



# RIESLING

## PFALZ IMPRESSIONS

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Riesling is, without doubt, the most misunderstood, most mispronounced and underrated of all *vitis vinifera* (literally wine vine) grape varieties. It is so often associated with the poor quality, medium-sweet German wines that flooded the UK wine market in the 70's and 80's. Yet the fact is that these wines were made from almost every German white grape variety except Riesling. Some of the most popular names from this era still exist and the re-branded Blue Nun and Black Tower are still amongst the most popular wines sold in British supermarkets. The power of marketing!

Riesling (pronounced 'reeceling' not 'riceling') is referred to in Germany as "The King of Grapes" and can produce some of the most exciting and delicious wines of all the grape varieties. The best wines have a purity and intensity like none other with a heady fusion of crisp green apple, delicate floral finesse and a steely mineral punch. Riesling out-ages all other white varieties and indeed most reds! As Riesling wines develop, which they do beautifully, further dimensions appear in the form of honey, toast and petrol.

The main reason Riesling ages so well is due to its inherent high acidity, which is further enhanced when the grape is grown in cool climate areas such as the Mosel in northern Germany. 'Dr L', Ernst Loosen (£6.95, Friarwood, Edinburgh) is a classic example, clean, pure, fresh and crisp. High sugar levels also contribute to longevity and with Riesling having a natural tendency to ripen early, the long and sunny autumns of the Mosel are just

perfect to produce an intense sweetness that will enable the resulting wine to be aged for up to fifty years!

Riesling is capable of producing wine in a wide range of styles, although it undoubtedly shows its best in the sweeter versions. Riesling is susceptible to Botrytis, a desirable fungus known as 'noble rot' that infects the grapes and splits the skins allowing the water in the fruit to evaporate, which has the result of concentrating the sugars and flavours. Wines made from these infected grapes are referred to in Germany as 'Beerenauslese' or 'Trockenbeerenauslese'. While these wines will be intensely sweet, the best will be perfectly balanced with a racy acidity that cuts through the sweetness. You can expect intense crystallised fruit flavours of apricot, orange and marmalade. Absolutely lovely!

Riesling is also used in Germany to make a sweet style of wine called Eiswein (Ice Wine). Here the fruit is left on the vine until temperatures reach -10°C when the grapes freeze (usually late December). The fruit is harvested whilst frozen and the grapes pressed. The resulting wine is amazingly sweet with very pure fruit. Eisweins are some of the most stunning wines I've ever tried. It is inevitably a low volume product and due to the strict conditions required for a successful harvest this premium wine comes with premium prices. This style of wine is perfect for accompanying patés and cheeses, try the Weingut Heribert Boch, Trittenheimer Apotheke Riesling Eiswein (£28.50, Waitrose).

Further south in Germany, in the slightly warmer regions, for example the Pfalz, Riesling still maintains the crisp acidity but tends to show a typical warmer climate tropical fruit expression in the form of mango, pineapple and paw-paw!

Germany is not the only place in the world where Riesling is grown. It is nowhere near as widely planted as Chardonnay or Sauvignon Blanc as it has a preference for a cool climate and can be difficult to grow. An unfashionable image makes it a difficult wine to sell and growers have a tendency to avoid it. Riesling also excels in Alsace (admittedly not far from

Germany!) where it also enjoys the long, dry, sunny autumns it prefers. Alsace Rieslings are usually dry. My favourite producer from Alsace is Rolly Gassmann and his Riesling is one of the best (£11.00, WoodWinters, Bridge of Allan).

In the New World, Riesling is most widely grown in Australia and excels in the Clare Valley & Eden Valley regions of South Australia. This might be slightly unexpected, as the general climate here is hot and dry. However, the vineyards are planted well above sea level and this keeps the temperatures down. The styles are generally dry and have mouth-watering acidity and intense lime zest, Pewsey Vale Riesling (£9.99, Oddbins) - it's pure gin & tonic.

So, if you have a tendency to overlook Riesling and associate it with old fashioned tat, hopefully you might now think again. The King is very much alive - long live the King!

Riesling will be starring in "The Royal Variety Show" at this year's "Wine School at the Fringe" (1-25 August 2008). A 'sell-out' in 2007, "Wine School at the Fringe" is a series of wine tasting events, held on "The Millennium Link" barge, during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. The 2008 programme offers 70 tastings, 10 different shows, 7 old favourites and 3 brand new blockbusters.

Tickets are £16.50 and can be purchased through the fringe box-office from the 9th June 2008, [www.edfringe.com](http://www.edfringe.com) or 0131 226 0000



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