

Riesling Report

The voice of Riesling

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2002

Riesling Cuttings

*Selected news, reports and
tastings from around the world*

IN THIS ISSUE:

VDP Accord of 2002

Australian Riesling collaboration

An MW goes to Japan

New Riesling from Pipers Brook

Rieslings of the World Tasting

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Next Issue

Germany's Annual Auctions

THE NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2002 issue of Riesling Report will feature our full report on the high-end collectors' auctions that take place in Germany every September. We'll have notes on all of the wines from each of the four major auctions: the Bernkasteler Ring (Mosel), the VDP Mosel-Saar-Ruwer, the VDP Rheingau and the VDP Nahe-Ahr. Plus, we'll have tips for you on how to get your hands on some of the wines, even if you can't go to Germany. Most of the wines in the auctions are special bottlings from the current vintage, which in this case will be the magnificent 2001 vintage that we've already heard so much about. We're expecting insanely great things this year and Riesling Report will be there to give you the complete story.

Riesling Report is published electronically by Kirk Wille and Peter Liem. For more information, please visit the Riesling Report Web site: www.rieslingreport.com

We welcome letters, comments and suggestions. Interesting and thoughtful letters will be published in future reports. 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:

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Letters from abroad

LIKE ANYTHING IMPORTANT in life, Riesling has a way of bringing people together. Since we launched *Riesling Report* in March, 2000, we have come to know a good number of other Riesling evangelists from around the world. Some we've met while traveling, others in the virtual world of electronic communication. A few have become regular contributors to our pages.

As we toil in the barren fields of mass-market wine consumption, striving mightily to bring some light and understanding to the dim trendiness of our times, it is immeasurably inspiring to encounter others treading the same path. Beyond the bolstering of purpose that comes from knowing you're not alone, there is enormous gratification in the discovery that some progress is being made.

Our mission is simple: we only want to instill a heightened appreciation of our planet's natural gifts, thus enhancing the quality of daily life. It's difficult to understand why this simple goal is met with such stubborn resistance. Apparently some people just don't want to be happy.

Fortunately, that is not the case with Riesling lovers, especially those we've met in recent years. Herewith, a selection of reports from our far-flung band of Riesling brothers (and sisters). *Similia similibus curantur.*

—Kirk Wille, editor & publisher

VDP Classification Accord of 2002

Classification criteria for Great Growths, First Growths and wines from classified sites

Editor's note: This is a lightly edited press release from the VDP. I've included it because it contains some interesting information on developments in Germany's ongoing classification debate. The really interesting news will come later, when we see how well these new criteria are implemented and what effect (if any) it has on the market for top-quality German wines.

Press release issued 19 June 2002

THE VDP (Verband Deutscher Prädikatsweingüter, the Association of German Prädikat Wine Estates) endeavors to ensure that wines bearing the names of Germany's finest vineyard sites are distinguished by a clear profile. Vineyard sites shape the profile of the cultural landscape and the character of first-class wines. As such, the unique nature of a top site cannot be underestimated, for it is inherent to producing individualistic wines that reflect the respective "terroir" of origin as well as the dedication and passion of the wine-grower.

The VDP Accord of 2002 represents the input of the VDP regional associations, who conscientiously helped define the basic profile of great growth wines without losing sight of varying local conditions. The result is a uniform framework of binding measures for all estates that wish to produce great growth wines. It recognizes that regional differences must be respected in order to produce inimitable wines of the highest quality possible. Within the overall framework, regions and districts are free to stipulate stricter conditions (regarding maximum yields, starting must weights or demarcation of classified sites, for example).

Classification Categories

Members' vineyards (or portions thereof) will be carefully classified by the VDP regional associations in consultation with members whose vineyards have already been classified. This forms the basis of the categories of a "quality pyramid" as follows:

I. Grosse Gewächse/Erste Gewächse

(great growths; called first growths in the Rheingau region)

II. Klassifizierte Lagenweine

(wines from a classified site)

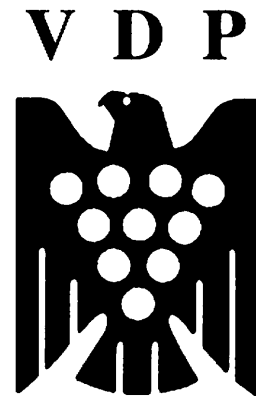
III. Guts- und Ortsweine

("house wines" labeled with a proprietary name and/or the name of a village or region)

I. Grosse Gewächse / Erste Gewächse

These wines originate from classified, narrowly demarcated top sites that provide optimal growing conditions and whose exceptionally ripe crop consistently yields wines of great substance, as evidenced over a long period of time.

A list of every region's top sites will be maintained by the VDP national associa-



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tion. As new data becomes available, the site lists can be updated accordingly. The production of great growths is voluntary. The following criteria are binding measures prescribed for great growths produced by members of the VDP.

- 1. Grape varieties.** Great growths are produced exclusively from grape varieties that the regional associations have deemed to be traditional.
- 2. Yields.** In vineyard areas registered for the production of great growths, yields are restricted to 50 hl/ha.
- 3. Harvest procedures.** Grapes for great growths are harvested selectively, by hand.
- 4. Ripeness level.** Grapes for great growths must be at least ripe enough to qualify as Spätlese.
- 5. Production procedures.** Great growths are produced exclusively according to traditional methods of production.
- 6. Inspections/Examinations.** Great growths are subject to the general standards prescribed by the VDP national association as well as additional inspections and examinations. Quality-oriented measures are supervised in every vineyard prior to the harvest and vineyards are inspected to monitor yields. All wines undergo an additional strict, sensorial exam conducted by the VDP.
- 7. Marketing.** White great growths can be released on the first of September the year after the harvest. Red great growths can be released on the first of September two years after the harvest.
- 8. Packaging.** The VDP executive committee is empowered to issue a directive on packaging in order to ensure clarity of labeling and uniform appearance. A special bottle embossed with the “great growth/first growth logo” will be designed for great growths. The special bottles and logo will always be used for great growths. For 0.75-liter bottlings there are four types of bottle: the traditional swan-necked bottle in green or brown glass (also as half bottles); the flagon-shaped Bocksbeutel; and the Burgundy bottle. All great growth bottlings will bear a similar front label and a capsule depicting the VDP logo – the stylized eagle with a cluster of grapes. The front label must include at least the name of the vineyard site and wine estate. The maximum data permitted on the front label includes vintage, vineyard site, grape variety, wine estate, location and region. All other data required by law are on a separate label.
- 9. Style.** Great growths are dry in style. Estates that produce great growths abstain from using “Auslese trocken” to designate wines from the same site and grape variety as their great growths. Lusciously sweet wines of the Prädikats Auslese and above that are produced according to the same criteria are on a par with great growths but are neither designated or packaged as such at this time.

II. Klassifizierte Lagenweine

By 2004 at the latest, vineyard designations on VDP members' labels will be restricted to classified sites only; no other vineyard names will be used. The site-specific traits of a vineyard must be clearly recognizable in the wine. Every region's list of classified sites will be completed and the introduction of “wines from a classified site” will be effective in all regions by the middle of 2004 at the latest. These measures will be introduced earlier in some regions.

The following criteria for the production of wines from a classified site, i.e. the use of vineyard designations in general, are binding measures prescribed for all VDP members as of vintage 2004.

- 1. Grape varieties.** Wines from classified sites are produced from grape varieties determined by the regional associations.
- 2. Yields.** Yields are restricted to 65 hl/ha for wines from classified sites.
- 3. Harvest procedures.** Grapes for wines from classified sites are harvested selectively, according to their degree of ripeness.
- 4. Ripeness level.** Grapes for wines from classified sites must be fully ripened and the ripeness level must be perceptible in the wine.
- 5. Inspections/Examinations.** The wines are subject to examination during the organoleptic VDP estate inspection to confirm their overall quality and to ensure that they conform with the level of quality expected of wines from classified sites.
- 6. Packaging.** Wines from classified sites can be recognized by a vineyard designation on the label and a capsule depicting the VDP logo the stylized eagle with a cluster of grapes.

III. Guts- und Ortsweine

The broad base of the “quality pyramid” comprises the VDP estates’ “house wines.” They are produced according to the general standards and stringent quality criteria prescribed by the VDP, but are not marketed with a vineyard designation.

IV. Concluding Remarks

All additional definitions will be determined by the regional associations in their respective examination procedures. On the basis of these classification principles, the VDP national association and the regional associations that are in the process of classifying (classification committees), respectively, will screen the applications of other regions that decide to classify their vineyards.

After the introductory phase, it is intended to give all wine-growers a chance to subscribe to the classification criteria, provided that they are willing to adhere to the prescribed measures and, through their work in the vineyard and cellar as well as their bearing, to help improve the image of Germany’s top-quality wines and to support the underlying goals that classification endeavors to achieve.

Traditional Grape Varieties Permitted for Great Growths as Determined by the Regional Associations

Baden:	Riesling, Weissburgunder (Pinot Blanc), Grauburgunder (Pinot Gris), Spätburgunder (Pinot Noir)
Franken:	Riesling, Silvaner, Weissburgunder, Spätburgunder
Mittelrhein:	Riesling
Nahe:	Riesling
Pfalz:	Riesling, Weissburgunder, Spätburgunder
Rheingau:	Riesling, Spätburgunder
Rheinhessen:	Riesling, Spätburgunder
Saale-Unstrut:	Riesling, Weissburgunder
Württemberg:	Riesling

Top Aussies Mesh with Riesling

“WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE GRAPE VARIETIES?”

someone asked noted English wine critic Jancis Robinson during an on-line chat session a little over a year ago.

“Riesling,” she replied without hesitation.

“And your favourite blends of grapes?” added the persistent interviewer. “Riesling and Riesling,” she shot back, as quick as a flash. “Riesling blended with Riesling would be pretty good.”

Just what the next comment might have been from either Ms Robinson or the earnest interviewer isn’t clear, but it’s a safe bet that one or two on-line eaves-droppers would’ve found the conversation amusing.

Amusing – and in light of recent Australian developments – also quite prophetic. The reason? Two of the country’s best-known Riesling exponents have teamed up to produce a wine with exactly the same rationale in mind. They’ve called it Mesh.

Its origins quite coincidentally date back to the same time that Ms Robinson’s comments were being broadcast over the World Wide Web in the middle of 2001. Around then, Clare Valley winemaker Jeffrey Grosset had been mulling over the idea of making wine from fruit from the Eden Valley, some 100km to the south of his regular stomping grounds of Polish Hill and Watervale in South Australia.

“I’d been thinking about it for a while and went down there to check it out,” he recalls. “You know, some of the wines that have been the most memorable in my life have been wines out of Eden Valley and Watervale. When I look at those wines, I’ve always felt that there are world-class expressions of Riesling coming out of Australia. I’ve never really distinguished between the two regions in terms of sheer quality. I’d just wanted to do this thing with Riesling down there (in the Eden Valley) as well as here.

“I stopped for lunch there in the valley and met up with Yalumba’s Brian Walsh. I talked with him about the frustrations I’d had about finding the vineyard I wanted in exactly the right spot. I told him I might be 30 years waiting for one to come onto the market, so I might have to just set one up by myself in the meantime. Brian said we could possibly do something together. He was really in tune with what I wanted to do, so he said, ‘You need to speak to Robert.’”

The Robert in question was Robert Hill-Smith, head of the 150 year-old family-owned and run company called Yalumba, based in South Australia’s Barossa Valley. Only distantly acquainted with one another, it wasn’t long before the two makers got together and kicked around a few ideas.

“We found we had a very clear idea of what we wanted to do,” says Grosset. “We didn’t want to work together as a team to do what committees often do – to make ‘nice wines.’ We both wanted to make a wine with more power and more weight for an Eden Valley, with a bit of that mineral/gravelly character, and with great persistence of flavour on the palate. And we wanted it to be a great food wine – completely dry.”



Jeffrey Grosset and Robert Hill-Smith with their new Riesling collaboration, called “Mesh.”

With the help of Yalumba's good local knowledge – built up over several generations of winegrowing in the Barossa and Eden Valleys – two vineyards were identified as having a strong likelihood of being able to provide fruit for a joint winemaking effort. Both were family-owned, and had been supplying Yalumba with fruit grown under contract for its premium Riesling portfolio. The sites were positioned adjacent to one another in the Eden Valley, separated by no more than a couple of kilometres.

Before even a grape was to be picked, the pair had decided that each party should lay their cards on the table and present to the other some clear ideas as to how harvesting and winemaking should be carried on. “We also talked about what we could learn from each other,” recalls Grosset. “We said that with a few small changes Grosset would follow with what they felt would give the best expression of Riesling based on their experiences in the Clare Valley, while Yalumba would adopt a quite specific approach to their side of the winemaking, based on their own experiences of those two vineyards over many years.

“Rather than pull the whole deal together and decide that there should be just one way to do this thing, we decided we would go down what seemed reasonable winemaking paths and we would come to an end-point where the wines that we had each made could be cleaned up and got ready for careful assessment and some decisions about what to do next.”

“A lot of people probably thought that this was going to be bit of a strange marriage,” says Hill-Smith. “The perception of what Jeffrey is about and what he does is probably a lot stronger and a lot clearer than is the case about Yalumba and what it does. But once you start looking at all the positives – like our experience in Eden Valley, his association with super premium Rieslings and his meticulousness – we felt that there was a lot we could gain from each other. It was a shared passion about Riesling, about Eden Valley, and about Australia.”

When the two vineyards were handpicked at harvest, no detail was left to chance. As teams of workers picked their way through vines that were 30 and 40 years old, alternate rows of fruit were collected into different coloured plastic bins. Blue 20 kg buckets indicated the fruit was to be processed by Grosset at a winery located in the district nearby, while yellow buckets pointed the way to Yalumba operation's home-base winery at Angaston and company winemaker Louisa Rose.

As luck would have it, Mother Nature had laid the groundwork for one of the latest vintages in the Eden Valley in recent memory. The fruit was in great shape and the project began to take its predetermined paths.

“It was a very low cropping year,” notes Hill-Smith, “a very late year with incredibly high natural acidity, low pH, and super physiological ripeness. It was a wonderful year to start. It certainly gave us lower tonnages than we wanted to take in, but we felt that we would end up with a super wine.”

That indeed turned out to be the case, but with one interceding twist of fortune – something that neither maker expected to see happening. Come the moment of truth – the first day of assessing the wines alongside one another – and the panel of winemakers who had had lovingly cared for their new charges over the preceding weeks were soon in disarray. Tasted blind and in the company of a handful of other top 2002 Rieslings, the new wines refused to play along with the script. The expectation that the wines of one particular vineyard or maker would rise above the others did not come to fruition.

“We had a lot of trouble just trying to work out which were the pairs of wines



we made,” admits a bemused Grosset. “What we thought we’d see would be subtle differences between the two, but that in a minute or two we’d be able to identify this pair of wines as having come from vineyard one, and this pair over here as the pair from vineyard two. In fact, we couldn’t pick the wines at all. The winemaking effects were so significant that there were different levels of alcohol, different levels of pH and acidity, differences that we thought were quite extraordinary. We didn’t expect that at all.

“But the biggest shock of all came when we said, ‘OK, let’s put vineyard one’s wines back together, and put together vineyard two’s as well – which I described then as re-meshing – and the wine that resulted from that process was better than any single component on its own. I think that’s just an extraordinary thing.

“So now, when I think about the name that we’ve given this wine it’s really very interesting,” adds Grosset. “Mesh started out as a description of the fusion of ideas, but as it turns out mesh also describes the meshing of the wines together – something that wasn’t planned to be that way at all.”

Hill-Smith agrees. “Riesling is probably the most pure expression of the grape that there is. And when you’re picking rows by hand at the same time of the day, and following a carefully managed plan like we did the only variant in this whole business was that of winemaking.

“You can have all the discussions about the influences of terroir that you like, but my god, the way that differences in individual winemaking philosophies can manifest itself in the glass is just amazing. Clearly, the best single component on the table was not as good a wine as a blend of the components, and that’s very satisfying in the end. That’s what our philosophy was all about - producing the best possible expression of Riesling. A layer of complexity has definitely come through as a result of that meshing process.”

Certainly there’s no doubt from this writer’s viewpoint that both Hill-Smith and Grosset are correct in identifying their 2002 Mesh (\$Aus26.95) as an extraordinary wine, and a great expression of what I know and understand about Eden Valley Riesling. It has wonderful concentration and intensity, with the citrus characters so typical of the region. More importantly, it has Riesling’s nervosity, that elusive character of tight-rope walking, where the wine balances fruit sweetness with fine acidity. As Hill-Smith says, “This is not an accountant’s wine. This is a winemaker’s wine.”

With roughly 50 percent of its 22,000 bottles heading out onto export markets, its limited volume means that Riesling enthusiasts will have to look hard to track it down for themselves. Mind you, it’ll be worth the effort.

Jancis Robinson would agree.



A Master of Wine goes to Japan

The Institute of Masters of Wine hosts an international Riesling seminar in Tokyo, Japan

[30 May 2002]

THE INSTITUTE OF MASTERS OF WINE exists to pursue all aspects of excellence within the global wine industry, and it promotes the highest standards of quality and excellence in wine as well as the highest standards of conduct within the wine industry. The ongoing work to achieve this supports candidates from round the world as they undertake the education programme offered by the Institute, by taking a leading role in international events and discussions which affect the wine industry, and by obtaining support from all sectors of the wine industry for these aims.

With two Masters of Wine invited to judge at the Japan Wine Challenge for the first time in May of this year, the Institute of Masters of Wine (IMW) hosted two events in parallel with the competition. Sally Easton MW and Dr. Ron Georgiou MW took time out of the judging schedule to offer an exam-condition blind tasting session for MW students as well as a second, open session where trade professionals and journalists were invited to a seminar on international Riesling wines.

At the Riesling seminar 14 wines were shown from six countries across all styles from light to full-bodied, low to high alcohol, bone dry to fully sweet. The seminar focused on discussing the physical attributes of the Riesling vine, its flexibility to produce elegant and concentrated wines across a wide spectrum of styles and its ability to express varietal purity in conjunction with its capability to reflect individual terroir – a sense of origin. Through the course of the seminar, themes of climate, site and winemaking were considered, those factors which influence both the style and flavour profile of this profoundly vivid grape variety. Many would argue that Riesling produces the finest and greatest white wines in the world. The seminar aimed to offer some insights into the reasons for this argument. A brief synopsis of the seminar and tasting notes follow.

Exploring Riesling

Riesling is regarded as one of the most plastic phenotypes of vinifera strains. It has a persistent ability to reflect a sense of place – its terroir, its origin – whilst also expressing its varietal definition. It is a profoundly flexible grape variety that produces wines in many different styles. Its wines have an amazing potential for longevity due to their potential alcohol, high acidity, high fruit concentration and high extract.

Riesling is a late budding, late ripening variety in cool climates. It has hard wood which enables it to withstand cold winters. It is a moderately vigorous vine and this aspect needs to be strictly controlled to produce high quality grapes. With increasing yield, pH increases, acidity drops, flavour is reduced and ripeness delayed. It is suggested that yields of 70 to 80hl/ha in Germany can be fully ripe; it is also argued that a yield of 45 to 50hl/ha bring a noticeably higher quality flavour profile. Quality conscious producers all over the world rarely achieve more



Sally Easton MW

than 45hl/ha. The variety has compact bunches of small grapes which are relatively prone to botrytis.

Riesling is able to attain full physiological ripeness and therefore flavour intensity at very low sugar levels. For example, in parts of New Zealand Riesling can ripen at 7–8° Baumé (7–8% potential alcohol). With acidity levels lower than would be found in Germany at this sugar level, a delicately balanced wine can result. This ability to ripen at low sugar levels is enshrined in German wine law which has lower minimum ripening requirements for Riesling than for other grape varieties.

A long slow cool ripening period is argued to be necessary for high quality production as it permits the retention of Riesling's natural acidity and maximises extract and flavour concentration. In very warm areas it ripens early and resultant wines are often dull and flat.

Riesling has a naturally high tartaric to malic acid ratio. Malic acid respiration doubles for every 10°C rise in temperature, which means that warmer climates may produce grapes with higher pH and lower levels of titratable acidity, especially malic acid. The resultant wine will show a less appley, less sharply defined acid profile.

Riesling grapes are able to produce a wide variety of wine styles and at all levels of sweetness. Depending on the vineyard site, wines are made with alcohol varying between seven and 14 percent. Residual sugar may vary considerably from bone dry to very sweet. It is Riesling's high natural tartaric acid level that better balances high sweetness levels; other grape varieties tend to have lower tartaric levels which makes them less suitable for serious sweet wine vinification. These wines are made in both botrytis and non-botrytis styles, expressing a delicacy of structure from the lightest through to the most powerful, full-bodied examples.

Riesling has little flexibility with regard to overt oak influence, and with malolactic fermentation, although Zind-Humbrecht in Alsace is a notable exception. It is in part due to the lack of the potentially masking influences of oak, malolactic fermentation, tannins and anthocyanins that enables this varietally pure grape to reflect climate and terroir so clearly.

Consistent elements in a generalised flavour profile are its high natural acidity offering raciness and tartness on the palate (in warm climates this acidity may be added), high extract and high potential alcohol. This latter is often expressed as residual sugar combined with moderate actual alcohol, as in the Mosel. It is these three key components that provide much of the matter essential for longevity. Fruit volume and intensity also need to be concentrated to make for a long-lived example.

Fruit aromas and characters vary quite considerably. For example, flower, apple, steel, mineral, flint, perfumed lemon or lime, honeysuckle, peach, apricot, honey, pineapple, lanolin and petrol are all common descriptors for Riesling. These descriptions vary with mesoclimate, site and wine style. It is interesting to note that dry Riesling examples can sometimes be confused with ones having a small amount of residual sugar. It is the high aromatics, the dry extract, the fruit ripeness, alcohol and glycerol which all contribute to a deceptive impression of sweetness.



Defining “terroir”

To appreciate how reflective of origin is Riesling, it is important to give some definition and boundary to the concept of terroir. Site specificity is at the core of terroir and its perceptible influence on the finished wine. It comprises an interrelationship of the natural environment at mesoclimatic and microclimatic level, pedology and geology as well as topography. The resultant wine and style is argued to reflect the impact of man’s choices within these natural circumstances. In its ideal proof, someone tasting the wine will taste and sense an appreciation of the wine’s origin.



Steep, south-facing vineyards in cool climates, such as Winninger Röttgen on the Lower Mosel, provide Riesling’s best opportunity for an extended ripening period.

Climate and temperature

Temperature is probably the key climatic variable affecting Riesling quality. Too much heat can lead to viscosity and oiliness in the wine. Enzymatic processes may stop altogether if temperatures are too high; flavour compounds either simply evaporate or a class of flavour compound that gives kerosene aroma remains. This aroma is regarded as a fault in Australia and top producers will go to great lengths to avoid it. Interestingly kerosene or petrol aroma is regarded as a normal part of the bottle age process in both New and Old World examples. A very dry atmosphere encourages increased transpiration which is likely to also increase the uptake of potassium which unfortunately neutralises tartaric acid, negatively impacting the flavour profile.

The marginality of a cool climate offers the best opportunity to optimise the peaks of Riesling expression. The aim is for an extended ripening period under cool conditions. In the Mosel, for example, the best sites are those most sheltered from the wind, with maximum ripening sunlight, both direct and reflected from water surfaces. South- or southwest-facing slopes also optimise sunlight conditions, whereas southeast-facing slopes are too often cloaked in early morning mist that must burn off before the vine has benefit of the sun’s rays. At this northerly latitude, a slope gradient of about 30° ensures the angle of incidence of the sun’s rays is the nearest possible to perpendicular. Vineyards higher than 100 metres above the reflective surface of the Mosel river suffer insufficient radiated warmth. The slate soils of the Mosel collect warmth during the day and reflect it back to the vine at night, helping to moderate the very cool night time temperatures.

The importance of proximity to a water body for the best Rieslings cannot be overstated in the search for a warm spot in a cool climate. Examples include the Rhine river in Alsace, the Mosel in the eponymous wine region, the Danube and its tributaries the Krems and the Kamp in Lower Austria, the Rhine again in the Pfalz and the Rheingau, and lakes Ontario and Erie at the Niagara Peninsula. Generally, New World sites buck this trend as marginality of site in these locations is often sought by virtue of elevation to find an appropriately cool spot in a warmer climate.

The influence of soil

Soil provides more than anchorage, nutrients and a supply of water or the capability to drain it efficiently. Apart from warmth generating properties of soil in a cool climate, heavier, water-retentive soils are argued to give full bodied wines with firm acidity; free draining light soils offer fresher, fruitier, more lively wines; drier soils result in flatter, less vibrant wines.

In the cellar

Winemaking practices for Riesling have evolved so as not to unduly influence the grape's ability to reflect its sense of origin. Fermentation is generally in some sort of inert vessel, usually stainless steel or large old oak, and more or less reductive techniques are likely to be used. Fermentation temperatures may be culturally slightly different, with Australia the lowest at 12–15°C, Germany in the middle at 14–16°C and Alsace probably the highest at 18–20°C. In the Old World, wines are more likely to be left on their lees over winter to preserve freshness, and cellar time during a cold winter is likely to naturally tartrate-stabilise a wine.

Setting the seminar stage

With its variety of styles, Riesling lends itself well to an exploration of balance. By focusing on the perception of each wine's structural elements – acidity and potential alcohol (represented by actual alcohol and residual sugar), the level to which each wine appeared as an harmonious whole, seamless and without hard edges, could be assessed.

For each region a brief geomorphological overview was offered with the aim of illustrating some elements of terroir that might be identified in the glass. Some general similarities were identified in the wines shown from Alsace, the Pfalz and Austria – all wines that showed the warmth, dryness and continentality of meso-climate. Despite vintage difference, these wines were all of high alcohol between 12.5 to 14%; and they were dry, with residual sugars no higher than 6.5g/l (grammes per litre). The Mosel wines beautifully illustrated the light alcohol of 7 to 8.5%, balancing residual sugars of 40 to 80g/l, and acidities slightly more racy, steely and linear than was illustrated in the wines from Alsace, Austria and Pfalz.

From the Australian selection, the wines showed consistent analytical parameters: alcohol 12-13%, residual sugars less than 4g/l, and acidities around 7 to 8g/l. The New Zealand example followed this pattern but had a little more residual sugar at 6g/l and this, to the author's palate, offered a more appealing balance between fruit, acidity and alcohol. The Tasmanian industry is at a very early stage in its evolution and the potential for Riesling was well highlighted. The Clare Valley examples showed more appreciably than the Eden Valley. Top producers have found the slightly cooler and more consistent climate better suited. All the examples showed the now-classic lime and lemon character, with Clare showing more sherbet and exotic fruit, Eden showing slightly broader, more open textured fruit. As a generalisation, the New World wines lacked the richness of expression of the Alsatian, Austrian and German examples.



The vineyards of Alsace are protected by the Vosges Mountains to the west and contain a staggering array of soil types.

Vendange Tardive is not the easiest of wine categories to appreciate; the harvest criteria are such that the resultant wine may be fully dry and rich or may be medium sweet and either with or without a proportion of botrytis-affected fruit. These distinctions are not currently illustrated on the label which means that tasting such wines is an experience of anticipation, although complications may be encountered when creating a menu paired with food.

The final example of Riesling was from Canada, a place becoming renowned for high quality icewines, frequently more affordable than the German originals. The reason for this is simple – Canada's climate is more predictably cold than that of Germany. Icewines can be made every year, whereas conditions in Germany are much riskier - Eisweine are made only a few times a decade. Canadian icewine must achieve higher sugar levels at harvest than in any region in Germany. As a generalisation the resultant wine therefore has higher alcohol of around 10 to 11%, slightly broader flavours due to lower acidity levels and a fleshier mouth-coating texture. A typical fruit profile includes pineapple and other tropical fruit

Wines shown:

France, Alsace

Trimbach – Cuvée Frédéric Emile, 1995

Made from a blend of fruit from two Grand Cru vineyards – Gaisberg and Osterberg on clay-limestone soils with fossilised seashells, the minerality is reflected in the wine as is the pronounced acidity. Bone dry, mineral, stony nose of enormous power and intensity, with apple blossom fragrance. Intensely young with no hint of any secondary characters yet developing. Seamlessly integrated with prodigious length.

Austria, Kamptal

Weingut Bründlmayer – Zöbinger Heiligenstein, alte reben, 2000

A landmark vineyard of the Permian period, about 270 million years old comprising desert sandstone and volcanic deposits, lying at the back wall of an amphitheatre shape opening up around the river Kamp as it flows south to join the Danube. Intense elderflower blossom fragrance belying a richly weighted and concentrated body. Great purity of citrus and peach fruit. An intriguing combination of elegant floral character and serious weight typical of this region.

Austria, Wachau

Hirtzberger – Hochrain Smaragd 1999

Steep, south-southeast facing terraced vineyards of ancient sedimentary gneiss overlain by fine brown sandy soil. Bright peachy, spicy nose with great silkiness of texture combined with understated power and weight. Ripe and beautifully balanced.

Germany, Mosel

Dr. Loosen – Bernkasteler Lay, Kabinett, 2000

Immediately behind the Loosen house, this slate vineyard has a gentler slope and richer soil than the estate's other vineyards. Apple blossom on the nose interlaced with mineral notes. Light, racy wine with piercing purity and elegance despite a vintage of poor press.

Dr. Loosen – Ürziger Wurzgarten, Spätlese, 2000

Weathered red volcanic and slate soils on a precipitous vineyard. Creamy citrus and apple nose with a richness and spiciness on the palate creating a completely integrated roundness of texture and balance.

Dr. Loosen – Erdener Prälat, Auslese, 1999

South facing; red slate soil with vines just above the river and below a large heat-retaining cliff outcrop; very warm microclimate giving powerful and refined wines. Intense peach, mango and honeyed nose, sublimely balanced on the palate. Richly concentrated combined with great delicacy of texture and purity of fruit.

Germany, Pfalz**J L Wolf – Pechstein, 1999 (Forster Pechstein Spätlese trocken)**

A black basalt outcrop above the village creates a warm microclimate and mineral rich soil. An enormously powerful and pure wine with mineral notes and almost savoury finish. Quite difficult to fully appreciate on its own, it would be best complemented with food.

Australia, Tasmania**Tamar Ridge Wines - 2001**

From vineyards in northern Tasmania this illustrated the promising international beginnings for this location. Bruised apple nose with steely acidity. Quite straightforward, yet with a lean, tight profile and mid weight fruit.

Australia, Clare Valley**Pikes Wines - 2001**

Half the fruit was sourced from the cool Polish Hill River area of Clare Valley where the soils are well-drained red-brown earth over clay and slate subsoil and aspect is south, southeast, away from the hot afternoon sun. Intense mineral, apple, lime nose with palate of medium weight and tight, steely structure.

Grosset Wines – Watervale, 2001

Grapes from the other cooler area in the Clare Valley–Watervale District. Green tints to the colour; mineral, steely lime aromatics; firm edges to the acidity; great intensity and linearity.

Australia, Eden Valley**Henschke – Julius, 2001**

The warmer climate of Eden in comparison to Clare was illustrated with this wine. A broader, slightly more deeply coloured, more open profile with gentler flavours. Characteristic lime fruit purity still present.

New Zealand, Marlborough**Huia Vineyards – 2001**

Grapes from the Pukenga vineyard with soils of silt and loam. Sherbet, apple fragrance on nose with hint of ginger spice. Mid weight wine, slightly honeyed with good intensity and integrated freshness of acidity. Pure and uncomplicated.

France, Alsace**Domaine Albert Mann – Vendange Tardive, Rosenberg, 1994**

A small lieu-dit on limestone and sandy soils. A light style of vendange tardive courtesy of vintage conditions; expressive spicy, honeyed mushroom notes on nose and palate showing good balance and elegance; still young with a zesty clean freshness to the finish.

Canada, Ontario**Inniskillin – Icewine, 1999**

An escarpment on the southern border of the peninsula deflects cold winds back to the lake, preventing pockets of cold winter air resting over the vines; this lowers the risk of frost damage. Golden colour; complex nose of smoke, spice, tangerine, pineapple and mango. Voluptuous, silky texture with pure fruit and some unctuous, mouth-coating viscosity without undue cloy. Very long finish.

About the author

Sally Easton, Master of Wine, is a freelance consultant, writer and educator based in the United Kingdom. She has considerable commercial experience in the wine industry, primarily as a buyer in both the High Street retail and traditional merchant sectors of the market. Sally has taught on the Master of Wine educational programme since achieving her MW in 1998. She develops and delivers consumer wine seminars and tastings, and judges at international wine competitions. Sally is always happy to hear from enthusiastic Riesling fans. You can reach her via e-mail at sally@winewisdom.co.uk. You can also visit her Web site: www.winewisdom.co.uk.

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New Pipers Riesling calls a different tune

WHEN A YOUNG AGRICULTURAL SCIENTIST by the name of Andrew Pirie first left mainland Australia almost 30 years ago – in search of a cool climate site from which he could produce wines with a distinctly European character – few of his winemaking peers could have anticipated his ultimate move to the island of Tasmania some 800 miles south of his home base in Sydney. After all, the conventional wisdom of the day would have had many of them believe that his choice of the tiny hamlet of Pipers Brook in the State's heavily forested north-east was too cool a region for growing late-ripening varieties like Riesling.

No one then bent on producing premium quality Rieslings would be expected to look beyond mainland sites with proven track records, like the Clare, Barossa or Eden Valleys of South Australia. "While viticulture at 41 degrees latitude was the dominant form of agriculture in Western Europe, it was certainly considered pretty eccentric at that time in Australia," says Pirie, whose name has become synonymous with Pipers Brook Vineyard Riesling in the ensuing two decades.

Mind you, as someone with years of analytical enquiry and a Ph.D. in viticulture already behind him, Pirie was hardly likely to have taken those first steps without properly thinking things through. Then there were other reasons as well. As a young graduate student, he had been to Europe beforehand in 1971, and had worked for a couple of months at Domaine Zind-Humbrecht and Hugel et Fils in Alsace, two of Riesling's flag-bearers. While there, he had observed the traditional cool-climate viticulture and winemaking techniques being used on the properties, and had considered how they could be applied on similar sites on the other side of the planet. Bucking what had become the accepted conventions of the day in his home country just doesn't seem to have entered his head. What mattered instead was an uncompromising desire to make world-class wines.

The recent release of the 2000 Pipers Brook Vineyard Single Site Riesling (\$Aus33.50) suggests those goals have changed little over the past twenty-odd years. Firmly placed in the upper rank of Australian Rieslings, this is a very special wine indeed – in terms of its making, and its quality.

PBV has had Rieslings in its portfolio since 1979. For the most part, they have been rated consistently among the country's best by national and international commentators. No listing of Australia's Top 100 wines in any given year would be complete without the inclusion of a PBV Riesling. Variations in style occur but quality rarely wavers. Today's 3.5 hectares (8.5 acres) of close-planted Riesling vines stand as a testament to the exhaustive background work carried out by Pirie prior to the company's establishment in 1974. The vineyard's gravelly kraznozern soils with their volcanic origins certainly offer a fertile home for the variety, but rarely seem to provide problems of excessive vegetative growth or incomplete physiological or flavour ripeness.

In warmer years like 1994 and 2000, the vineyard's wines are cast in the citrusy 'big island' mould, and with age become toasty in the manner of South Australia's Clare Valley Rieslings. In cooler years, they are fresher, more vibrant and minerally, and eventually develop the honied aromas and flavours redolent of Alsace or Germany's Rheingau. Almost regardless of vintage, the variety's charac-



The new single-site Riesling from Tasmania's Pipers Brook Vineyard.

teristic terpene elements are expressed at very low levels.

By the time fruit at Pipers Brook is being picked around mid-April, the occasionally damp days of autumn pose risks of uncontrolled botrytis infection. Wisely, today this is largely being alleviated by rigorous vineyard management practices and the use of effective disease-prevention spray programs. Between 1979 and 1998 such botrytis infections left periodic thumbprints on the wines and indeed became a part of the house style.

Until three years ago, PBV Rieslings were all made according to a very conventional New World winemaking regime – essentially, the cool-temperature fermentation of clarified juice in stainless steel tanks. In 1999, the use of limited skin contact became a part of the recipe in order to accent the wine’s textural qualities.

The 2000 Single Site Riesling – the company’s first Riesling to be given a designation proclaiming single vineyard origins – has taken that process one step further. For the most part, it is a move toward fulfilling Pirie’s unrequited desire to produce Rieslings that bridge the gap between traditional Australian Rieslings – with their toasty, oily characters – and those of northern European, with their floral scents and significantly lighter palates.

Sourced exclusively from the company’s oldest vines, its fruit comes from the Upper Slopes or A13 block, originally planted in 1974. Its reference to Upper Slopes evokes recollections of a forebear – from the 1983 vintage – yet it is a horse of a different colour than that produced almost 20 years ago. Indeed the combination of single-vineyard origins and some unconventional winemaking has created a wine that is even significantly different from the property’s current mainstay, the Estate-labelled Riesling of 2000.

“The spirit of our single-site selections is to make small parcels of wine from locations that produce a wine of quality greater than any blend,” says Pirie. “This wine is more than just a single site selection from a low-yielding, aged vineyard. We’ve actually added a ‘new’ winemaking process which is relatively simple, classic, and with minimal additions to the wine. The whole point of it has been to apply intensive winemaking effort in order to build a wine for long-term appreciation.”

Extended skin contact, time on light lees, and six-months’ maturation in 1,000-litre oak casks have all played a role in fashioning the wine. Pirie’s rationale for using large oak maturation is simple. It’s the preferred method of many of the best Alsatian producers. “Ever since I spent time in Alsace in the 1970s I’ve hankered to age some Riesling in large wood, and the quality of the fruit from the Upper Slopes in 2000 has given us the opportunity to test its impact,” said Pirie. “This is the first time in Australia that anyone has really done the Alsatian thing with big wood and it really helps to round the wine off. Not surprisingly, it knocks the aromatics off the top of the wine and makes it look a little austere, but over the next five to ten years we really believe it will go places because of the foundations we’ve laid down in its making.”

Whether or not it will reach its maker’s prediction of a 20-year life-span is anybody’s guess. Given the impressive cellar record of the more conventionally made PBV Rieslings, one gets the impression that Pirie just might have been under-playing his hand a little, preferring instead to let the Piper have the last say in calling the tune.



Andrew Pirie and one of his 1,000-litre, neutral oak barrels.

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

Rieslings of the World Tasting

ON THE AFTERNOON of June 16, 2002, I conducted a blind tasting seminar on Rieslings of the world at Gasthaus Zum Hirschen in the Remstal wine village of Fellbach just east of Stuttgart, Germany. The 17 wine professionals in attendance included sommeliers, restaurant owners, shop owners, wine-makers and sales people. Most of the people in the group had some familiarity with one another and with me, so a relaxed environment added to the enjoyment in addition to the educational aspect. Due to logistical and practical considerations, the wines were sorted in six groups of four wines each. After each flight, the wines were revealed and discussion took place. Wines were made available to the attendees for re-tasting upon the seminar's conclusion.

The purpose of this event was to provide an overview of Riesling's regional and stylistic differences throughout the world. Wines were organized more or less dry to sweet. Where no country of origin is listed, it is German. As is often the case in German tastings of this type, a ringer or "pirate" wine, the Silvaner, was included. By placing it in the first flight, I attempted to tune the tasters' palates toward Riesling rather than try to deceive them into thinking of it as Riesling.

Though this report is primarily mine, some credit must go to Heinz Munder of WG Rotenberg for his writing assistance and to all of the attendees for the lively conversation that helped shape my comments. Additional thanks to Obi for use of his "Sunday Cellar," Thomas Richter for his able pouring, and to all the winemakers for their generous contributions.

The wines – in the order tasted

1. Markgraf von Baden, 2001 Durbacher Schloß Staufenberg Klingelberger Kabinett Trocken [Baden/Ortenau]

Appearance: Pale gold-yellow

Aroma: Wax, quince, peach

Palate: Medium body, hint of sweetness, alcoholic

Finish: Average length, a bit dirty

Comments: Klingelberger is the Badener name for Riesling. A juicy, warm and forward wine. With a bit more effort this winery could turn heads.

2. Hans Wirsching, 2001 Iphöfer Julius-Echter-Berg, Kabinett Trocken [Franken]

Appearance: Pale yellow

Aroma: Herbs, minerals, peachy, some grassy notes

Palate: Light-medium body, racy

Finish: Fruit salad, nectarine, quince high acid,, nice length, complex

Comments: Tight, needs a few years to open. Very good.



The tasting compared the stylistic differences between Rieslings from all over the world, including from the terraced vineyards of the Wachau district of Austria.

3. **Hans Wirsching, 2001 Iphöfer Julius-Echter-Berg, Silvaner Kabinett Trocken [Franken]**

Appearance: Lots of CO₂
Aroma: Sweetish, low intensity
Palate: Undeveloped, light-medium body, lacks fruit
Finish: Reasonable length, clean and clear
Comments: Needs another one to two years to open. Silvaner is a specialty of this region, and Wirsching is one of the best
4. **Konzelmann, 2000 Niagara Peninsula [Ontario, Canada]**

Appearance: Very pale
Aroma: Gentle petrol notes, stewed vegetables
Palate: Nice acidity, vegetal, slightly sweet
Finish: Cherry, peach, earth, nice length
Comments: Somewhat awkward. Konzelmann is from the Stuttgart area having relocated to Canada many years ago.
5. **Oenoforos, 2001 Côtes d'Eglion [Pelopponese, Greece]**

Appearance: Pale, bright
Aroma: Low intensity sweetish fruit, mineral and acetic notes
Palate: Light body, lacks fruit, decent structure
Finish: Dry, clean finish, acid-fruit balance is moderately long
Comments: 800m, north-facing vineyards allowed this Greek (!) Riesling to fare well. More fruit concentration would have made this a real winner.
6. **Graf von Neipperg, 2000 Schwaigerner Ruthe, Spätlese Trocken [Württemberg]**

Appearance: Straw-yellow with watery rim
Aroma: Rich botrytised note, a bit unhealthy
Palate: Dry, medium body, pear and peach
Finish: Warm, dried pineapple stays for long time
Comments: A wine that can vary wildly from year to year. This isn't one of the best, but the vintages bookending it are very good.
7. **Schloß Proschwitz, 1999 Spätlese Trocken [Sachsen]**

Appearance: Yellow
Aroma: Lemon, yeasty
Palate: Lemon, viscous, mouthwatering
Finish: Unsettled—needs another year or two to work itself out
Comments: Good balance, but a touch heavy-handed.
8. **Domäne Wachau, 2001 Terrassen Federspiel [Wachau, Austria]**

Appearance: Straw-yellow
Aroma: Yellow tree fruits
Palate: Young, disjointed, minerally
Finish: A little bitter with its high mineral nature, fermentation flavors
Comments: Good, needs a year to resolve itself. This is the new label name for the Freie Weingärtner – the world's finest wine co-operative.
9. **Dr. Bürklin-Wolf, 1999 Ruppertsberg Gaisböhl, Spätlese Trocken [Pfalz]**

Appearance: Straw-green
Aroma: Low intensity pear, minerally
Palate: Medium acidity and body, excellent balance, a hint of sweetness
Finish: Fine and long. High alcohol is nicely balanced by the rich fruit.
Comments: Very good, better in two to three years

10. Georg Breuer 2000 Rudesheimer Berg Rottland [Rheingau]

Appearance: Star bright-yellow
 Aroma: Sweet, some botrytis-aromas, decent peach flavour
 Palate: Elegant acidity, dry with grapey fruit. Medium body.
 Finish: Good length but simple
 Comments: Great winemaking, less than adequate fruit from one of Germany's masters, Bernhard Breuer, and his cellarmaster Hermann Schmoranz.

11. Leeuwin, 2000 Artist Series [Margaret River, Australia]

Appearance: Deep yellow-gold
 Aroma: Piercing lime, honeydew melon, and petrol
 Palate: Medium-full body, assertive and bone-dry. High acidity, talc and lime.
 Finish: Powerful, minerally, clean.
 Comments: Excellent now, likely better in three to eight years. This one surprised the group as no one guessed it to be from Oz.



The famous Rudesheimer Berg Rottland vineyard in Germany's Rheingau region, source of two Georg Breuer wines in this tasting.

12. Heymann-Löwenstein, 1998 Schieferterrassen [Terrassenmosel]

Appearance: Shimmering gold
 Aroma: Deep, earthy, brettanomysces(?)
 Palate: Medium body, earthy, hint of ripe Golden Delicious apple sweetness
 Finish: Long and supple, haunting and rich. Hinting of pineapple
 Comments: Very good effort from the Wizard of Winingen.

13. Van Volxem, 2001 Wiltinger Klosterberg [Saar]

Appearance: Green-gold
 Aroma: Minerally, racy
 Palate: Touch of CO₂, fine balance, light-medium body, rich
 Finish: Hints of slate, good length, the sulfur slams the fruit
 Comments: Better in one to three years. This recently purchased winery specializes in "harmonically dry" Rieslings

14. Seppi Landmann, 1993 Zinnkoepflé Grand Cru [Alsace France]

Appearance: Yellow-gold
 Aroma: Dried apple, peach, sultanas
 Palate: Dry, medium-full body, a touch oxidized
 Finish: Round, warm, and long though seemingly a little low in acidity
 Comments: Very good, but drink up.

15. Seppi Landmann, 2000 Zinnkoepflé Grand Cru [Alsace France]

Appearance: Luminous green-gold
 Aroma: Nectarine, peach
 Palate: Medium-full body, medium acidity, hint of sweetness
 Finish: Clean, medium length
 Comments: Very good, will age well for up to five years.

16. Domäne Wachau, 2001 Singerriedel [Wachau, Austria]

Appearance: Yellow with a watery rim, bright
 Aroma: Musty tank aromas, peach
 Palate: Medium-full body, dry, powerful, minerally with plum and peach
 Finish: Nice finish and length
 Comments: Closed and crisp—better in two to five years

17. Saturna Island, 2000 Similkameen Valley [British Columbia, Canada]

Appearance: Very pale straw
 Aroma: Petrol, yeast
 Palate: Sweet mandarin orange, light-medium body
 Finish: Short and warm
 Comments: As the potential exists, more efforts need to be made here.

18. Chateau Ste. Michelle-Dr. Loosen, 2001 Eroica [Columbia Valley, Washington]

Appearance: Yellow-gold
 Aroma: Orange and papaya, a touch of sweetness, dense but undifferentiated
 Palate: Moderately sweet, subtle acidity carries the tropical fruit and medium body
 Finish: Long with banana notes
 Comments: Whistle clean with no ageing potential. From the Ernie Loosen–Stimson Lane joint effort.

19. Heyl zu Herrnsheim, 2000 Pettental [Rheinessen]

Appearance: Green-gold
 Aroma: Peach, melon, lemon cream pie
 Palate: Full body, forward, fruit dominated and supported by elegant acidity
 Finish: Long peach, strawberry, and mineral notes
 Comments: Excellent, especially in such a tough vintage. Little aging potential.

20. Van Volxem, 2001 Scharzhofberger [Saar]

Appearance: Bright green-gold
 Aroma: Mineral, sulfur and vegetables
 Palate: Light-medium body and lightly sweet, little mineral note. Sulfur blanks out the fruit.
 Finish: Acid and sulfur dominated
 Comments: Wound up, needs a year or two to open.

21. Sankt Urbanshof, 2001 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Spätlese [Mosel]

Appearance: Light green-gold
 Aroma: Petrol, currants, sulphur
 Palate: Touch of CO₂, lightly sweet with buoyant acidity
 Finish: Lemon-lime soda, creamy and long
 Comments: Delightful, needing another 3-5 years to begin to open.

22. Seppi Landmann, 1998 Zinnkoepflé Vendages Tardives Grand Cru [Alsace]

Appearance: Star bright, gold
 Aroma: Sweaty, caramel, low fruit
 Palate: Petrol, creamy medium body, medium sweet with a hint of red apple
 Finish: Pear note, warm and velvety.
 Comments: Nicely done, still young.

23. Dr. Max von Richter, 1993 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Auslese [Mosel]

Appearance: Deep green-gold
 Aroma: Tight
 Palate: Medium body, dense, medium-high acidity
 Finish: Just beginning to round out, long and pleasant
 Comments: Still young, better in two to five years. Excellent wine from an excellent vintage.

24 Georg Breuer, 1999 Rudesheimer Berg Rottland Auslese [Rheingau]

Appearance: Gold
 Aroma: Botrytis, clean, tropical fruits and apple-pear notes
 Palate: Medium-full body, sweet, deep and earthy. Acidity is buried somewhere beneath the crushing weight of this ultra-Auslese.
 Finish: Very nice length, mineral-packed
 Comments: Excellent now, and one for the cellar.



Vineyards of eastern Washington, birthplace of Eroica, the collaboration between Chateau Ste Michelle and Dr. Loosen.

Guest Riesling Reporter **David Furer** has written for Wine Enthusiast, Santé and Barfly magazines, and has 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.