

INTERNATIONAL RIESLING TASTING

Every year at the Small Vigneron Awards we conduct an international tasting for our judges. This year, for the first time ever, it was riesling. We opted for vintage 2009 because it was reasonably even across Australia and Europe, and because we wanted to assess wines that had been in bottle for a few years. That's where the fun began.

Obtaining high quality 2009 European rieslings meant buying several of them directly from retailers in Germany and Austria. We're thankful for the great co-operation of our European suppliers, but the Winewise budget was certainly stretched by air freight costs and Australian government imposts.

The tasting was indeed fascinating. Multiple bottles of each wine were purchased, and editor and Small Vigneron Awards chairman Lester Jesberg endured the normal frustrations with bottle variation as he checked each bottle prior to the blind tasting. A few were rejected outright for oxidation and it was clear to him that the tasting could be as much about bottle closures as it was about the wines.

Cork is an inferior seal because it produces considerable differences in the same wine from bottle to bottle. Minute variations in the diameter of bottle necks and similar inconsistencies in corks lead to huge differences in the amount of air that comes in contact with the wines. Riesling is especially vulnerable – particularly aged riesling. It was clear to Lester that the screw-capped wines would have an advantage – and only one European (Austrian) wine was sealed with screw cap. Ironically it didn't fare particularly well.

Lester chose the best bottles of each of the five wines from Alsace, Austria and Germany to take on the five Australian rieslings. All of the European wines were dry, or almost dry.

The twelve Small Vigneron Awards judges were chosen from a range of wine industry fields including winemaking, journalism and wholesale/retail. All have considerable experience tasting European wines in Australia and many different parts of the world.

The wines are reviewed below in order of preference of the twelve judges. The order was determined first by median score and, in the event of ties, the mean score was used to split the wines.

Note: The number in brackets at the end of each review is the number of gold medal scores (18.5 and above on the 20 point scale or 95 and above on the 100 point scale)

Order of Preference



2009 Seppelt Drumborg Riesling Year after year, this special site produces world-class riesling, and the 2009 is a gem. Its vibrant lemon/lime aromas and flavours bring with them just a hint of honeyed maturity. The palate is long, dry, intense and acid-fresh. (9) ★★★★★
[Henty \(Vic.\), Australia](#)



2009 Leiwener Laurentiuslay Riesling Grosses Gewächs (St. Urbans-Hof) A stunning slightly sweet riesling which shows some bottle-age maturity but is floral and complex. There are hints of lime marmalade and a beguiling spiciness which add to the considerable presence of this outstanding wine. (8) ★★★★★ [Saar, Germany](#)



MARKUS MOLITOR

2009 Niedermenniger Herrenberg Riesling Auslese Trocken (Markus Molitor) The nose is striking, offering aromas of ripe gooseberry, apricot and tropical fruit, and the palate has great intensity, a touch of sweetness and a strong line of acidity which brings everything into balance. Wow. (8) ★★★★★ [Saar, Germany](#)

2009 Crawford River Riesling This riesling is nearing its peak but is still very fresh, the limey aromas given complexity by bottle-age toastiness. The palate reflects the nose, and the linearity and acid freshness provide completeness. (7) ★★★★★☆ [Henty \(Vic.\), Australia](#)

2009 Howard Park Riesling This riesling is fresh, limey and bursting with life. There's a pleasant, faintly toasty, hint of maturity and the palate delivers abundant varietal flavour and acidity. (8) ★★★★★☆ [Great Southern \(W.A.\), Australia](#)

2009 Grosset Polish Hill Riesling Freshness shines out in this excellent example of bottle-aged Polish Hill. The lime character of Clare is there in abundance, and the mature side of the wine meets the primary side seamlessly. Delicious drinking. (6) ★★★★★☆ [Clare Valley \(S.A.\), Australia](#)



2009 Maximin Grünhäuser Riesling Abtsberg Alte Reben Trocken The German stunners in the nearly-dry style come from the coolest regions. That surprised us. Maximin Grünhäus is one of the great estates of Germany, but the growing environment, in theory at least, doesn't lend itself to drier styles. Great vineyards often defy theory. This example shows maturity but has excellent fruit weight and a strong line of acidity. A wine every riesling lover should try. (5) ★★★★★ [Ruwer, Germany](#)

2009 Peter Lehmann Wigan Riesling Choosing vintage 2009 wasn't the kindest thing we could do for an Eden Valley riesling, but the Wigan is one of Australia's finest, and we see why here. Although it's nearing its peak, the intense limey aromas and flavours impress and the acidity is very uplifting. (4) ★★★★★ [Eden Valley \(S.A.\), Australia](#)

2009 Hochheimer Stielweg Riesling Trocken (Weingut Künstler) There's a beautiful pairing of freshness with maturity here. Juicy limes show out in the bouquet and there's a little honeyed character as well. The palate is very long, intense and dry. (3) ★★★★★ [Rhein, Germany](#)

2009 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Grosses Gewächs (Reinhold Haart) A delightfully aromatic riesling with some honeyed bottle age complexity. The slightly sweet palate has great power and acid drive on the finish. (5) ★★★★★ [Mosel, Germany](#)

2009 Hugel Riesling Jubilee Most judges forgave the volatile acid lift of this wine because everything else was so good. Lime still plays a role in the aroma and flavour, and the powerful fruit is backed up by lively acidity and just-right grip. (3) ★★★★★ [Alsace, France](#)

2009 Brand Riesling Grand Cru (Josmeyer) Although it's fully mature, or close to it, this riesling has a lot to offer. The stone fruit flavour is long and powerful, backed up by acidity and balanced phenolics. (3) ★★★★★ [Alsace, France](#)

2009 Loibner Berg Riesling Smaragd (F.X. Pichler) From the king of the Wachau comes this rich, intense wine that is quite complex, perhaps due to a hint of botrytis. The palate is power-packed, marginally sweet and fairly firm, but not bitter. A substantial riesling. (3) ★★★★★ [Wachau, Austria](#)

2009 Ried Pfaffenberg Steiner Riesling (Weingut Knoll) A big wine that is slightly sweet, but has mouthfilling honeyed apricot flavour backed up by phenolic firmness. A "take no prisoners" riesling. (1) ★★★★★ [Wachau, Austria](#)

2009 Durnsteiner Hollerin Riesling Smaragd (Weingut Alzinger) Another substantial, firmly structured riesling with honey and beeswax characteristics. Not exactly subtle and aromatic, but that's not Wachau is it? (2) ★★★★★ [Wachau, Austria](#)

2009 Clos Ste Hune (Trimbach) It may have been a cork-related issue, but this highly regarded wine was disappointing. We opened three bottles and they were all fairly even, so the best two went into the tasting. This bone dry wine retained just-sufficient flavour, but was showing all of its six years of age – and then some. Nevertheless it still offered some drinking pleasure. (2) ★★★★★ [Alsace, France](#)

2009 Vom Stein Riesling Smaragd (Nikolaihof) Fully mature, with interesting dried lavender aromatics. The best bottles delivered enough fruit sweetness. The worst was just clinging to life. (0) ★★★ [Wachau, Austria](#)

2009 Schlossberg Riesling Grand Cru (Domaine Bott Geyl) Deep colour. Although it hasn't totally dried out, oxidation is advancing rapidly. (0) ★★☆☆ [Alsace, France](#)

2009 Spitzer Hochrain Riesling Smaragd (Franz Hirtzberger) A very individual style with very prominent lime marmalade botrytis. The dryness of the palate is the dominant feature as the fruit fades. (0) ★★★ [Wachau, Austria](#)

2009 Kessler Riesling Grand Cru (Domaines Schlumberger) Dried out by oxidation. Very little flavour remaining. Three bottles opened – all similar. (0) ★ [Alsace, France](#)

This was a thrilling tasting. If the German wine producers had been switched-on enough to use screw caps they would probably have dominated the results. Who knows about the others? The Alsations have built a dreadful record of sub-standard corks, and only a relative few producers are willing to address that problem.

Domaine Laroche in Chablis switched completely and successfully to screw caps 14 years ago, and their wines have aged as they would under perfect corks (Encountered in about one in 50 cases in my experience). How backward are wine producers who won't even investigate how that "experiment" has proceeded? How can anybody put so much effort into producing quality wine knowing that most of it was going to die prematurely?

Australian winemakers introduced screwcaps in the 1970s. Consumers weren't ready then, but enough wines aged beautifully to start the second wave in the late nineties. Australian wines have not looked back. Over 90% of red and white wines are cork-free, and those that aren't are aimed mostly at foreign markets.

We often say to cork supporters "How would you react if at least 25% of the milk you buy was at least slightly sour?" Those who still stand up for cork, especially in white wines, are obviously fans of sour milk – or oxidation. Cork taint is no longer the major issue, but doing away with cork would obviously eliminate it completely.

Despite all that, we tip our hat to the five German wines. Cork held them back, but they showed why Germany is considered to be the spiritual home of riesling. However, it's about time the world learned just how good the best dry rieslings from Australia are.



WINEWISE RATING SCALE

★★★★★	Outstanding	97-100 pts
★★★★☆	Highly Recommended	93-96
★★★★	Recommended	90-92
★★★☆☆	Recommended	87-89
★★★	Agreeable	85-87
★★☆☆	Agreeable	82-84
★★	Acceptable	80-82
★☆☆	Acceptable	77-79
★	Barely Acceptable	74-76
☆	Unacceptable	71-73
No stars	Undrinkable	<71

“HOT” NEW WINES

2009 Brokenwood ILR Reserve Hunter Valley Semillon The freshness of this wine demonstrates why Hunter semillon is possibly the most under-rated wine style in the world. The aromas centre around lemon, lime and fresh hay, and the palate is decidedly linear, based on a spine of acidity. This exceptional wine, at six years of age, is still at least five away from its optimum drinking window. (\$75.00) ★★★★★
<http://www.brokenwood.com.au/Templates/NetcatCommerce/Pages/ProductListing.aspx?id=411&epslanguage=en-AU>

2014 Tolpuddle Vineyard Chardonnay I'm sure my kiwi friends won't mind me describing this wine as 100% pure Tasmanian. It's a great expression of chardonnay from the island state, showing reserved but intense stone fruit backed up by a strong line of acidity. It's mouth-wateringly delicious now, but will build extra richness over time. (\$65.00)
 ★★★★★☆

2014 Tolpuddle Vineyard Pinot Noir A fragrantly and texturally seductive pinot noir with aromas and flavours that align with those of pinot noirs from the area around Beaune. It's a supple beauty. (\$75.00)
 ★★★★★☆

Lester Jesberg

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