

RIESLING: A MULTI-TALENTED UNDERDOG

Our resident wine buff **Simon Calabria** takes a look at riesling, which as it turns out, was pleasantly surprising.



Pewsey Vale
Eden Valley
Riesling
2010 (\$20)



Pewsey Vale
'The Contours'
Riesling
2005 (\$28)



Delatite
Riesling
'Sylvia'
2008 (\$23)



Donnhoff
Oberhauser
Leistenberg
Kabinett
2008 (\$46)

In the white wine popularity stakes in Australia, riesling never seems able to reach the top of the podium. First it was chardonnay, and more recently sauvignon blanc. And while these white varieties were holding top spot, experts keep heralding riesling as the 'next big thing'. Given its pedigree and versatility, it's hard to believe that riesling hasn't been able to grab the mantle.

Riesling is regarded a noble grape and it's not hard to see why. Like no other variety it can be made into many different wine styles, can handle ageing, is food friendly and always expresses the many places in which it is grown. Styles include dry, off dry/semi-sweet (such as the German kabinett), sweet (such as auslese, beerenauslese), botrytis-affected, ice-wine and even sparkling. Countries include its original home Germany, Austria, France (Alsace), Italy, Australia (particularly Clare and Eden valleys, Great Southern in WA, Victoria and Tasmania), New Zealand, Canada, United States and South Africa.

Riesling is an aromatic variety. When young it displays intense fruit, florals, and at times minerality, but always balanced by its natural acidity. It is this acidity that provides riesling its compatibility with food and its ability to age. With age comes more complexity with toastiness and honeyed characters, as well as an increased silky texture. Sometimes aged riesling can even display kerosene notes, a trait often desired by some makers and drinkers (and curiously not near as bad as it sounds).

Australian rieslings have benefited from a string of quality recent vintages over the past decade (including 2008, 2009 and 2010). Of these, the 2010s are likely to be included alongside the outstanding wines from the 2002 and 2005 vintages.

Somewhat incredibly, even the most highly-regarded Australian rieslings (those from Grosset, for example) can be bought for about \$40 a bottle, but most are available well under that price.

A benchmark example highlighting the value that riesling offers can be seen in the annual release of **Pewsey Vale Eden Valley Riesling**. The retail price for this wine is close to \$20 and at that price is worth every cent. Made in the dry style, the

current release is the excellent 2010. Other makers to look out for include Petaluma, Crawford River, Howard Park, Richmond Grove, Leo Buring, Delatite, Jamsheed, Frankland Estate and Heggies.

Wineries often hold back some riesling and release it with some age. These aged rieslings are generally more expensive than the current vintage models. The value, however, is readily apparent. The current release **Pewsey Vale 'The Contours' Riesling 2005** (\$28) and **Peter Lehmann's Wigan Riesling 2004** (\$35) are both outstanding wines.

Gaining some momentum in Australia is the off-dry (or kabinett) style of riesling. These wines tend to show more florals and mouthfeel, are generally lower in alcohol and incredibly good with food. Referred to as 'off-dry' (as they retain some residual sugar) the balance with acidity means the wines usually still finish dry on the palate. Some Australian examples include **Pewsey Vale Prima Riesling 2009** (\$25), **macforbes Riesling rs20 2010** (\$28) and **Delatite Riesling 'Sylvia' 2008** (\$23).

Imported riesling is a whole different story and an adventure entirely worth seeking. Makers such as **Dr Loosen** (Germany), **Pierre Sparr** (Alsace) or **Domane Wachau** (Austria) are becoming more common in bottleshops and on wine lists. Don't let the labelling and naming of these wines put you off. If in doubt, seek help from a restaurant sommelier or wineshop attendant. Some names to look for, in addition to those above, include **Donnhoff**, **Wittmann** and **Gunderloch** (from Germany), **Emmerich Knoll** and **Brundlmayer** (Austria), and **Albert Mann** (Alsace).

It probably doesn't matter whether riesling wins a popularity contest. Just keep it in mind when next reaching for a bottle of white. You will be pleasantly surprised.

Prices shown are RRP per bottle.

Simon operates Winecall, an internet-based mail order wine business. For more information go to www.winecall.com.au/winetalk