

# Read this if you don't like riesling

Bob Campbell MW pens an ode to the variety

**I love riesling.** It's my favourite white grape variety. Pinot noir just beats it for first place overall. Why do I love it? Let me count the ways:

- \* **It comes in many different guises**, from searingly dry to lusciously sweet.
- \* **It's very food-friendly** – as long as you match wine and food sweetness levels.
- \* **The best examples** age superbly.
- \* **It is clearly the best-value** wine on sale in this country.
- \* **There are few bad rieslings** and many great ones.

My wife, Marion, doesn't share my passion for riesling. She likes only bone-dry white wines. Chardonnay is her favourite. This is a bit tricky because it reduces the number of times I can open one of the many wonderful rieslings quietly maturing in my wine cellar. In fact, to be honest, I've probably got more riesling than I'm likely to be able to drink.

If all the people who love riesling moved to the South Island and those who hate it moved north, the population of the South Island would shrink considerably. Riesling lovers are a minority group.

I suspect that many people don't like riesling because they think it's sweet or, at least, not

dry. That is simply not true. I recently tasted 172 rieslings (heaven!) from around the world, but mostly made in New Zealand. I divided them into the four sweetness levels recommended by the International Riesling Foundation (IRF) using a calculation that includes residual sugar, acidity and pH (strength of acidity). The largest group (57 wines) was dry, the next largest (54) was medium/dry, then medium/sweet (48), while the smallest group (12) was sweet.

I encouraged Marion to taste the best of the dry rieslings left over from the tasting. She begrudgingly admitted that they weren't too bad. She acknowledged that she could drink any of them (and she did). This is a small step for riesling, but a giant leap forward for our household. I celebrated by buying a case of Mt Difficulty 2008 Target Gully Riesling (\$24.95 a bottle) – it's not dry, but it is terrific.

Here are a few tips for anyone who likes dry white wine, and especially for those who don't like riesling.

\* **To find a dry New Zealand riesling**, it's (almost) as simple as reading the label.

Most local dry rieslings are clearly labelled as such, although in a few cases you might have to



Akaroa,  
New Zealand

hunt around on the back label. Unfortunately not all rieslings labelled as 'dry' meet my definition, or the IRF's definition, of dry. For example Camshorn 2007 Salix Clays Dry Riesling, Amisfield 2008 Dry Riesling, d'Akaroa 2008 Dry Riesling and Tresillian 2008 Dry Riesling are all, in my opinion, medium/dry.

\* **Buy Aussie.** Most rieslings from the Clare and Eden Valleys of South Australia are bone dry. It's riskier buying riesling from cooler Australian regions such as Tasmania and the Great Southern area of West Australia as they have crisper acidity that's often balanced by a little sweetness. Perhaps because it tends to be reliably dry, riesling is more popular in Australia than it is in New Zealand.

\* **Buy Austrian.** Most Austrian riesling is bone-dry. It is also generally very good, though a little more expensive than riesling from New Zealand and Australia. It can be hard to find, although a growing number of good wines are now being imported into this country. The website [www.wineferret.co.nz](http://www.wineferret.co.nz) offers five Austrian rieslings.

## 3 OF THE BEST dry rieslings

### 1 Kiwi made

Craggy Range 2008  
Te Muna Road Riesling,  
Martinborough, \$25.95

This stunning local riesling from a top producer and a cracker vintage has ripe, almost succulent tree fruit, floral and citrus flavours and a bone-dry finish. An intriguing and attractive wine with surprising weight for a totally dry riesling.

### 2 Aussie rules

Mesh 2008 Eden Valley  
Riesling, \$35

The product of a joint venture between Grosset (Australia's top riesling maker) and Yalumba, this is a rich wine in a totally dry style. Subtle flavours include citrus/lemon, toasted nut/yeast lees and mineral. It has a silken texture and a lengthy finish. Imported by Negociants, 09-366 1149.

### 3 Austrian magic

Salomon Undhof 2007  
Pfaffenberg Riesling, \$36

Sealed with a glass stopper, this is a typical (for Austria) dry style with hints of spice, citrus blossom and slate/mineral. Very pure with a delicate, silken texture and lengthy finish, it is a subtle, classy wine that shows impressive power. Imported by Eurowine, 04-472 2638.



mesh

