The narrow gorge of Watkins Glen State Park cuts a dazzling, rugged path through the shale on its way to Seneca Lake.

## Falling water

THERE'S SOMETHING INVIGORATING about standing in front of a waterfall. From the tiniest trickle to the most thunderous cascade, falling water thrills the senses with its grace, power and timeless constancy – qualities, by the way, that are also found in the most invigorating Rieslings of the world.

Science tells us that crashing water releases positive ions that bring a freshening tingle to the body. Clearly there is much more to it than just a bunch of electron-hungry molecular fragments flying around. Aside from the cooling, refreshing spray that rewards you after a long, dusty hike, waterfalls evoke something very primal. These are the most basic forces of nature at work (sometimes, at play) and being in their presence fills you with awe, humility and genuine respect.

As you can see, I like waterfalls. So it's no big surprise that I loved visiting the Finger Lakes. Because of their size and connection to winegrowing, the lakes get most of our attention. But there are more than a thousand waterfalls in the area and, though they have no direct influence on the vineyards, they define a region rich in geological detail.

When you visit the Finger Lakes – and you should – take some time away from the wine tasting to get out there and drink up some positive ions.

—Kirk Wille, editor & publisher

**Riesling Report** is published electronically six times a year by Kirk Wille and Peter Liem. A one-year subscription is just \$32.

To subscribe, and for more information, please visit the Riesling Report Web site: [www.rieslingreport.com](http://www.rieslingreport.com)

We welcome letters, comments and suggestions. Interesting and thoughtful letters will be published in future issues. Unproductive ranting will be disregarded. Useful suggestions will be adopted.

If you would like to tell us about a particularly thrilling Riesling experience you've had, or would like to ask us some questions, please direct your correspondence to:

Riesling Report  
9910 SW Quail Post Rd.  
Portland, Oregon 97219 USA  
Telephone (503) 244-2573 Fax (503) 244-9103  
[kirk@rieslingreport.com](mailto:kirk@rieslingreport.com)

RR15

## Wine Australia 2002

THERE WAS A TIME when all you needed to know about buying a good Australian Riesling were the names of a few leading wine producers, like Leo Buring, Pipers Brook Vineyard, or Jeffrey Grosset. These days, it's not so easy. The wide brown land of the twenty-first century is rife with outbreaks of viticulture. Almost overnight it seems, the country has become the world's fourth largest wine exporter, and the largest exporter of wines anywhere outside Europe.

Modest plantings of Riesling over recent years suggest it will be a very long time indeed before the variety rises much above its present infinitesimal share – less than quarter of a percent – of the grape intake recorded

each vintage. Yet in spite of those numbers, there are plenty of new Australian Riesling players now choosing to enter the fray, the vast majority on sites measuring less than four hectares (10 acres). Most chase cooler climates, seek higher latitudes, test ever higher elevations.

And the established Riesling players? Well, they're out improving the quality of the breed as well, courtesy of better vineyard practices, advances in winemaking technology, and the employment of more highly skilled work forces. All this is taking place against a backdrop where the sheer number of wine producers across the country continues to increase at an alarming rate. To the existing total of almost 1,500 companies, one newcomer is added every 73 hours, say the publishers of the industry's bible, the 2002 Australian & New Zealand Wine Industry Directory. Who can keep track of all that's going on in Riesling production when the industry itself is undergoing such rapid transformation? Hardly anyone.

Mind you, Riesling lovers will agree there's no harm in trying. That's the whole point of taking part in the national wine industry's four-day biennial bash that's set to take place at Sydney's Fox Studios during early August. Called Wine Australia 2002, this year's event is not only the largest one on the industry's national wine calendar, it is the largest event of its type held in the Southern Hemisphere. And by the time its doors close on Monday, Aug. 5, Wine Australia 2002 is expected to have generated more than \$13 million in income for the economy of its host state, New South Wales. That's significant for a country with a total population well shy of 20 million people.

During Wine Australia 2000, held in Melbourne, some 500 winery exhibitors presented wines to over 33,000 consumers, 4,900 trade visitors, and some 350 international guests. In 2002, the number of exhibitors is closer to 550, repre-



The Wine Australia 2000 event was held in Melbourne (photo courtesy of Liquid Ideas).

senting a total of 40 distinct wine regions from around the country.

The key focus of this year's program will be Australia's new and occasional wine drinkers, a target group that will be critical for Riesling producers if the variety's current domestic market share is to be improved in the short to medium term.

This focus represents a significant change of direction for an event that has taken place every two years since 1996, says Wine Australia CEO Gail Sambidge-Mitchell. An exhaustive review of the last Wine Australia delivered a strong message to its organisers. Consumers there said they wanted an event that was non-intimidating, and that had more significant food, lifestyle and tourism components. For their part, producers wanted an event that was shorter than those held in the past, and one far less expensive for the industry's smallest wineries.

Event organisers seem to have gotten the message. This year's Wine Australia is to be a three-day consumer event, from Friday, Aug. 2 to Sunday, Aug. 4, at Moore Park's Fox Studios. A fourth day has been set aside exclusively for members of the wine trade on Monday, Aug. 5. "Wine Australia events are not 'pour-a-thons' but the opportunity for visitors to walk through all the regions of the country and increase their personal knowledge about wine while having a truly enjoyable and fun day out," says Sambidge-Mitchell.

The Fox Studios venue was chosen for its relaxed and social ambience, and is intended to make the event seem as much a festival as an exhibition. Indeed, it is being promoted to visitors as the Great Aussie Wine Festival.

Informal wine tastings, food and wine master classes and wine information sessions will be presented at a number of venues, while a tailored program will be delivered on the Monday trade day. A newly devised Wine Discovery Centre will provide the hub for wine learning and a launch pad for guided tasting tours.

Getting new wines ready for presentation at the event will be a tall order for many of the country's Riesling producers, especially for those affected by 2002's later-than-normal vintage. Richmond Grove's John Vickery says its timing will exclude his company from showing its latest Watervale wine because of the need for additional time and care necessary to bottle under Stelvin screwcaps, the closure he re-introduced to Australian consumers back in 1998. "We need to get the wine squeaky clean in order to get rid of fermentation characters such as yeastiness and so on. We're taking our time with that, and erring on the side of caution," he says.

For the 15 producer-members of the Clare Valley Winemakers Association, Wine Australia 2002 provides the opportunity to once again explain the virtues of their move away from traditional cork seals in favour of new Stelvin technology, a decision that caused a small ripple effect at its outset in 2000, and is gathering wave strength on a New World – if not global – basis.

Wines from 2002 will be available, but in limited quantity. Most wines here will be from the 2001 vintage, though some older samples are likely to be found lurking behind tasting counters around the venue, and may be tasted on request.



## Wine Australia 2002

For your diary, here are the relevant admission details:

### General Public

Friday, August 2,  
11 a.m. – 9 p.m.

Saturday, August 3,  
11 a.m. – 9 p.m.

Sunday, August 4,  
11 a.m. – 9 p.m.

### Trade Only

Monday, August 5,  
9 a.m. – 6 p.m.

### Admission Fees

Public Days: \$25 per person  
(includes tax)

Trade Day: \$15 per person  
(includes tax)

Further information about Wine Australia, pre-purchases and media on-line registration can be found on the Web at [www.wineaustralia2002.com](http://www.wineaustralia2002.com)

## 2002 International Eastern Wine Competition

THE 2002 EDITION of the annual International Eastern Wine Competition took place in May at the Logan Ridge Estates winery in New York's Finger Lakes region. The competition, sponsored by the trade journal "Vineyard and Winery Management," attracted nearly 2,000 entries from 14 countries, 36 U.S. states and four provinces of Canada.

Because Riesling is fast becoming the signature variety of the Finger Lakes region, this year they decided to inaugurate a World Riesling Championship. I was asked to be a judge at the competition, and I readily agreed, thinking (stupidly, as it turns out) that I was only being asked to judge Rieslings. The judging took three days and my panel tasted everything from Pinot blanc (and Riesling, of course) to Syrah to fruit wines from strange things like elderflower and persimmon.

Large wine-producing areas, such as California and Australia, dominated the entries, but since it is the International *Eastern* Wine Competition, there were many wines from mid-west and eastern states that you don't normally think of as wine regions. Plus, I tasted more non-vinifera wines in those three days than I had in my entire lifetime. We have a little bit of Niagara and Marechal Foch here in Oregon, but they are novelties. In the eastern United States, however, non-vinifera varieties are a big part of the regional culture. Now I know very intimately what is meant by the term "foxy," which is often used to describe the coarse grapiness of native varieties and many of the French hybrids. But I did find some interesting, racy sweet wines made from a complex hybrid called Vignoles.

Following are all of the medal-winning Rieslings from the competition. As you can see, most of them come from the eastern U.S., especially from the Finger Lakes themselves. A few German wines made it to the competition, but mostly inexpensive QbAs from average producers. To truly become a World Riesling Championship, the competition needs to find a way to get more European entries from top-quality producers. Overall, I was more impressed by the red wines in the competition than by the Rieslings.

### Double Gold

#### LaVelle Vineyards (Oregon)

2000 Riesling, Willamette Valley (\$10)

*Named best semi-sweet Riesling and best white wine overall.*

#### Jackson-Triggs Vintners (British Columbia)

2000 Riesling Ice Wine, Okanagan Valley (\$33/375ml)

*Named best sweet Riesling.*

#### Wagner Vineyards (Finger Lakes)

2000 Riesling Ice Wine (\$26/375ml)



My judging panel at the 2002 International Eastern Wine Competition. I'm on the left, with Lynn Ogrzylo, a food and wine writer for *Sommelier Magazine* in Ontario, Canada; Dana Keeler, winemaker at Heron Hill Vineyards on Keuka Lake; Ed Draves, assistant wine manager at Premier Wines in Buffalo, New York; and Thomas Henick-Kling, an associate professor and director of the enology program at Cornell University's New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva.



## Gold

**Dr. Frank's Vinifera Wine Cellars (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Johannisberg Riesling Reserve (\$20)

**Dr. Frank's Vinifera Wine Cellars (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Johannisberg Riesling dry (\$12)  
*Named best dry Riesling.*

**Beringer Vineyards (California)**  
2000 Johannisberg Riesling

**Chalet Debonne Vineyards (Ohio)**  
2000 Riesling, Lake Erie (\$9)

**Chateau Grand Traverse (Michigan)**  
2001 Riesling semi-dry (\$10)

**Jekel Vineyards (California)**  
2000 Riesling, Monterey (\$10)

**Keuka Spring Vineyards (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Riesling (\$11)  
*Named best semi-dry Riesling.*

**Chateau Lafayette Reneau (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Johannisberg Riesling (\$12)

**Heron Hill Vineyards (Finger Lakes)**  
2000 Riesling, Ingle Vineyard (\$13)

**Peninsula Cellars (Michigan)**  
2001 Riesling Select, Old Mission Peninsula (\$12.50)

**Schloss Wallhausen (Nahe, Germany)**  
2000 Riesling (\$13.50)

**Standing Stone Vineyards (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Riesling (\$12)

**A. Capella (Michigan)**  
2000 Riesling Ice Wine, Old Mission Peninsula (\$79.50)

**Jekel Vineyards (California)**  
2000 Late Harvest Riesling (\$22)

**Magnotta Winery Corp. (Ontario, Canada)**  
2000 Riesling Ice Wine (\$40)

**Sheldrake Point (Finger Lakes)**  
2000 Riesling Ice Wine (\$42.50)

## Silver

**Babich Wines (New Zealand)**  
2001 Riesling, Marlborough (\$10)

**Bassermann-Jordan (Pfalz, Germany)**  
2000 Riesling trocken (\$14)

**Chateau Grand Traverse (Michigan)**  
2001 Riesling (\$12.50)

**Salmon Run (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Johannisberg Riesling (\$10)

**Atwater Estate Vineyards (Finger Lakes)**  
2000 Riesling (\$13)

**Baron zu Knyphausen (Rheingau, Germany)**  
2000 Riesling (\$12)

**Blue Mountain Vineyards (Pennsylvania)**  
2000 Riesling (\$12)

**Casa Larga Vineyard (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Johannisberg Riesling (\$8)

**Chateau Lafayette Reneau (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Riesling (\$12)

**Chateau Lafayette Reneau (Finger Lakes)**  
2000 Johannisberg Riesling (\$12)

**Chateau Ste. Michelle-Dr. Loosen (Washington)**  
2001 Eroica Riesling, Columbia Valley (\$20)

**Glenora Wine Cellars (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Riesling dry (\$10)

**Jackson-Triggs Vintners (British Columbia, Canada)**  
2000 Riesling Okanagan Valley (\$7)

**Jekel Vineyards (California)**  
2001 Riesling, Monterey (\$10)

**King Ferry Winery/Treleaven (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Riesling dry (\$10.50)

**Lakewood Vineyards (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Riesling (\$13)

**Lucas Vineyards (Finger Lakes)**  
2000 Riesling semi-dry, Cayuga Lake (\$10)

**Peconic Bay Winery (New York)**  
2000 Riesling, North Fork of Long Island (\$13)

**Widmer Brickstone Cellars (Finger Lakes)**  
2000 Riesling (\$11)

**Zelphi Wines (Nahe, Germany)**  
1999 Riesling Spätlese (\$20)

**Chalet Debonne Vineyards (Ohio)**  
2001 Riesling Reserve, Grand River Valley (\$10)

**Clover Hill Vineyards (Pennsylvania)**  
Riesling (\$9.50)

**Fox Estate Winery (Washington)**  
2001 Riesling, Columbia Valley (\$10)

**Glenora Wine Cellars (Finger Lakes)**  
2000 Riesling, Vintner's Select (\$15)

**Red Newt Cellars (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Riesling (\$12.50)

**Rockbridge Vineyard (Virginia)**  
2001 Riesling (\$10)

**Swedish Hill Vineyard (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Riesling (\$11)

**Two Rivers Winery (Colorado)**  
2001 Riesling, Delta County (\$11.50)  
*My top-scoring Riesling for the competition!*

**Heron Hill Vineyards (Finger lakes)**  
1999 Riesling Late Harvest (\$16)

**Jackson-Triggs Vintners (British Columbia)**  
2000 Riesling Ice Wine Grand Reserve (\$43/375ml)

**Jackson-Triggs Vintners (British Columbia)**  
1999 Riesling Ice Wine Grand Reserve (\$43/375ml)

**Jackson-Triggs Vintners (Ontario)**  
2000 Riesling Ice Wine Proprietor's Grand Reserve (\$37/375ml)

**Lang Vineyards (British Columbia)**  
2000 Riesling Ice Wine (\$60)

**Pindar Vineyards (New York)**  
2000 Riesling Ice Wine, North Fork of Long Island (\$35)

### **Bronze**

**Atwater Estate Vineyards (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Riesling dry (\$13)

**Cascata Winery (Finger Lakes)**  
2000 Riesling Classic Reserve (\$12.50)

**Chateau Grand Traverse (Michigan)**  
1999 Select Harvest Riesling dry (\$12.50)

**Heron Hill Vineyards (Finger Lakes)**  
2000 Riesling dry (\$11)

**Palmer Vineyards (New York)**  
2000 White Riesling, North Fork of Long Island (\$13)

**Pillitteri Estates (Ontario)**  
2000 Riesling, Niagar Peninsula (\$7)

**Standing Stone Vineyards (Finger Lakes)**  
2000 Riesling dry (\$12)

**The Wollersheim Winery (Wisconsin)**  
2001 Riesling dry (\$8.50)

**Biltmore Estate Wine Co. (North Carolina)**  
Riesling (\$10)

**Chateau St. Jean (California)**  
2001 Johannisberg Riesling (\$15)

**Chateau Ste. Michelle (Washington)**  
2000 Riesling, Cold Creek Vineyard (\$14)

**Chateau Ste. Michelle (Washington)**  
2001 Johannisberg Riesling, Columbia Valley (\$8)

**Chiappone Cellars Winery (New York)**  
2001 Morning Star Riesling, Lake Erie (\$15)

**Ferrante Winery (Ohio)**  
2001 Riesling, Grand River Valley (\$11)

**Firestone Vineyard (California)**  
2001 Riesling, Central Coast (\$8)

**Fox Run Vineyards (Finger Lakes)**  
2000 Riesling dry (\$10)

**Fulkerson Winery (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Riesling dry (\$10)

**Hazlitt's 1852 Vineyards (Finger Lakes)**  
2000 Riesling (\$9)

**Heron Hill Vineyards (Finger Lakes)**  
2000 Riesling (\$11)

**Freiherr Heyl zu Herrnsheim (Rheinhessen, Germany)**  
2000 Riesling Niersteiner Pettenthal (\$22)

**Hunt Country Vineyards (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Riesling (\$10)

**Kendall-Jackson Winery**  
2001 Vintner's Reserve Riesling (\$10)

**Dr. Frank's Vinifera Wine Cellars (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Johannisberg Riesling semi-dry (\$12)

**The Wollersheim Winery (Wisconsin)**  
2001 White Riesling (\$7.50)

**Fox Run Vineyards (Finger Lakes)**  
2000 Riesling (\$9)

**Lang Vineyards (British Columbia)**  
2000 Late harvest Riesling (\$9)

**McGregor Vineyard & Winery (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Riesling semi-sweet (\$12)

**Schloss Saarstein (Saar, Germany)**  
2000 Serriger Riesling (\$15.50)

**Carlson Vineyards (Colorado)**  
2001 Riesling, Grand Valley (\$8.50)

**Hunt Country Vineyards (Finger Lakes)**  
2001 Late Harvest Riesling (\$14)

**Jackson-Triggs Vintners (British Columbia)**  
2000 Sparkling Riesling Ice Wine (\$43)

**Kiona Vineyards (Washington)**  
2000 Late Harvest White Riesling (\$10)

**Leelanau Wine Cellars (Michigan)**  
2000 Late harvest Johannisberg Riesling (\$11)

**Standing Stone Vineyards (Finger Lakes)**  
2000 Late Harvest Riesling (\$11)

**Von Stiehl Winery (Wisconsin)**  
2001 Late Harvest Johannisberg Riesling (\$14.50)

# Discovering New York's Finger Lakes Region

WINE REGIONS, IT SEEMS, often experience the same evolutionary fits and starts as do ill-fated animal species and geologically active land masses. Changes in climate, catastrophic natural events and human intervention can all cause the fundamental restructuring of a developing viticultural area. The Finger Lakes region of upstate New York is a good example.

For many millions of years, much of this area of the country was a shallow inland sea. Annual runoff from the surrounding uplands deposited layer after layer of muddy, mineral-rich sediment, which can still be seen in the deep crust of shale bedrock that underlies the entire region. Eventually the water drained away to the south, leaving a complex network of rivers and streams. Ice Age glaciers scoured the area and carved out the long, narrow lakes that look so much like the fingers of a hand stretched out across the land.

Of the 11 lakes in the Finger Lakes region, just four dominate the area's wine industry. They are, from east to west, Cayuga Lake, Seneca Lake, Keuka Lake and Canandaigua Lake, although the latter is of minor significance, especially where Riesling is concerned. The three biggest lakes are so long and narrow that they resemble large river valleys. This seems to be what has attracted many of today's winegrowers to the area. They recognize that the effect of the deep water on the climate of the surrounding lakeshore is much the same as that found in Germany's Rhine River valley. The big difference, as we shall see, lies in the area's macroclimate.

Cayuga Lake is the longest of the Finger Lakes, and is at the lowest elevation, giving it a relatively mild growing season. Seneca Lake is nearly as long as Cayuga Lake, but it is much deeper (632 feet) and creates the warmest mesoclimate for vineyards that lie within about a mile of the lakeshore. It is on the banks of the much smaller Keuka Lake, however, that the history of this young wine region took its first faltering steps.

## Birth of a wine region

Europeans love wine, that much is clear. When Europeans colonized America, they immediately set about planting vineyards wherever it seemed suitable. Mostly they failed, and their failures were especially grand whenever they tried to plant European *vitis vinifera* varieties. The climate was just too harsh. Thomas Jefferson was one of the many optimists who struggled in vain to establish viable *vinifera* vineyards. One of our country's greatest thinkers, Jefferson played a



The pastoral setting surrounding Seneca Lake belies the dramatic shale gorges and waterfalls you find when you take an up-close look at the Finger Lakes region.

major role in establishing the United States as a sovereign nation based on the inalienable human rights of liberty and equality. Getting a few acres of vines to grow proved to be a much more difficult endeavor.

Jefferson never succeeded with vinifera varieties at his estate in Virginia, but he was impressed by wines made from Alexander, a naturally occurring hybrid of native (*vitis labrusca*) grapes first cultivated in Pennsylvania. This prompted him to encourage more plantings of native vines, and varieties such as Catawba, Concord and Isabella soon rose to prominence.

The Finger Lakes region's love affair with native varieties began in 1829, when the Episcopalian minister, Rev. William Bostwick, planted a small vineyard in Hammondsport, at the southern end of Keuka Lake. Although Bostwick was only moderately pleased with the results of his plantation, he also provided vine cuttings to many others in the area, and Hammondsport became the ad hoc center of wine growing in the region.

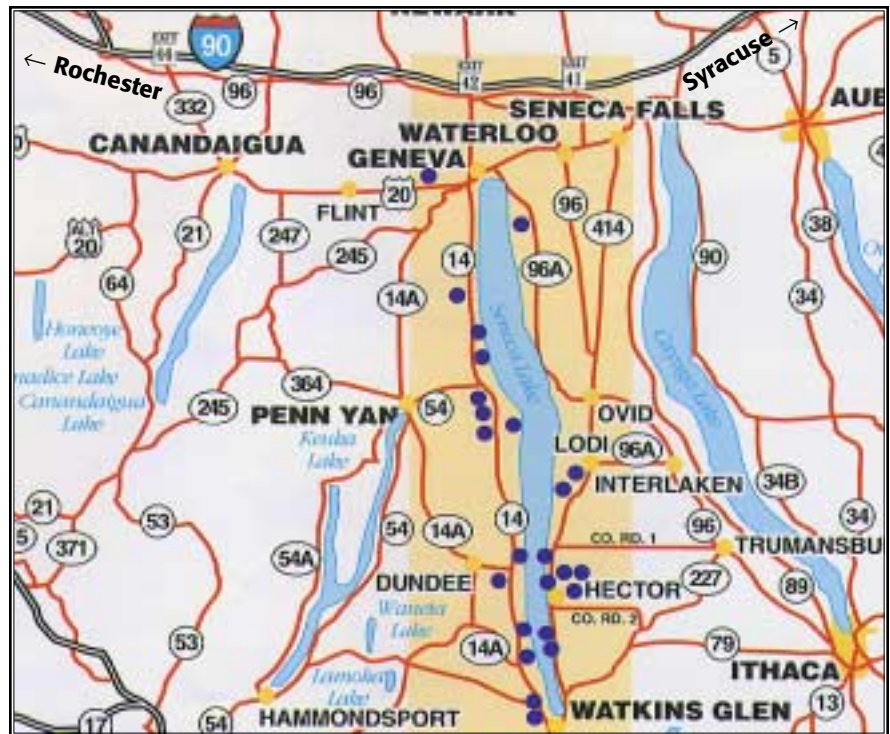
Commercial wineries started popping up in the 1860s, including Pleasant Valley Wine Company, producer of Great Western Champagne, a native-variety sparkling wine that brought international recognition to the region by winning a gold prize at the Vienna wine exposition in 1873. By 1900, there were 20,000 acres of vines around Keuka (pronounced KYEW-kuh) Lake, nearly double what there is today in the entire Finger Lakes region.

A large portion of these vines were producing table grapes for the voracious East Coast markets that became commercially accessible via the Erie Canal and the railroad system. Still, there was a sufficient number of successful wineries that the region was financially devastated by its first cataclysmic disaster – this one wrought by the fickle mind of man.

**Prohibition**

When the Volstead Act was passed in 1919, creating the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, the United States entered one of oddest phases of its hard-fought history. The Puritanical spirit of many of the nation's original settlers swept the country in a God-fearing, bible-thumping wave that led to the attempted eradication of alcohol from our culture. The attempt failed, of course, leading only to greater disregard for the law and providing a singular opportunity for organized crime.

You can understand the motivation behind Carrie Nation and other Temperance Movement leaders. With the advent of distilled spirits and the spirit-crushing factory slave environ-



The Finger Lakes region lies in upstate New York between Rochester and Syracuse.



A Keuka Lake table grape crate label from the 1920s.

ment of the dawning Industrial Age, habitual drunkenness was becoming an insurmountable problem for the working class. But Prohibition cut a broad swath, making no distinction between hard liquor and fine wine, and the fledgling wine industry in the Finger Lakes was ruined.

By the time Prohibition was repealed in 1933, most of the wineries in the region had long since folded. A few managed to stay in business by selling sacramental wines or unfermented grape juice, but most of the vineyards were abandoned. Among the survivors were clever folks like Walter Taylor, who devised an ingenious scheme to keep at least a small number of Americans drinking wine.

One of the provisions of the Volstead Act allowed for the legal production of wine that was meant only for personal consumption. As long as you weren't selling it, you could vinify a limited amount of table wine in your own home. Taylor came up with the idea of selling unfermented juice from different varieties, which he dubbed "wine types," along with minimal supplies for home winemaking. Business was brisk and the Taylor Wine Company excised the offensive term from its name and survived Prohibition doing business simply as the Taylor Company.

### Recovery, and the hybrid invasion

The Finger Lakes is still recovering from the effects of Prohibition. Its path back to respectability, and its road to a bright vinous future, have been again hampered by a washout of an experiment with French hybrids. It was a noble effort with non-noble vine varieties, but the result has been a culture of coarse, low-quality wines that still pervades the wine industry and lies at the core of the vinifera vs. hybrid battle that rages on today.

Another of the Prohibition survivors was the Urbana Wine Company, which had built a name as a producer of first-class sparkling wines. It kept itself afloat by producing sacramental wines under the name Gold Seal Products Company. When Prohibition was repealed, it revived the Urbana name and went looking for a savior to restore the company's reputation for fine sparkling wines. In 1934 Gold Seal got lucky and persuaded Charles Fournier, then chief winemaker at Clicquot-Ponsardin in Champagne, to take the job. Fournier did indeed revive its sparkling wine business, which changed names again in the 1950s to Gold Seal Vineyards.

When Fournier arrived in New York, he brought with him a couple of the French-American hybrid grapes that had been engineered to be winter hardy and disease resistant. The intent was to combine the finer qualities of European vinifera varieties with the natural toughness of indigenous labrusca vines. Commercially, it was a success, and the number of hybrid varieties continues to proliferate. Quality-wise, however, the wines are only marginally more interesting and sophisticated than their native brethren.

How do we explain, then, that the sparkling wines Fournier was making were, by all accounts, superb wines in both delicacy and taste? Even though table wines from hybrid varieties are rather coarse and "grapy" to the taste, grapes for sparkling wine are harvested underripe, before any unpleasant varietal flavors develop. Fournier was an astute fellow and he recognized that his hybrids would never reach the quality and style of the true vinifera wines of his homeland. He longed to plant vinifera vineyards, but was told repeatedly that it was not possible



An advertisement for Great Western Champagne from 1903.



A Prohibition-era ad for the Taylor Company's do-it-yourself "wine types."

and that all past attempts had failed miserably. However, another phenomenon of nature was about to hit the region, and Fournier's dreams would soon be realized.

### **The inimitable Dr. Frank**

In 1953, Fournier met Konstantin Frank, a Ukrainian immigrant who had been hanging around doing menial labor at Cornell University's agricultural experiment station in the town of Geneva on Seneca Lake. Frank's poor command of English prevented him from explaining clearly that he held a doctorate in enology from the Polytechnic Institute in Odessa, and that he had been director of the Institute of Viticulture and Enology in the Ukraine during the 1940s. His insistent and rather disparaging comments about the hybrid varieties then being grown (he firmly believed hybrid wines to be toxic to humans!) went completely ignored.

Frank was fluent in at least five languages, and in the Frenchman Fournier, he found a kindred spirit with whom he could finally communicate. They talked excitedly about Frank's experience in growing vinifera vines in the much colder Ukraine, and Fournier hired him to develop vinifera vineyards for Gold Seal. The process involved finding suitable winter-hardy rootstock, developing efficient grafting procedures and devising techniques to protect the vines in winter and to combat the many vine diseases in the area. In the words of Frank's grandson, Fred Frank, the Finger Lakes region is "the epicenter of vine diseases," including the notorious trio of phylloxera, powdery mildew and downy mildew.

After much experimentation, Frank and Fournier planted their first vinifera vineyards on the west shore of Keuka Lake, on the hills behind the now-defunct Gold Seal winery in Hammondsport. Through tenacity and determination, Frank and Fournier accomplished something in less than a decade that others had failed at for 300 years. By 1966, they had 70 acres planted and the age of vinifera in the Finger Lakes had begun.

Dr. Frank planted his own vinifera vines in 1960, on the western bank of Keuka Lake near Hammondsport. To clearly distinguish his wines from everything else in the region – and perhaps as an in-your-face gesture to the vinifera naysayers – he gave his upstart winery the ungainly name of Dr. Frank's Vinifera Wine Cellars. Today among the premier wine estates of the region.

### **A new era for Finger Lakes wines**

In 1976 the state of New York enacted the Farm Winery Act, which made it legal for grape growers to produce and sell their own wine. Before that, large wine companies, such as Taylor Wine Company and Canandaigua Wine Company (currently the second largest in the United States, after Gallo), controlled the wine market, and vineyard owners were just farmers. This new legislation opened the door for quality-conscious growers to do something more with their grapes than simply selling them off for cheap bulk wines. Since 1977, the Finger Lakes has seen rapid growth in the number of small wineries, from none to nearly 80 today.

Hybrid varieties still dominate by a large margin (over 90 percent), but more and more of these "farmers" are turning to vinifera, especially as the American



Dr. Konstantin Frank (left) and Charles Fournier shared a vision of vinifera vineyards in the Finger Lakes. Their pioneering work has given the region a chance to develop a world-class wine industry.

taste for these wines has changed in the last couple of decades. But vinifera alone does not a great wine make. Many good wines – and a few great ones – are being made here, but the region still suffers from its youthful inexperience and incomplete assimilation of the true culture of viticulture. It is still a new idea to many here that the key to quality is in the vineyards, not in the cellar.

There is wonderful potential here. The long, deep lakes provide a warming effect and cool air drainage in the cold of winter, while keeping the vineyards cool during the region's very hot summers. For heat-unit believers, the Finger Lakes has degree-day accumulation comparable to Bordeaux, a fact that has led to increased plantings of Cabernet Franc. The difference is that all of this heat comes in a compressed time frame. The growing season here is short but very intense, followed by severe cold in the winter. Growers must cover the trunks of the vines with soil up past the graft point to protect them from winter frost damage.

Well-known for its remarkable natural beauty, the Finger Lakes region also is an exceedingly popular tourist destination. Because of the many thirsty wine novices who flock to the area every year, there is still a booming market for cheap (and often sweet) "tourist" wines. You can't fault them for wanting to try the indigenous products, but their undemanding palates and free-flowing dollars have slowed the region's inevitable conversion to vinifera. Plus, from what I saw, most of these tourists are merely on a traveling drink-a-thon rather than a pilgrimage to find the vinous pinnacle of upstate New York.

Many people here insist that the hybrid wines are genuine and worthy of serious consideration. These are the unique products of the region, they say, and must be appreciated as such, not continually compared to the wines of Europe. That is a somewhat valid argument, and I tasted some decent hybrid wines (Vignoles and Seyval Blanc were my favorites among white wines), but for experienced Western palates, these wines lack elegance, focus and depth of character. They can be good picnic wines, but will never move our souls like a great European vinifera wine.

Some very good vinifera wines are starting to appear in the Finger Lakes. Very few can be described as providing a transcendent wine-drinking experience, but I think it's only a matter of time. Where vinifera is concerned, it is a very young wine region and the winegrowers there are still finding their way through the maze of viticultural and vinicultural choices.

## **Riesling in the Finger Lakes**

Of the 10,400 acres of grape vines in the Finger Lakes, less than 1,000 are vinifera varieties. Of those, less than 400 are Riesling. That is barely a drop in the fermenting tank compared to the 22,000 hectares (55,000 acres) of Riesling in Germany, but a few producers here are making Riesling that is deserving of your attention. They are also pointing the way to a bright future for Riesling in North America. Riesling is proving to be the most interesting and, interestingly, the most reliable vinifera variety in the Finger Lakes. It is naturally winter hardy – made even more so by American rootstock – and develops ripe flavors without being fully ripe by laboratory analysis. Early signs show that Riesling's purity of flavor is bringing out subtle differences in terroir between the lakes. The keys to making memorable wines – here as in Europe – are meticulous vineyard management and low yields, lessons that are clearly understood by a small group of the best estates, but largely ignored by the rest.

## **Highly Recommended Finger Lakes Rieslings**

### **Dr. Frank's**

#### **Vinifera Wine Cellars**

9749 Middle Road,  
Hammondsport  
[www.drfrankwines.com](http://www.drfrankwines.com)

Any vintage of:

- Dry Riesling
- Semi-dry Riesling
- Riesling Reserve
- Rkatsiteli

### **Hermann J. Wiemer Vineyard**

Route 14, Dundee  
[www.wiemer.com](http://www.wiemer.com)

Any vintage of:

- Dry Johannisberg Riesling
- Johannisberg Riesling
- Riesling Reserve
- Late Harvest Johannisberg Riesling

### **Red Newt Cellars**

3675 Tichenor Road, Hector  
[www.rednewt.com](http://www.rednewt.com)

- 2001 Riesling

### **Standing Stone Vineyards**

9934 Route 414, Hector  
[www.standingstonewines.com](http://www.standingstonewines.com)

- 2001 Dry Riesling
- 2001 Riesling
- 2000 Late harvest Riesling

### **Fox Run Vineyards**

670 Route 14, Penn Yan  
[www.foxrunvineyards.com](http://www.foxrunvineyards.com)

- 2001 Dry Riesling
- 2001 Riesling

### **Anthony Road Wine Company**

1225 Anthony Road, Penn Yan  
Tel: 800-559-2182

- 2001 Dry Riesling
- 2001 Riesling Reserve

### **King Ferry/Treleaven Wines**

658 Lake Road, King Ferry  
[www.treleavenwines.com](http://www.treleavenwines.com)

- 2001 Dry Riesling

**Dr. Frank's Vinifera Wine Cellars**

Any discussion of Finger Lakes Riesling must start at the beginning, with Dr. Frank. After proving at Gold Seal that vinifera vines could survive the hard winters, Frank started his own winery on Keuka Lake, just north of Hammondsport. An energetic scientist and incurable tinkerer, Frank cluttered his vineyards with a bewildering matrix of vinifera varieties and grafting experiments. The resulting wines were often of uneven quality, but Frank brought a new work ethic to wine growing and was notorious in the area for his demanding standards.

When Konstantin Frank died in 1985, his son Willy took over the wine estate. A seasoned businessman, the younger Frank immediately started ripping out the maze of oddball vines, focusing on a few, commercially viable varieties – mainly Chardonnay, Riesling and Pinot Noir. Wine quality became more consistent and the Dr. Frank estate soon became the best-known and most highly decorated winery in the Finger Lakes.

Today, Willy owns Chateau Frank, a sparkling wine company housed next door, while his son, Fred, manages Vinifera Wine Cellars. Fred is a congenial and welcoming man who runs the winery with the quiet confidence that comes with three generations of winemaking under your belt. The wines continue to get stronger and more distinctive, and the quality has never been better. Keuka Lake Rieslings seem to show a more forceful minerality than those from Seneca or Cayuga Lakes. The soils are somewhat different here, generally more acidic and with lots of broken shale mixed in. The picture of terroir is still developing, but Dr. Frank's Rieslings have a definite style and taste that is quite distinctive.

Typically, the winery makes three Rieslings, starting with the a dry version from its 50 acres of old vines. The 2001 Dry Riesling is excellent, with a fine mineral structure and a rounded, silky texture. As with most of the estate wines, yields are less than two tons per acre. The 2001 Semi-Dry Riesling is juicy with bright, peachy fruit and a lovely balance on the palate. New for the 2001 vintage is the Riesling Reserve, a \$20 wine made from selected blocks of old vines, which will be released this fall. It is intensely penetrating in its minerality, with fine citrus flavors on a tightly focused frame.

All of Dr. Frank's Rieslings benefit from a few years of bottle age and can improve for many years, as was shown by a recent tasting that went all the way back to 1962. Right now, the 1999 vintage is just starting to show its true self, becoming even more intense in the aroma and more complex on the palate. The 2001 Reserve Riesling is a wine that you will want to keep in the cellar for at least three to five years before drinking it.

I must also tell you about Salmon Run, a second-label Riesling made by Dr. Frank from purchased grapes. It is the winery's "value" line (although at just \$12, the dry and semi-dry Rieslings also are quite good values), meant for easy drinking. The 2001 Salmon Run Riesling is clean, crisp and juicy with a delicate lime and peach aroma. A lovely everyday drinker for \$10. Okay, there is still one more Dr. Frank wine you need to know about. Rkatsiteli (AR-kat-si-tell-ee) is the oldest and most widely planted vinifera grape variety in the world, grown abundantly in



Meticulously maintained vinifera vines in the vineyards of Dr. Frank's Vinifera Wine Cellars on the west side of Keuka Lake.



Eastern Europe. It is a real specialty, and the 2001 vintage is compelling, with a pungent mineral and Sauvignon Blanc aroma, a full texture and a prickly finish.

### **Hermann J. Wiemer Vineyard**

The next great champion of vinifera to enter the lists is Hermann Wiemer, a German expatriate who grew up in Bernkastel, at the heart of winegrowing in the Mosel Valley. Wiemer's father ran the largest commercial vine nursery in Germany and supervised much of the replanting of the Mosel region after World War II. While studying at Germany's Geisenheim wine school, Wiemer met a very charismatic American winemaker named Walter S. Taylor.

This was the grandson of the clever chap who founded Taylor Wine Company and kept it profitable during Prohibition. The younger Taylor had left the family business after it was sold to a larger corporation. He railed famously against the licentious winemaking practices at Taylor (which included softening high-acid wines, and increasing production, by simply adding water to the tanks) and established his own winery, called Bully Hill. Taylor, also a clever chap, persuaded Wiemer to join him as winemaker in the new venture. It didn't take long for them to start butting heads over the vinifera issue.

Taylor was committed to the hybrid varieties, believing them to be the best hope for the future of Finger Lakes wine. Wiemer did his best to make something of the hybrid wines, but his heart was never in it. In 1973, Wiemer bought 140 acres of farmland on the west side of Seneca Lake and, following the path set out by Dr. Frank, he started to plant his own vinifera vines. His first plantings also included the hybrid Seyval Blanc, which he thought to have some promise, but those vines have long since been replaced with vinifera varieties.

Today, Wiemer has about 70 acres of estate vines, of which 40 acres are Riesling. Along with the original vineyards around the winery, Wiemer recently acquired some long-neglected vineyards a bit north, near Geneva. The vines were in pretty bad shape but still produced some nice fruit. "Can you imagine what we'd get if we just paid a bit of attention to the vines," he said. That is the crux of the problem in the region: poor vineyard management. Most native and hybrid vineyards are not pruned and maintained like the immaculate vines we are used to seeing in vinifera regions. To keep costs low, the vines are simply hedged ("barbarically hedged," in Wiemer's words) a couple times each year, but the shoots are let to grow any which way they choose. Its an ugly sight, producing wines that are hardly any less ugly.

Wiemer has beautiful vineyards and you can see it in his wines. When it comes to elegance and finesse in the Finger Lakes, Hermann Wiemer stands above all others. As at Dr. Frank's, there is a dry Riesling and a semi-dry Riesling, as well as a reserve Riesling in especially good vintages, such as 2001. The wines are racy and delicate in a somewhat austere style with firm mineral extract. In addition, he is usually able to produce a fine late-harvest Riesling with ripe, juicy fruit and a long, silky finish.

Aside from the winery business, Wiemer operates a large-scale vine nursery that supplies wineries all over the New World. Many prominent wineries in California have turned to Wiemer for high-quality, grafted nursery stock, as have nearly



Hermann J. Wiemer



A hybrid vineyard along Keuka lake with its poorly maintained, "barbarically hedged" vines.

half of the wineries on New York's Long Island.

Hermann Wiemer is a very relaxed man, who speaks softly, with the calm that comes with experience and the perspective of time. In his own quiet and persistent way, he continues to tilt his vinifera lance at the hybrid windmills that still permeate the region. It is no longer a frantic fight on the tactical level, but a sustained, strategic struggle that he knows will be won eventually. In an issue of American Airlines' inflight magazine from a couple years back, he is quoted as saying, "If we could just overcome this hybrid image, New York winemakers wouldn't have to be ashamed anymore."

## Up and coming Riesling producers

### Red Newt Cellars

One of two promising producers on the east side of Seneca Lake, Red Newt has made a big splash in the last couple of vintages. The 2000 Red Newt Riesling was awarded the Governor's Cup (best of show) at the 2001 New York Food & Wine Classic, and I daresay the 2001 vintage is just as good, if not better.

Red Newt is owned by David Whiting, a local boy who went off in the 1980s to seek his fortune and ended up finding it back home in the vineyards of the Finger Lakes. After working 10 years in various wineries around the area, Whiting established Red Newt in 1998, producing a range of wines from contracted fruit.

Most of the grapes for his Riesling come from two well-known properties in east Seneca's "banana belt" – Atwater Estate and Chateau Lafayette Reneau – and it is remarkable to compare their own wines to the Red Newt. Whiting is obviously getting the best fruit and demanding lower crop levels. I don't know how else to explain the huge differences between the concentrated, flavorful Red Newt and the pleasant but dilute wines of Atwater and Chateau Lafayette Reneau.

With the 2001 vintage, Whiting is launching a reserve Riesling – mostly from Atwater fruit – that shows a deeper texture, with a fine thread of minerality tying its pure, ripe fruit into a taut, energetic package. Vineyard selection is something that he is pursuing methodically. "We're just getting started in sorting out the vineyards that we already have here," said Whiting, "But Riesling is definitely making a strong comeback in the area. Ten years ago you couldn't sell it and now there's not enough."

In conjunction with the winery, Whiting's wife, Debra, has opened the Red Newt Bistro, which is considered to be one of the best places to dine in the area.

### Standing Stone Vineyards

In 1991, Tom and Marti Macinski bought a 125-acre farm in Hector and started the other bright Riesling light on east Seneca Lake. The vineyards they acquired included the original Seneca Lake vinifera plantings done by Gold Seal's Charles Fournier in the 1970s. Standing Stone Vineyards was established and their first crush came with the 1993 vintage.

From the very beginning, Standing Stone wines have attracted much praise. With 30 acres of vines, they produce around 6,500 cases a year and are planting another 10 acres. The Macinskis have heeded well the lessons of Dr Frank and Hermann Wiemer, and put due emphasis on working the vineyards. The Rieslings come from well-maintained older vines that have self-regulating yields of around 3.5 tons per acre. The soil in this area is a very rocky silt-loam over shale bedrock and the wines show a dense fruitiness backed by racy acidity.

The ebullient Marti, a lawyer by training, sees some signs that the region is



Red Newt Cellars is making waves in the Finger Lakes with its flavorful, concentrated Riesling.

## Finger Lakes Wine Information

**Keuka Lake Wine Trail**  
[www.keukawinetrail.com](http://www.keukawinetrail.com)

**Seneca Lake Winery Assoc.**  
[www.senecalakewine.com](http://www.senecalakewine.com)

**Cayuga Lake Wine Trail**  
[www.cayugawinetrail.com](http://www.cayugawinetrail.com)

**NY Wine & Grape Foundation**  
[www.nywine.com](http://www.nywine.com)

**Cornell University Grape Pages**  
 A lot of interesting information about winegrowing research in the Finger Lakes, from Robert Pool, professor of viticulture.  
[www.nysaes.cornell.edu/hort/faculty/pool/](http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/hort/faculty/pool/)

moving away from the “cartoon” wines that are made for tourists and casual wine drinkers. “The Finger lakes region is still more of a tourist area, not a great wine region,” she said, “but you can’t expect to be taken seriously if your wines aren’t available in serious markets.” More than half of the wine produced in the Finger Lakes is sold out of the winery door and consumed locally. Without expanding the winery too rapidly, the Macinskis are working to get noticed in “serious” markets such as New York City. At the same time, they want to stay small in order to maintain quality and “to keep it fun!”

### **Fox Run Vineyards**

This winery, on the upper west side of Seneca Lake, was first established by a retired couple that thought growing grapes would be a good leisure activity. They soon realized the amount of hard work involved and were fortunate enough to connect with Scott Osborn and Andy Hale, who bought the property in 1993. By that time, the 25 acres of vineyards were in rather poor condition and their first order of business was to get the vines back in shape. Today the winery owns 60 acres of vines, 10 of which are Riesling.

Osborn, who had worked for a number of years as cellar master in various California wineries, was the winemaker. But in order to devote more of his time to the business side of the winery, he hired winemaker Peter Bell in 1994. Bell is a very knowledgeable and meticulous young winemaker who had learned his craft in Australia and had worked at Dr. Frank’s for about five years. His energy and enthusiasm make him, without doubt, one of the brightest hopes for the future of vinifera wines in the Finger Lakes.

Bell’s taste runs to the austere side for Riesling, perhaps a product of his training and working in Australia and New Zealand. But he insists that the wines are being made for longevity, not simply for early appeal. Tasting the wines back as far as 1994 shows that, despite a few anomalies, he is headed in the right direction. The French would agree, and at the 1999 “Riesling du Monde” competition in Alsace, Fox Run’s 1997 Riesling took home a gold medal, one of two from the United States (Dr. Frank’s was the other).

With solid financial backing, Fox Run has put together a first-rate modern winery, featuring shiny new temperature-controlled stainless steel tanks and plenty of oak barrels for the red wines. They are also putting a lot of effort into the vineyards and have moved to the labor-intensive (i.e. expensive) technique of vertical shoot positioning, which opens up the canopy and improves exposure to sun and air. This aids ripening, vine health and assimilation of nutrients, while reducing disease pressure.

Fox Run’s 2000 Dry Riesling has a fine mineral and lime peel aroma, with tasty citrus fruit and terrific length on the palate. The 2000 Riesling follows suit with a bit of pear and apple added to the citrus fruit. Tank samples of the same two wines from the 2001 vintage were fine and focused, with good minerality and a firm acid edge. But, as noted earlier, they are rather austere by nature and will need a couple of years in the bottle to open up. Ageability is another battle still being waged in the Finger Lakes, however, and you can’t always count on the region’s Rieslings to survive the few years they need to integrate. That award-winning 1997 Riesling, for example, has not endured. Bell and Osborn attribute it



Now owned by Standing Stone Vineyards, these are the first vinifera vines to be planted on Seneca Lake. They were planted in the 1970s by Charles Fournier of Gold Seal Vineyards.



Scott Osborn and Peter Bell (and the fox) of Fox Run Vineyards.

to the synthetic corks that were used, but the fact is you can't yet expect very many Finger Lakes Rieslings to live beyond a year or two. It's still very much hit or miss, but with a guy like Peter Bell on the case, the odds of a wine staying fresh and lively into maturity improve with each passing vintage.

### **Anthony Road Wine Company**

This sizable winery (13,000 cases annually) on west Seneca Lake between Fox Run and Wiemer, was established in 1989, but the Martini family's vineyards were first planted in 1973. In talking to area members of the wine trade, I learned that Anthony Road has long been a local favorite and that the hard-working Martini's have built a name for the winery in New York City by traveling the five hours (each way) to a Manhattan farmer's market every weekend for many years.

Now Anthony Road has taken a huge step toward higher quality by hiring an energetically handsome young man from Germany's Franken region. Johannes Reinhardt had done a year-long internship at Dr. Frank's, the region's hottest incubator for young talent, and was persuaded to return to the Finger Lakes to become the full-time winemaker for Anthony Road. Reinhardt's European approach puts the emphasis on quality in the vineyards and is already taking the Anthony Road Rieslings from merely pleasant to positively encouraging.

In a brief visit to the winery, I tasted a fine, juicy 2001 Riesling made from purchased grapes. It was a nice wine, but not Reinhardt's idea of a "serious" wine. That came from the tank with the 2001 Dry Riesling and the new 2001 Riesling Reserve. Both of these wines were rather austere, as you would expect of a Franken native. They showed impressive minerality and it will be quite interesting to see how these and future vintages fare over time.

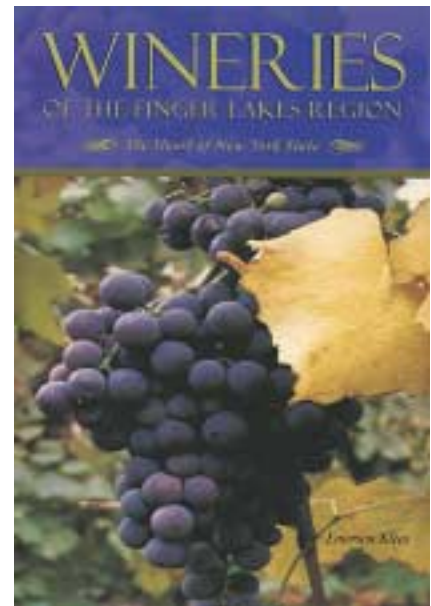
I also tasted an exceptional 2000 Vignoles Trockenbeeren, a massive dessert wine. The complex Vignoles hybrid can get very ripe while still holding onto its acidity, so it's often used for sweet wines. This wine had huge, spicy tropical fruit and searing acidity. Heavier than a good German Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese, it nevertheless was an engaging, satisfying wine.

### **King Ferry Winery/Treleaven Wines**

One of the finest Finger Lakes Rieslings we tasted came from this 22-acre winery on the east side of Cayuga Lake. The 2001 Treleaven Dry Riesling is a wonderfully balanced and elegant wine, with fine lime and citrus flavors blended with a pretty peach and apricot aroma. It has a lovely mineral perfume and is clear and clean on the palate. This exceptional Riesling was made by Pete Saltonstall at King Ferry Winery, from vines planted in 1983.

Saltonstall's father taught agronomy at Cornell many years ago and had acquired a good chunk (some 600 acres) of extension service property that the university was selling off. When his father died, most of the property was sold again, but they kept a piece of it high up above the banks of the lake. A group of friends convinced Saltonstall that starting a winery was a good idea and he turned to Hermann Wiemer for help in selecting vine varieties and vineyard sites in the thin topsoils of the area. The original plantation included five acres of Riesling and another five have just been added.

King Ferry is the name of the winery, but the wines themselves are marketed under the Treleaven name, a tribute to the family that had previously owned the property. The Treleaven Chardonnays have received high praise, and King Ferry was named a "great producer" on Wine Enthusiast Magazines list of Chardonnay



### **Wineries of the Finger Lakes Region**

By Emerson Klees

Friends of the Finger lakes Publishing

159 pages. \$14.95

[www.fingerlakes.com](http://www.fingerlakes.com)

This is the best and most up-to-date book about Finger Lakes wineries. It includes chapters on the history of winemaking in the area, as well as brief descriptions of all of the wineries currently in business. In spite of sparse contact information and a frustrating lack of an index, it is a book well worth the modest price.

producers. Frankly, I believe the Rieslings to be the better wines. In addition the the superb dry Riesling, King Ferry produces a semi-dry Riesling that is very good, but lacking the balance and finesse of the dry Riesling.

### **The future of Finger Lakes Riesling**

Overall, Rieslings from the Finger Lakes still tend to be heavy, uni-dimensional and lacking in elegance when compared to benchmark German Rieslings. On their own merits, however, the better examples exude youthful exuberance and great potential. For us, the seven producers described above represent the best hope for high-quality Riesling from the Finger Lakes. Each of these dedicated winegrowers is pushing hard for more Riesling plantings and their collective understanding of what it takes to make a great Finger Lakes wine is improving daily. As with the other vinifera varieties here, Riesling production is still quite small, but the wines are getting the attention of wine lovers around the world and demand is sure to rise. We have no doubt that vinifera wines will eventually outpace the lesser-quality hybrids, and that Riesling will lead the way.

A few other wineries deserve mention for their pleasing, if simple, Riesling efforts. While their wines are not as serious, they are often quite satisfying to drink. The true test of any good wine is that it draws you back to the bottle for another glass, and I can tell you that the 2001 Riesling from Glenora, one of the region's earliest modern-era wineries, does just that. Two other Seneca Lake Riesling producers of good standing are Lamoreaux Landing and the venerable Chateau Lafayette Reneau. On Keuka Lake, McGregor Vineyard makes a dry Riesling with good mineral intensity, although their other Rieslings aren't as successful. We've also heard good things about Swedish Hill on Cayuga Lake, but have not had an opportunity to taste the wines.

### **Visiting the Finger Lakes**

I visited the Finger Lakes for the first time last May and was astonished at the natural beauty of the place. Wide-angle scenic photos of the lakes don't give you the real story, which lies in the architecturally crafted gorges and waterfalls that fill the area around the lakes. When you go to the Finger Lakes to visit wineries, you must also allow some time for hiking. Definitely not to be missed is the narrow gorge hike in Watkins Glen State Park at the southern end of Seneca Lake. Stunning waterfalls greet you at every turn in the trail and the walls of the gorge give you a precise geological record of the region in their many, many layers of sedimentary shale.

Another must-do hike is Taughannock Falls State Park on the western shore of Cayuga Lake (see cover). It's an easy two-mile hike along a creek that looks like it was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, ending at the dramatic, 215-foot falls.

The best dining in the area is mostly in Ithaca, and at a few newer restaurants that are popping up at wineries throughout the area (such as the bistro at Red Newt). Many of the wineries, notably Glenora, also offer comfortable lodging. Visit the various Web sites I have listed and you'll find all the information you could ever want about visiting the Finger Lakes. Then it's just a matter of deciding which wineries to visit and on which lake you'd like to treat your weary self after a long day of tasting wines.



Pete Saltonstall is owner and winemaker at King Ferry Winery on Cayuga Lake.

### **Finger Lakes Tourist Information**

#### **Finger Lakes Association**

Lodging and dining information  
[www.visitfingerlakes.org](http://www.visitfingerlakes.org)

#### **The Finger Lakes**

[www.finger-lakes.com](http://www.finger-lakes.com)

#### **Vacation Lodging**

[www.fingerlakesgetaways.com](http://www.fingerlakesgetaways.com)

#### **Ithaca/Tompkins County**

##### **Visitors Bureau**

[www.visitithaca.com](http://www.visitithaca.com)

#### **B&B Recommendation:**

##### **Reading House**

Route 14, north of Watkins Glen  
[readingbb@aol.com](mailto:readingbb@aol.com)

#### **Recommended restaurants:**

##### **Pangea**

123 Third Street, Ithaca  
 Tel: (607) 273-8515

##### **Dano's**

113 South Cayuga, Ithaca  
 (607) 277-8942

## Vintage 2002 Down Under Riesling's Wake-Up Call

"DO YOU WANT AN EARFUL, or do you want something a bit more succinct?" comes the voice down the telephone line. It's a slightly agitated John Thomson. He's just been asked to comment on the outcome of vintage 2002 on his celebrated Crawford River property in southern Australia's Henty wine region, and it's immediately clear from the rising tones of his reply that he is not a happy camper.

Yet who can blame him? The man who arguably vies with Jeffrey Grosset as Australia's numero uno in Riesling production says he's just put behind him one of the worst vintages he can remember in 27 years of cool climate viticulture. On his 2000-hectare grazing property in southwestern Victoria, production across all grape varieties was down by more than a whopping 85 percent.

"It was just a shocking year. It didn't feel like I even had a vintage," he adds, his annoyance softening now and being replaced by words of resignation. Pay careful attention and it's plain that the consequences for the clientele of his award-winning wines will be similarly dire for the next 15 months or so – or at least until the new wines of vintage 2003 appear in the market place. Normally regarded as a reliable performer, Thomson's four hectares of Riesling failed to live up to the variety's reputation for being the grower's grape during indifferent weather conditions. Instead, they produced barely 100 cases of wine, a very significant reduction from the total of 2200 cases of Riesling he made in 2001.

If you think that's OK, try this for size – Crawford River eked out more than 100 cases of Riesling under a limited-release Reserve bottling program last year, and the resulting wine scored 95 points from the inscrutable James Halliday. This vintage there is just a single wine, the tiny volume enabling it to be whole-bunch pressed, and handled in the winery with fastidious care.

"The problem is, I can't tell you at this stage which wine I've made," says Thomson. "I certainly won't be putting it out as a Reserve unless I'm really happy with it." Like many growers in the southeastern corner of mainland Australia – and on the island vineyards of Tasmania, further to the south – Thomson blames the uncharacteristic weather patterns of the past growing season for his Riesling vines' low levels of production.

He says last year's cold, wet spring – and the low sunshine hours during the cool damp summer that followed – resulted in poor flowering and fruit-set. The prevalence of straggly, unfilled bunches with small berry sizes made handpicking an arduous task, also adding considerably to the wine's ultimate cost of production. "We did get a few bunches, but they were the exception to the rule. Fortunately, we were saved by some very nice warm, sunny weather in late March and early April, and we managed to ripen everything we had on the property at the



Catherine and John Thomson of Crawford River.

Guest Riesling Reporter **Mark Smith** is Tasmania's most widely published wine educator and Riesling lover. If ever you have questions about Riesling in Australia or New Zealand, you can contact him by e-mail: [winesmith@bigpond.com](mailto:winesmith@bigpond.com)

last minute,” he says.

For quality-driven producers like John Thomson, the best news out of the late-ripening 2002 season is the exceptional quality of Riesling fruit that finally made its way through to a successful harvest. With disease pressure low during the season, and high levels of natural acidity still evident in fruit at the end of picking, this year’s Rieslings out of south-eastern Australia should produce some outstanding table wines with great flavour intensity, and many with a capacity for long bottle-ageing. That will be a turn up for the books given the concern being shown by many Riesling growers around Christmas time and the New Year.

Richmond Grove’s John Vickery has seen almost 50 vintages of Riesling production in Australia. He says the past year had few peers when it came to posing challenges to growers in the coolest parts of the country’s eastern states. Gladly, those in the heartland of Riesling territory – the South Australian regions of the Barossa, Eden and Clare valleys – fared considerably better than those with marginal winegrowing climates like southern Victoria and Tasmania. As the most northerly of South Australia’s premier Riesling districts, the Clare Valley managed to avoid much of the inclement weather that dogged vineyards further south during spring and the record-breaking cool summer. Crop levels here were little short of normal says Vickery, but quality looks to be very promising indeed.

“This year, we don’t have the big ripe citrusy styles that we usually get out of our Watervale sites. They’re leaner and more minerally/citrusy because of the later ripening. In fact, on a couple of vineyard sites – where they have a southerly rather than a northerly aspect – the wines are quite elegant and lean, and more typical of the Eden Valley style.”

Spokeswoman Jane Mitchell says growers that make up her district’s Clare Valley Winemakers Association are especially happy with the quality of Riesling wines they made in 2002. It was a trouble-free vintage in general, cool but with very low disease pressure. “The Clare Valley didn’t get hit like the Barossa Valley, the Eden Valley and Coonawarra did this year, and I suppose we were very lucky. Considering we were almost wiped out by hail two years ago, we were pretty glad that 2002 turned out to be our year,” she said.

For his part, Vickery is particularly pleased with the outcome from sites dotting the floor of the Barossa Valley surrounding his home-base in the township of Tanunda. Often overlooked in the market place by Riesling lovers favouring wines from cooler locations like Polish Hill and Watervale to the north, Barossa Rieslings this year will be among the best to come out of South Australia. “It was a cool



Map courtesy of Dept. of State and Regional Development, Victoria.



John Vickery of Richmond Grove.

season here, which really suits the Barossa Valley. It made beautiful wines –generous, easy-drinking styles, yet ones that will still age gracefully. Instead of being ripe tropical wines, they’re much more citrusy and limey,” he said.

By contrast, vineyards throughout the nearby but cooler Eden Valley endured a nervous wait for much of the season in spite of their light crops, says Vickery. “We didn’t get ripe fruit flavours until we reached relatively high sugar levels this year, so we’re going to see wines with alcohols around the high 12s, making them more generous wines than normal. Overall, I think there’s going to be some pretty good Rieslings coming out of the Eden Valley in 2002.”

Merv Lange is glad he’s not had to suffer the fate of his counterparts some 2000-plus kilometres to the east of his property in far-off Western Australia. His classy Alkoomi Rieslings readily sell-out on Australian markets, leaving little left over for the small but receptive export markets he has cultivated over the past decade or so.

Western Australia’s Mount Barker and Frankland River districts of the Great Southern region are among the unsung heroes of the Australian Riesling scene. This year looks to have produced a winning combination of high quality and moderate volumes from sites that typically enjoy cool climates, and the long-ripening seasons that are associated with them.

“It was a terrific year for us,” says Lange. “We had a really good year, and just a couple of weeks later than normal on our Frankland River sites. We’re only a month away from bottling now and already our 2002 Riesling is showing all those wonderful cool climate characters that we look for in the variety.” More intense and focused than the wines made in 2001 and 2000, he says the latest Alkoomi Riesling is easily the best the company has produced here since a string of very successful vintages in the late 1990s.

And the volume? Around 6,000 cases. Just don’t mention that to Crawford River’s John Thomson. He’s suffered enough already.



Vintage 2002 Riesling grapes hanging on the vine. Note the small size of berries in comparison to an Australian 10-cent coin, which measures just 25mm (one inch) in diameter.

## The Great Rieslings of F.E. Trimbach

I BEGAN MY CAREER IN THE WINE BUSINESS in 1991 at a small off-licence (wine shop) in Bath England. While there I saw much of the West Country, but made it to London only when I returned to the United States, and then only the drab confines of Gatwick Airport. A few months ago, while in Germany, I received an invitation to visit an old friend from Chicago who'd recently taken a job as a sommelier there, and to see the city. I filed it away as "something to do later." Later came sooner than I expected when the UK-based Circle of Wine Writers sent notifications to its members of a guided tasting of the Trimbach family's Frédéric Emile and Clos Sainte Hune Rieslings. The opportunity to try a vertical representation of these wines is rare, so off to London I went.

Accompanied by said friend, sommelier Michael Davis of La Pont de La Tour Restaurant, we made our way from Earl's Court to Soho's private Groucho Club via one of London's famous red doubledecker buses. Thanks to the guidance of Mike D., this was to be one of the very few tourist actions I took during my three days here. After finding our way through the serpentine hallways and numerous rooms of the club, we were welcomed by Jean Trimbach, responsible for the UK market, and his uncle Hubert, whom I'd met a few times before and who is responsible for the U.S. market. The room was perfectly set for a tasting — no smells, no visual or aural distractions, and we sat beside the sunny window for best viewing of the pale wines.

The tasting was organized by Circle member and specialty wine shop owner Frank Ward ([www.frankwardltd.co.uk](http://www.frankwardltd.co.uk)). "I've tasted and drunk the wines of Trimbach for 25 years," said Ward. "Between the two Rieslings we're tasting here today, the Clos Sainte Hune is more homogenous and complex with great vinous integrity." Both of Trimbach's top Riesling vineyards are pruned for an optimum of 60 hectoliters/hectare, and normally harvested at 50 to 60hl/ha. Since 1995, both wines have been harvested at a minimum potential alcohol of 12-14 percent.

The Trimbach house style is considered to be the one of the driest in Alsace. Though they respect their colleagues' choices to make the sweeter style now so popular in Alsace, the four Trimbach men emphatically have no wish to suit fashion by changing. Cultured yeasts are used (OG8 and Grand Cru for you hefe-heads), with a little fining and filtering with kieselguhr (diatomaceous earth). Both wines are rarely chaptalized, the last time being in 1979. The wines are fermented and stored in stainless steel, glass-lined, and temperature-controlled wooden vats. The wines are taken off the lees early, while some batonnage on the fine lees is practiced if the vintage is a healthy one. Both wines are normally released about five years after the harvest.

The Cuvée Frédéric Emile Riesling is harvested from a south-southeast-facing vineyard directly behind the family's Ribeauvillé home. The soil is a limestone



Winemaker Pierre Trimbach stands among the vines in the estate's legendary Clos Sainte Hune vineyard.

upon sandstone, the vines planted at a density of 5,000 per hectare, with the average vine age at 40 years.

Considered by many to be the greatest Alsace Riesling, Clos Sainte Hune is surely one of the finest Rieslings in the world. The first vintage was made in 1919, and the Trimbach family continues to be its sole proprietor. It comes from a 1.3 hectare, southeast-facing plot near Hunawihhr. The soil is nearly 100 percent calcaire, with the 20- to 50-year-old vines planted at a density of 6,500 per hectare.

## Tasting notes

### Riesling Reserve 1998

A warm-up wine from a combination of 30-year-old estate vines and purchased fruit. A bright straw-green appearance with a delicate nose of spring flowers and chalk. Light-medium body, medium acidity, simple palate. Earthy, round finish that's surprisingly a little expansive.

### Frédéric Emile 1998

A ripe vintage, 30 percent of the grapes for this F.E. were affected by pouriture noble, or botrytis, comparable to the stellar 1989 vintage. Star bright with a pale, straw-green appearance. Complex nose of starfruit, anise, and apricot. Light-medium body with a tight, fine acid backbone. Very good balance. Excellent grip and a hint of earth on a medium length finish. (5.4 grams per liter of residual sugar, 13.4% alcohol)

### Frédéric Emile 1997

Though very ripe, 1997 was a particularly dry year during harvest. Star bright, pale yellow-green. Concentrated nose of lanolin, lime skin, clementines, wet stones. Medium body, focused and still wound-up. Rich, long and slightly warm finish. (4.2 g/l rs, 13% alc)

### Frédéric Emile 1995

Though 1995 saw a lot of rain and dampness in autumn, the well-drained slopes kept the grape swelling to a minimum. Star bright, pale yellow-green. Lime, green plums, and stone aromas. Medium body and focused with vibrant, clear acidity and a juicy orange flavor. Clean, expansive and a bit tart on the finish. Just beginning to open up. (5 g/l rs, 13% alc)

### Frédéric Emile 1990

A perfect vintage for dry Alsace wines. Star bright, pale yellow-green appearance. Unusual, but enticing nose of strawberries, caramel and carrots. Firm, balanced, medium body with acidity playing a more supporting role. Rich flavors of pineapple and green apple. Finishes rich and long with earth and root vegetable flavor. Complex and still developing. (3.6 g/l rs, 13.5% alc)

### Frédéric Emile 1979

With the last of the harvest completed on 25 November, a bit of botrytis is to be expected. Shimmering green-gold color. Very mature and complex, earthy aromas of fried plaitains, cooked carrots, and crystallized ginger. Medium body and acidity with an orange note and an earthy, almost meaty quality. Though the fruit is fading on the finish, it's being replaced by earth and clean acidity. (3 g/l rs, 12.5% alc)

### Clos Sainte Hune 1998

Harvested with 15 percent of the grapes botrytised. Star bright, pale yellow-green. Intense chalky aroma. Fine, light and immensely restrained. Fantastic structure. Finishes expansive and mineral-packed. (3 g/l rs, 13.5% alc)

### Clos Sainte Hune 1995

Star bright, green-gold color. Due to the botrytis it's showing a grapy character with hints of mineral and lilacs. Medium-full body, still tight. Expansive, mineral-laden finish with hints of lemon and green apple.



**Clos Sainte Hune 1990**

A benchmark year, a benchmark wine. Star bright, straw-green appearance. Complex array of aromas—lime, clementine, pine, white peach, linden flowers. Full-bodied and complex, just beginning to open with waves of tree fruits and minerals. Powerful, very long finish oozing minerals and ripe fruits. One of the three or four best wines I've ever tasted, this brought tears to my eyes. Outstanding. (5.6 g/l rs, 14.2% alc)

**Clos Sainte Hune 1985**

A very cool vintage and winemaker Pierre Trimbach's first. Shimmering green-gold appearance. Complex nose of kerosene, caramel, mint, red apple. Full-bodied and a touch mature with complex flavors of pear, caramel, truffle, and lime. Rich and expansive with a hint of fresh bread, crisp acidity.

**Clos Sainte Hune 1976**

A drought year with low yields and stressed out vines. Star bright, gold-green color. Low intensity aromas, hints of pine and lanolin. Medium body and acidity, mature and simple. Dusty, clean finish. Considering the vintage it's holding up well.

**Frédéric Emile Vendange Tardive 1989**

Starbright, straw green appearance. Apple, pear and hazelnut aromas. Light-medium, delicate sweetness with good corresponding acidity. Filigreed, clean acidity with a playful, lingering sweetness. (21 g/l rs, 13.3% alc)

**Frédéric Emile Vendange Tardive 1998 (barrel sample)**

Star bright, straw green appearance. Aromas of walnuts, dried apple and rubber. Medium bodied with a delicate interplay of sweet and sour sporting pear, plum, and rose flavors. A baby. Buoyant acidity, delicate sweetness and a haunting, long finish. (26 g/l rs, 13.4% alc)

**Frédéric Emile Sélection de Grains Nobles 1989**

Harvested exclusively from vines planted in 1941, with 70 percent botrytis-affected grapes. The next vintage of SGN to be produced will be from 2000. Shimmering green-gold robe with aromas of dried apple and latex. Sweet entry, slightly viscous with a salad of fruit flavors. Medium body and acidity. Very fine texture. Still young. The long finish is punctuated by flavors of marzipan and dried pineapple. Outstanding. (Over 100 g/l rs, 12.3% alc)

After the tasting we were treated to lunch by the Trimbachs. The Pinot Gris Reserve Personelle 1995, served first as a lovely aperitif, would have worked better with the Tuna Carpaccio with fresh ginger & chives were it not for the aggressiveness of the accompanying soy sauce. The Gewurztraminer Cuvée Seigneurs de Ribeaupierre 1998 melded marvelously with the Asian Halibut with Jasmine Rice, while the Gewurztraminer Vendange Tardive from the same vintage played excellent aromatic counterpoint to the not-too-sweet crème brûlée.

The final wine for the day was a 1967 Gewurztraminer Sélection de Grains Nobles made from individually hand-harvested berries. At 128° Öchsle, it set an Alsace record for the time. The wine, still holding a vibrant core of acidity, hinted at toffee and burnt orange. While not Riesling, it did manage to rush through the wide array of flavors already lingering on my palate, and gently pull the curtain on a memorable day.

**Maison Trimbach**

15 route de Bergheim  
68150 Ribeauvillé  
France

Tel: (+33) 389-73 60 30  
Fax: (+33) 389-73 89 04  
[www.maison-trimbach.fr](http://www.maison-trimbach.fr)



**David Furer** has written for *Wine Enthusiast*, *Santé* and *Barfly* magazines, and taught at the University of Chicago. He is a Certified Wine Educator and a Master Sommelier candidate who divides his time between Santa Cruz, California and Germany.