



RIESLING from the ashes

When judges are kicking down the door to join in with a tasting, and medalists are hailing from all corners and at all price-points, you know you have a special grape on your hands. Patrick Schmitt reports on the Global Riesling Masters

OF ALL the grapes that featured in September's Global Masters, it was Riesling that attracted the most interest from our pool of potential judges. While we coaxed Masters of Wine to sample Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay, we actually turned some away when it came to Riesling, such was its popularity among the professionals. As a result,

before the grape was even tasted, we were acutely aware of the strong affection that exists in the trade for Riesling.

However, it was only after the tasting that we realised the force of feeling when it comes to the handling of this grape, which, few would disagree, is capable of producing some of the greatest and most distinctive white wines in the world.

And just as great Chardonnay can result from an ideal balance between fruit and oak, great Riesling is about a balance too, but one between sugar and acidity. As competition judge Neil Sommerfelt MW commented, "The balance between the residual sugar and the acidity provides the key – and at all levels of price and from all regions."



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Findings from the tasting

- ▶ There was a high demand to judge in the Global Riesling Masters because the grape is much-loved among professionals.
- ▶ The results proved that top quality Riesling must achieve a balance between residual sugar and acidity.
- ▶ The tasting also highlighted the versatility of Riesling, which can be made in a variety of styles from diverse sources.
- ▶ Riesling's characteristic petrol aroma was considered a positive component when present at low levels as part of a complex aroma.
- ▶ The high proportion of silvers proved that the average standard of Riesling, even at low price points, is very high.
- ▶ Riesling has a strong and clearly identifiable personality.

In other words, it is not the actual level of sugar that matters. Neither sweetness nor sharpness should dominate the wine, but together they should enhance it. Hence, stated judge Alex Hunt MW, "We rewarded balance... as well as complexity" (see pages 48-52 for Anne Krebiehl MW's feature on Riesling).

Evidence of Riesling's rare ability to both please and cleanse the palate, even when sugar is present in massive quantities, was behind the fact that our sole "Master" in the competition was by far

white grape in the world, but it is certainly the most versatile," commented Sebastian Payne MW. Proving his point, the second highest scoring wine of the tasting was a bone dry example from Australia: Jacob's Creek Steingarten Riesling 2012. After this particular wine's source was revealed, Beverly Tabron MW admitted she had thought it was European, and described the wine as a "revelation". Further proof of the grape's adaptability can be seen in the source countries of the gold medal winners, as well as range of sugar levels.

GLOBAL SUCCESS

Rieslings from Australia, Germany, France, Chile and Canada all gained top medals in the tasting, including, it was interesting to note, two major global wine brands: the aforementioned Jacob's Creek, and Cono Sur, with its single vineyard Riesling that, like the former, was another that many of the tasters thought was European.

Although few gold medals were awarded, the tasting saw a remarkably high number of silvers relative to the number of entries, pointing to Riesling's reliably high level of quality. "There were good wines at each price point," recorded Payne, adding, "there was a huge proportion of silvers compared to the number of wines entered: the average standard was incredibly high." Summing up, he stated, "Riesling is a very safe bet."

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the sweetest – 2004 Kaseler Kehnagel Eiswein from Bischöfliche Weingüter Trier. Containing 185g/l, and waves of alternating dried and fresh fruit flavours, it finished with a pleasant tang to make sure one would salivate, and reach for another sip.

But not all our high scorers were laden with sugar. Indeed, the range of wines at the top of the table attests to another important Riesling trait: versatility. "Riesling is either the best or second best

Hunt agreed, although he commented that Riesling "should be something that can be done well at a relatively low cost" – a point that was proven by the fact four of the six golds in the competition were for wines under £20.

A CERTAIN WHIFF

Of course, no Riesling tasting could be complete without a discussion about the scent of petrol – an aroma closely associated with the grape, particularly after many years ageing in bottle.

Although considered a defect in a wine when present at very high levels, particularly in a youthful wine, in low levels the judges felt this smell can add a layer of complexity as well as character to the wines. "When Riesling is very good it has the most fantastic smell, but there are people who really don't like Riesling, and I think one of the reasons is that they don't like the smell of petrol," proposed Payne, before pointing out that of all the possible Riesling characters, it is the smell

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Winery	Wine Name	Country	Vintage	Medal	Price	ABV	Sugar g/l
Dry (up to 4g/l)							
Charles Schleret	Alsace Riesling 2007	France	2007	Gold	£10-£20	13	4
Karl May	Bechtheimer Geyersberg Riesling 2013	Germany	2013	Gold	£10-£20	13	0.8
Jacob's Creek – Pernod Ricard	Jacob's Creek Steingarten Riesling	Australia	2012	Gold	£10-£20	12	1.3
Jacob's Creek – Pernod Ricard	Jacob's Creek Reserve Barossa Riesling	Australia	2013	Silver	Under £10	11.5	2.9
Freigut Thallern Wein GmbH	Riesling Alte Ried	Austria	2012	Silver	£10-£20	13	3.5
Australian Vintage	McGuigan Shortlist Riesling	Australia	2014	Silver	£10-£20	12.4	2
Vintelooper	Vintelooper R1/13 Watervale Riesling 2013	Australia	2013	Silver	£10-£20	11	1
Jacob's Creek – Pernod Ricard	Jacob's Creek Riesling	Australia	2012	Silver	£10-£20	12	3.2
Larry Cherubino	Cherubino Riesling	Australia	2011	Silver	£10-£20	12	
Domäne Wachau	Riesling Smaragd Kellerberg	Austria	2013	Silver	£20-£30	13.5	4
Wakefield/Taylors Wines	St Andrews Riesling	Australia	2012	Silver	£20-£30	12.5	0.16
Wakefield/Taylors Wines	St Andrews Riesling	Australia	2013	Silver	£20-£30	11.5	0.13
Penfolds	Penfolds Bin 51	Australia	2014	Silver	£20-£30	12.5	1.8
Wakefield/Taylors Wines	St Andrews Riesling	Australia	2014	Bronze	£20-£30	11	0.07
Chateau Ste. Michelle	Dry Riesling	USA	2013	Bronze	Under £10	12.5	0.72
Viña Cousiño Macul	Isidora	Chile	2013	Bronze	Under £10	13.6	1.5
Brotherhood	Dry Riesling – New York Premium Selection	USA	2013	Bronze	£10-£20	12	0.3
Ste. Michelle Wine Estates	Riesling Eroica	USA	2013	Bronze	£10-£20	12	1.55
Charles Schleret	Alsace Riesling 2005	France	2005	Bronze	£10-£20	13	4
Brooks	Ara	USA	2011	Bronze	£10-£20	11	4
Medium Dry (up to 12g/l)							
Cono Sur	Single Vineyard Riesling	Chile	2013	Gold	£10-£20	13.5	7.5
Cono Sur	Reserva Especial Riesling	Chile	2013	Silver	Under £10	13.5	7.3
Domdechant Werner'sches Weingut	Domdechant Werner Hochheim Riesling Classic	Germany	2012	Silver	£10-£20	12	12
Langmeil	Eden Valley Riesling	Australia	2012	Silver	£10-£20	13.5	6
Jean Biecher et Fils	Alsace Grand Cru Riesling Schlossberg	France	2013	Silver	£10-£20	12.5	12
Cave de Ribeaupville	Riesling Alsace Grand Cru Osterberg AOC	France	2010	Silver	£20-£30	13	6.1
Villa Huesgen Weingut	Villa Huesgen Alte Reben Riesling	Germany	2013	Silver	£20-£30	13	8.1
Die Weinmacher GmbH	Blue Fish Riesling Trocken	Germany	2013	Bronze	Under £10	12	8.7
Freigut Thallern Wein GmbH	Riesling Selektion	Austria	2013	Bronze	Under £10	12.5	7
Nederburg Wines	Nederburg Winemaster's Reserve Riesling	South Africa	2014	Bronze	Under £10	12.6	8.4
Firesteed Cellars	Riesling	USA	2011	Bronze	Under £10	11.5	7
Brotherhood	Riesling – New York Premium Selection	USA	2013	Bronze	£10-£20	12	4.5
Kloster Eberbach	Wiesbadener Neroberg 'Crescentia' Dry Riesling	Germany	2013	Bronze	£10-£20	12	5.4
Bischöfliche Weingüter Trier	Kaseler Nies'chen Riesling Spätlese Trocken	Germany	2012	Bronze	£10-£20	11	9.3
Cave de Ribeaupville	Riesling 2013 Collection, AOC Alsace	France	2013	Bronze	£10-£20	13	5.5
ZGM	Invenio Riesling	Germany	2013	Bronze	£10-£20	12	10.8

of sherbet that puts him off, “although that seems to have diminished.”

Meanwhile, Hunt commented, “I don’t mind if the petrol is there as part of the aromatic mesh, but if comes on very strong and very early [in the wine’s development] then it is upsetting.”

What was apparent however was that the wines in the tasting, with few exceptions, seemed to overtly display Rieslingness, if such a word exists. “Riesling has personality,” stated Payne. Similarly, Hunt commented, “All the

‘There are people who really don’t like Riesling, and I think one of the reasons is that they don’t like the smell of petrol’

wines had varietal character, and very few would not be immediately identifiable as Riesling.” But what made them obviously Riesling? Well, aside from the occasional hint of petrol, Sommerfelt in particular listed a few key traits for the grape. “Stylistically, depending on a wine’s particular origins, I would expect to see wines exhibit flavours that are redolent of citrus fruits (lemon/lime), exotic fruits (peach/nectarine) with a keen-edge of vibrant acidity and minerality, depending on a wine’s

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Winery	Wine Name	Country	Vintage	Medal	Price	ABV	Sugar g/l
Medium Sweet (up to 45g/l)							
Schmitt Söhne	Rethink Riesling	Germany	2012	Silver	Under £10	11	15
Mission Estate	Mission Estate Riesling	New Zealand	2012	Silver	£10-£20	10.8	13.8
Bischöfliche Weingüter Trier	Kaseler Nies'chen Riesling Spätlese Feinherb	Germany	2012	Silver	£20-£30	11	22.3
Die Weinmacher GmbH	Blue Fish sweet Riesling	Germany	2013	Bronze	Under £10	11	29
Sula Vineyards	Sula Riesling	India	2014	Bronze	£10-£20	10.5	15
Langmeil	Live Wire	Australia	2012	Bronze	£10-£20	8.5	41
Schmitt Söhne	Thomas Schmitt Private Collection Kabinett	Germany	2013	Bronze	£10-£20	9	42.6
Framingham Wines	Framingham Classic Riesling	New Zealand	2013	Bronze	£10-£20	12	17
Friedrich Wilhelm Gymnasium	Fritz Willi Riesling	Germany	2013	Bronze	£10-£20	10.5	20.2
Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt	Josephshöfer Riesling Kabinett	Germany	2013	Bronze	£10-£20	9.5	23.6
Sweet (+ 45g/l)							
Bischöfliche Weingüter Trier	Kaseler Kehrnel Riesling Eiswein	Germany	2004	Master	£50+	9.5	185
Peller Estates Winery	Peller Estates Signatures Series Riesling Icewine, VQA Niagara Peninsula, Ontario Canada	Canada	2012	Gold	£30-£50	10.5	209
Zimmermann-Graeff & Müller	Peter & Peter Riesling Sweet	Germany	2013	Silver	Under £10	9	51
Bischöfliche Weingüter Trier	Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Kabinett	Germany	2011	Silver	£10-£20	10.5	49.2
Reichsgraf Von Kesselstatt	Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese	Germany	2013	Silver	£20-£30	7.5	67.7
Dr Loosen	Dr Loosen Erdener Treppchen Riesling Auslese	Germany	2013	Silver	£30-£50	7.5	104.6
Friedrich Wilhelm Gymnasium	Graacher Domprobst Spätlese	Germany	2012	Bronze	£10-£20	10	55.6
Louis Guntrum	Riesling Spätlese Oppenheim Herrenberg	Germany	2013	Bronze	£10-£20	8.5	83

origins.” Continuing, he noted, “Alcohol levels will vary according to the origin, chosen style and vintage but in all cases a purity, vigour and tension should be evident to a greater or lesser degree.” While picking up on the point raised at the outset, he concluded, “Even wines at the very sweet end of the spectrum should offer sufficient acidity in order to ensure that the wine is ultimately appetising, leaving the palate cleansed and refreshed.”

DEPTH FROM OLD AGE

But if there was one key aspect to Riesling that was not addressed in the tasting, it was the grape’s remarkable ability to develop greater complexity after many years, decades even, ageing in bottle.

With the majority of wines from the 2010 vintage onwards, the judges weren’t able to enjoy the beauty of aged Riesling, although we plan to correct this next year, with a new category for older examples. And once this is in place, one imagines there will be even greater demand among the judges to take part in the Global Masters for Riesling. db

Judges

Clockwise from top left: Alex Hunt MW, Sebastian Payne MW, Patrick Schmitt, Neil Sommerfelt MW, Ronan Sayburn MS, Beverly Tabbron MW, Beverley Blanning MW, Anne Krebiehl MW

