

## RIESLING - A GLORIOUS GRAPE

Perhaps it's the subtlety of riesling that has held back the much-vaunted "Riesling Renaissance", while the mass market continues to swill oceans of sauvignon blanc. Maybe it's also the delicacy and finesse of our best rieslings that lessen its appeal to the mythical average drinker. But we love riesling, so we selected sixteen covering the Australian "hot spots" for the variety – Clare, Eden Valley, Henty (Vic.), Coal River Valley (Tas.) and the Canberra District. We asked each producer for one bottle from 2014 or 2015 and another from 2010, 2011 or 2012.

### HISTORY

Wine lore has it that, in the early ninth century, Charlemagne established vineyards in the Rhine Valley, building on what was left by the Romans. Some adventurous historians even suggest that the riesling grape we know today is the same as, or was derived from, the Roman varietal *argitis minor* which was said to produce an aromatic white wine.

German documentation, dated 1435, bears the first known occurrence of the word "Rießlingen" which, over time, became "riesling".



Riesling found its way to Australia in the Busby collection of 1832. Busby referred to the cuttings as "389 Rischling, Bas-Rhin". Vines were grown, and cuttings taken to the Hunter Valley and other parts of New South Wales before Joseph Gilbert established riesling on his Pewsey Vale property in the Eden Valley of South Australia in 1841.

Riesling spread further in South Australia when Johann Gramp imported cuttings from Germany in 1847.

*My favorite grapes are those so woven into where they grow that grape and place are no longer extricable, like when you pull one thread and whole sweater unravels. But when pressed to consider grape alone, there's no question in my mind at all which is the greatest grape, of either color: Riesling.*

"Reading Between The Wines" Terry Theise

Further riesling landmarks in Australia were:

The importation of Geisenheim clones by Rudi Kronberger in the 1930s.

The use of German pressure fermentation tanks by Günter Prass and Colin Gramp. The resulting 1953 Orlando Barossa Riesling caused a sensation with its freshness and aromatic qualities.

John Vickery lifting Australian riesling to new heights in the 1960s and 1970s.

The use of the screwcap closure on the 1977 Yalumba Pewsey Vale Riesling should have been the dawn of a new era, but consumer resistance was strong, and the screwcap disappeared seven years later. However that disappearance was only temporary, and the metal closure was reintroduced by John Vickery with the release of the 1998 Richmond Grove Watervale and Barossa Rieslings. That fortunately ignited a revival by Clare winemakers in 2000 which spread throughout the Australian wine industry to such an extent that about 90% of all Australian bottled wine is now sealed with screwcap.

## THE TASTING

This riesling project focuses strongly on regionality. We hoped to identify characteristics imparted by the vineyard. We saw no point in making a competition out of it, so we are not printing ratings in this instance. However, we've indicated the preferred rieslings of each of the four tasters, and believe that all 32 wines are worthy of your attention. They appear in alphabetical order – by state, region and producer. The wines were tasted “blind” in two brackets – 2014-15 and 2010-12.

## NEW SOUTH WALES

**2015 Clonakilla Canberra District Riesling** This wine was stylish and delicate, but very reserved when we first tasted it shortly after bottling. It's showing much more now, and the lemon/lime perfume is very attractive. The palate offers good intensity backed by fresh acid. (\$26.00)  
<http://www.mwwines.com.au>

**2012 Clonakilla Canberra District Riesling** Four years' evolution has taken this riesling to the lemon curd stage. It's still very freshly flavoured and acid drives the finish.

**2015 Helm Premium Canberra District Riesling** The nose shows ripe citrus aromatics together with lemon sherbet character. There's a lot of power and acidity here, and a couple of years' cellaring (at least) is required. (\$27.90)

<https://www.danmurphys.com.au>

**2010 Helm Premium Canberra District Riesling** The aromas and flavours tend to rich lemon curd with honeyed notes. A powerful, mature riesling with a strong line of acidity.

**THE TASTE OF CANBERRA** *The lemon descriptor came up frequently in all the judges' notes on the Canberra District rieslings. The other feature was acidity which at times verged on hardness.*

## SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**2015 Grosset Springvale Watervale Riesling** The nose shows restrained but intense lime and orange blossom aromatics which lead into a very pleasing dry, long, mouth-watering palate. (\$34.95)

<http://www.mycellars.com.au>



DAVID YEATES' PICK OF 2010-12

**2010 Grosset Springvale Watervale Riesling** Shows fresh lime with a touch of toast. It's rich, ripe, intense and ready to enjoy, supported by acidity which keeps the palate full of life.

*There are many things that have changed in the way we make Springvale riesling now, compared to even five years ago. Our lower cropping levels, the ability to get every bunch so close to the same ripeness level, the absence of introduced fertilizer and of course the much earlier harvest dates (due to some combination of climate change and strict adherence to organics as required for certification) means that we are harvesting extraordinarily fresh, generously flavoured fruit with low pH's well before the dates we used to see back even five years ago. Jeffrey Grosset*

**2015 KT Peglidis Watervale Riesling** The lime of Clare is enhanced by delightful floral hints. It's a pristine gorgeous dry riesling with excellent acidity and impressive length of flavour. (\$30.00)

<http://www.winestar.com.au>

**2011 KT Peglidis Watervale Riesling** Those who tarred all of south-east Australia in 2011 with the same bad weather brush, think again. This is a delightful riesling which shows only a little maturity. Characteristics of lime and mandarin brulée show out. It's fresh and satisfying.

**2015 Petaluma Hanlin Hill Riesling** There's a lot going on here. Brian Croser once described the Petaluma riesling style as "dry spätlese", and that still holds true. There's a touch of lime, but it's more about apricot and orange peel. A richly flavoured riesling. (\$22.00)

<http://www.winestar.com.au>

**2010 Petaluma Hanlin Hill Riesling** This wine has developed well into a delicious stone fruit and lime style. It's very lively and mouth-filling.

**THE TASTE OF CLARE** *Of the six Clare rieslings, four were from centrally-located Watervale, and all four showed the lime blossom/lime juice characteristics so frequently associated with the Clare Valley. The Petaluma was the out-rider, reflecting later picking through richer aromas and flavours, leaning towards stone fruit.*

June 6, 2016

**2015 Jacob's Creek Steingarten Eden Valley Riesling** A classic floral Eden Valley riesling that is long, restrained and blessed with a delightful talc-like texture. Cellar five years at least.



LEX HOWARD'S PICK OF 2010-12

**2012 Jacob's Creek Steingarten Eden Valley Riesling** There's great freshness plus a little honey from bottle age, but above all, it's floral. A dry riesling that still has so much to offer. The texture of the 2015 is also apparent here.

**2015 Peter Lehmann Wigan Eden Valley Riesling** The essence of restraint – pure with floral hints. The palate is dry, long and very, very fine. One taster even detected the scent of camomile flowers.



LESTER JESBERG'S PICK OF 2010-12

**2012 Peter Lehmann Wigan Eden Valley Riesling** This wine is still wonderfully vibrant, delicate, floral and “slatey”. The length of the precise, acid-fresh palate is magnificent.

**2015 Pewsey Vale Eden Valley Riesling** The nose is blessed by abundant floral and citrus aromatics, and there's considerable flavour impact backed up by gentle acidity. Delightful drinking. (\$15.70)

<https://www.danmurphys.com.au>

**2012 Pewsey Vale Eden Valley Riesling** It's showing a little toasty maturity, but the varietal aroma and flavour are very fresh indeed. Citrus characteristics are taking over from the florals.

*In the Eden Valley we often see that our total acidity is lower than that of Clare, but our pHs are not higher - they are in some cases lower. This is why the EV wines are 'softer' as you describe (due to low TA), but still have a beautiful minerality and ageability (due to low pH). Louisa Rose, Yalumba*

**THE TASTE OF EDEN VALLEY** *The wines that set the standards for Eden Valley (like those above) are definitely more floral, delicate and softer than their Clare counterparts. This doesn't mean they are superior or inferior – just different.*

## TASMANIA



### LEX HOWARD'S PICK OF 2014-15

**2014 Heemskerk Coal River Valley Riesling** This is a beautifully poised riesling offering restrained but powerful lime aromas with a hint of slate. It's very intense, long and dry, finishing with racy acidity. Purity itself. (\$34.00)

<http://www.winesattemplestowe.com.au>

**2010 Heemskerk Coal River Valley Riesling** It's so floral, with just-right development, and hints of honey and mandarin. Lively Tasmanian acid completes a beautifully composed picture. (\$25.90)

<https://www.danmurphys.com.au>



### DEB PEARCE'S (& DAVID'S) PICK OF 2014-15

**2015 Pooley Margaret Pooley Tribute Coal River Valley Riesling** Fresh, delicate, floral and pristine. Very low level residual sugar does its bit to contribute to an artfully composed, lengthy palate with mouth-watering acidity that is in no way hard. A brilliant riesling. (\$60.00)

<http://www.pooleywines.com.au/purchase/>

**2012 Pooley Margaret Pooley Tribute Coal River Valley Riesling** Intensely floral and fuji apple-like, with the faintest hints of slate and the beginnings of toast. It offers vibrant apple tart flavour on a long and racy palate. A stunningly good riesling.

**2014 Pressing Matters R9 Coal River Valley Riesling** Perfumed and powerful, with very intense lime and stone fruit aromatics. Initially slightly sweet, but with very intense flavour and strong, but balanced, acidity. (\$26.95)

<http://www.mycellars.com.au>

**2012 Pressing Matters R9 Coal River Valley Riesling** Floral, slightly herbal and "slatey" in the manner of a Mosel. It's faintly sweet, but the acidity embraces the sugar and makes it disappear. Wonderful.

June 6, 2016

**THE TASTE OF TASMANIA** *The Tasmanian rieslings up the ante on floral aromatics and acidity, but don't lose the key quality of any wine – balance. Sometimes residual sugar is necessary to reach that point of balance, but it would be wrong to describe any of the six wines as sweet.*

## VICTORIA

The Victorian rieslings hail from the Henty region in the south-west corner of the state.



### LESTER JESBERG'S PICK OF 2014-15

**2014 Crawford River Riesling** A wine of great freshness and intensity, possessing layers of flavour. It finishes with crisp, lively acidity that is moderated by very skilful use of residual sugar which is very low-level. In terms of aromatics, it leans more towards lime than floral. (\$39.95)

<http://www.canterburywines.net>

**2012 Crawford River Riesling** There are lime blossom aromas with lightly honeyed notes. It's still very restrained but has a great palate delivering rich limey fruit backed by excellent, lingering acidity.

**2014 Seppelt Drumborg Riesling** Very intense and fragrant, having more floral notes than lime together with a "slatey" hint. There's a suggestion of sweetness, but the fruit is dynamic. Superbly balanced acidity leads to a dry finish. (\$36.50)

<http://www.canterburywines.net>



### DEB PEARCE'S PICK OF 2010-12

**2010 Seppelt Drumborg Riesling** Wow! Limey power - mouthfilling and mouthwatering. A magnificent riesling with plenty left in the tank. "I can't believe it's a 2010." **Deb**

**THE TASTE OF HENTY** *It's all about fruit intensity and acid balance. All four wines were "tweaked" with very small amounts of residual sugar to great effect. They remain dry and limey, but the barely-detectable sweetness has a moderating effect on the acid, resulting in exceptional examples of riesling.*

## **WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**2015 Cherubino Great Southern Riesling** A commanding citrus style with a grassy, herbaceous note. There's also a hint of leatherwood honey. This wine has power, length, acidity and textural grip. There's a lot happening. (\$35.00)  
<http://buywine.larrycherubino.com.au>

**2010 Cherubino Great Southern Riesling** A floral, herbal riesling with a very lively palate. It's richly flavoured and ready to drink.

**2014 Howard Park Porongurup Riesling** There's plenty of rich, ripe flavour and whiffs of leatherwood honey and hay. It's looking good now. (\$25.00)  
<http://www.aussiewines.com.au>

**2012 Howard Park Porongurup Riesling** Stone fruit shows through on a nose that is mature yet fresh. Leatherwood honey and hay appear again. A richly flavoured riesling with excellent acidity.

**2015 Kerrigan + Berry Mount Barker Riesling** An intense but restrained riesling. Mineral elements appear, together with floral and grassy notes. Substantial but balanced, with penetrating acidity. (\$30.00)  
<http://www.hayshedhill.com.au/view/cellar-new>

**2010 Kerrigan + Berry Mount Barker Riesling** Rich mature aromas and flavours, tending to stone fruit. Honeyed notes indicate that this wine is in its drinking window.

**THE TASTE OF GREAT SOUTHERN** *The WA selection tends to show a certain grassy, herbal, hay character. A unique, floral leatherwood honey note also emerged. The most distinctive group of the tasting.*

**SLATEY** The adjective "slatey" was used occasionally in the article. Let me explain. I've spent a lot of time over the years tasting riesling with Mosel winemakers. They often refer to slate when describing typical young wines. The connection is obvious because the soil of the middle Mosel vineyards is littered with pieces of slate. However, the "terroir" connection is very dubious. I think the "slatey" character is somehow linked to long, slow ripening in cool conditions. If you can, compare the 2014 Heemskerk and 2014 Seppelt Drumborg with a 2014 Dr Loosen Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett. **LJ**



To provide some idea of how Australia's riesling-growing regions compare in terms of climate, we've prepared the table below which also includes comparisons with key European regions. Please note that this involves considerable generalisation. It does not allow for the fact that sites within a region can vary considerably in terms of Heat Degree Days and Mean January Temperature. Variations from year to year can also be dramatic. The figures suggest that Clare shouldn't be able to produce high quality rieslings, but slightly cooler individual sites, cold nights and moderating cool breezes are but three factors the figures don't address.

<b>REGIONAL COMPARISONS</b>		
<b>REGION</b>	<b>HDD</b>	<b>MJT</b>
Porongurups	1441	19.0
Clare	1770	21.9
Eden Valley	1390	19.4
Henty	1204	17.7
Southern Tasmania	1013	16.8
Canberra	1410	20.2
<b>From <a href="http://www.winecompanion.com.au/">http://www.winecompanion.com.au/</a></b>		
	<b>HDD</b>	<b>MJT</b>
Rheingau	1197	19.0
Alsace	1290	19.7
Wachau	1190	19.4
<b>From various sources</b>		
<b>HDD</b> Heat Degree Days		
<b>MJT</b> Mean January/July Temperature		
<b>Heat Degree Days</b> is calculated by adding up the amount that the temperature exceeds 10 degrees Celsius each day of the vine's growing season.		

We conclude with the message that if you are not buying Australian rieslings, you're missing out on some of the world's finest examples of dry wines made from a truly glorious grape. Sauvignon blanc? Pfft!

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