

Photography **Jennifer Soo**

2009 Frankland Estate Isolation Ridge Riesling (Frankland River, WA), \$32

Frankland Estate was planted in 1988 and from its first vintage, the rieslings were individual – intense, refined and complex. Their 2009 has aromas of fresh lime and white nectarine with a touch of earthy minerality. The palate is unevolved yet already shows great finesse and style.



2008 J.L. Wolf Wachenheimer Riesling (Pfalz, Germany), \$31

The J.L. Wolf estate dates back to 1756 with its Wachenheimer vineyard. The deep sandstone soils give a rich earthiness with a weight and intensity rarely seen in Australian rieslings. Apricot and ripe stonefruits, honey and a regional earthiness give depth and breadth to this extraordinary riesling.



2006 Pierre Sparr Riesling Selection (Alsace, France), \$28

After nine generations at Sigolsheim, the Sparr family know how to make riesling. This is typical Alsace – rich, full flavoured and surprisingly textural. Aromas of ripe apricots and wild honey are repeated on the palate, its bottle-developed characters restrained by an underlying citrusy acidity.



2008 Prager "Steinriegl" Riesling Federspiel (Wachau, Austria), \$55

Prager vineyards are planted on the pure schist – an ancient, crumbling soil that gives an earthiness to this incredible wine. Restraint is the key with intense perfume and supple, spiced citrus-fruit flavours. It's classed as Federspiel – a dry wine of a moderate (12 per cent) alcohol. This is special stuff.



2007 Valli Old Vine Riesling (Central Otago, New Zealand), \$38

Grant Taylor is an Otago native, returning from California in 1993, when there were just 20 hectares under vine. One plot planted in 1981 at Alexandra was riesling. It's highly perfumed with an intense, steely spine of mineral acid supporting rich, sweet lime flavours with a long, lingering finish.

wine

rieslings

There are plenty of reasons to be sweet on this versatile white wine, writes **Peter Bourne.**



Riesling is a very versatile white wine. It can be bone dry or sumptuously sweet and anywhere in-between. In its youth, it's fresh and vivacious, packed with spicy citrus-fruit flavours. Mature rieslings are fuller, rounder and richer with intense flavours of dry toast, candied peel and lime marmalade. Good rieslings age gracefully for 10 or more years while the great happily live beyond 30.

Young rieslings make the perfect aperitif. Dry styles love fresh seafood – oysters, prawns and sweet white-fleshed fish such as whiting and flathead – while slightly sweet rieslings (known as off-dry) pair well with spicy food, especially Vietnamese or Thai. Mature rieslings match with dense fish dishes, chicken in many guises and even pork. And luscious dessert-style rieslings are simply among the world's great pleasures.

But while riesling is adaptable in the glass, it's much less forgiving in the vineyard. If it's too cool, the wines are thin and insipid. Even worse, if it's too hot, the wines are broad, coarse and flabby.

Riesling prefers a continental climate with warm-ish days, cool nights and cold winters. The valleys of Eden and Clare in South Australia offer just that and have produced our best rieslings since the middle of the 19th century. Little wonder when you cast an eye to the source of Australia's original riesling vines – Germany and its near neighbour, the Alsace region of France. Both offer distinctly continental climates along the complex Rhine and Mosel river system. Sure, they're both cooler than the Eden or Clare but selected sites on the steep river banks are designed to encourage maximum sunlight exposure and allow the ancient vines to ripen successfully in most seasons.

Antipodean winegrowers have discovered that riesling also thrives in cool maritime conditions, on sites influenced by the Southern Ocean. The Great Southern area of Western Australia, including Frankland River, the Porongurup Ranges and Mount Barker, makes delightful, lime-fresh rieslings. A number of marvellous, mineraly rieslings come from Henty on the Victorian coast – with a favourite made by the Thomsons of Crawford River.

And Tasmania also produces excellent rieslings with intense honey and lemon-sherbet flavours, while across the ditch in New Zealand, the style is more floral.

Unfortunately, riesling fell from its once exalted position in the 1970s, both in its German homeland – thanks to thin, sickly sweet *leibfraumilch* flooding the European markets – and in Australia, where simple, lolly-ish styles were swamped by brash chardonnay.

Leading Australian evangelists include John Vickery, who created the famed Leo Buring rieslings of the 1960s and '70s, Jeffrey Grosset of his eponymous Clare Valley winery and the Smith Cullam family from Frankland Estate, who host a biennial riesling tasting. Their Frankland Estate International Riesling Tasting is not a competition but rather a celebration of riesling, with makers from around the globe joining the best from Australia for a series of tastings, seminars and dinners.

To see Ernie Loosen from Bernkastel in Germany rubbing shoulders with Jane Mitchell from the Clare and Bert Salomon from Krems in Austria chatting to Stefano Lubiana from Tasmania brings the realisation that the wine world is small and quality riesling is quality riesling – whether it comes from the Adelaide Hills or the Rheingau.