

World Dry Riesling Championship

3 Nov 2004 by JR

Dry Riesling tasting - the results

The following is a list of the wines we tasted in descending order of popularity with the group. First is the name of the wine, then the vintage, then the producer, then the region, then the country and finally, in brackets, the group's average points out of 20 followed by mine.

- 1 **Weissenkirchner Achleiten 1990, Smaragd; Prager/Bodenstein**, Wachau, Austria (18.71/18)
- 2 **Clos Ste Hune 1990**; Trimbach, Alsace, France (17.86/19)
- 3 **Rüdesheimer Berg Schlossberg 1997; Georg Breuer**, Rheingau, Germany (17.82/17)
- 4= **Kellerberg 1995, Smaragd, F.X. Pichler**, Wachau, Austria (17.64/18.5)
- 4= **Gimmeldinger Mandelgarten Spätlese trocken 2002; Christmann**, Pfalz, Germany (17.64/19)
- 6= **Loibner Vision 2002, Smaragd, Högl**, Wachau, Austria (17.39/17.5)
- 6= **Vinothekfüllung 2002 Smaragd; Knoll**, Wachau, Austria (17.39/18.5)
- 8 **Loibenberg 1990, Smaragd, Knoll**, Wachau, Austria (17.36/18.5)
- 9 **Zöbinger Heiligenstein 2002; Hiedler**, Kamptal, Austria (17.29/16)
- 10= **Weissenkirchner Achleiten 2001; Smaragd; Prager**, Wachau, Austria (17.25/17)
- 10= **Zöbinger Heiligenstein, Alte Reben 1997; Bründlmayer**, Kamptal, Austria (17.25/17)
- 10= **Auslese trocken 1990; Gunderloch**, Rheinhessen, Germany (17.25/18)
- 13 **Monzinger Halenberg Auslese trocken 2001; Emrich-Schönleber**, Nahe, Germany (17.18/19)
- 14 **Rüdesheimer Berg Schlossberg 2002, Johannes Leitz**, Rheingau, Germany (17.14/18)
- 15 **Loibenberg 1997, Smaragd; Alzinger**, Wachau, Austria (17.11/18.5)
- 16 **Weissenkirchner Achleiten 2001; Smaragd, Rudi Pichler**, Wachau, Austria (17.07/17)
- 17 **Nussberg 2002; Wieninger**, Vienna, Austria (17.04/16.5)
- 18= **Zöbinger Heiligenstein, Lyra 2002; Bründlmayer**, Kamptal, Austria (17.00/17.5)
- 18= **Schlossberg Grand Cru Cuvée Ste. Catherine 1997**; Weinbach-Faller, Alsace, France (17.00/19.5)
- 20= **Isolation Ridge 2003; Frankland Estate**, Frankland River, Western Australia, Australia (16.96/17)

- 20= Brand 2001**; Zind-Humbrecht, Alsace, France (16.96/18)
- 22 Niederhäuser Herrmannshöhle Spätlese 2002**; **H. Dönnhoff**, Nahe, Germany (16.93/17)
- 23 Privat 2002**; **Nigl**, Kremstal, Austria (16.89/18)
- 24 Vinothek 1990, Smaragd**; **Nikolaihof**, Wachau, Austria (16.79/17)
- 25 Unendlich 2002**; **F.X. Pichler**, Wachau, Austria (16.75/16.5)
- 26 Kallstadter Saumagen Spätlese trocken "R" 1990**; **Koehler-Rupprecht**, Pfalz, Germany (16.68/16)
- 27= Reserve 2003**; Crawford River, Victoria, Australia (16.61/17)
- 27= Polish Hill 1997**; **Grosset**, Clare Valley, Southern Australia (16.61/18)
- 27= Cuvée Frederic Emile 1997**; Trimbach, Alsace, France (16.61/18)
- 30 Jesuitengarten Spätlese trocken 2002**; **Wolf**, Pfalz, Germany (16.54/18)
- 31= Spitzer Singerriedel 1997, Smaragd**; **Hirtzberger**, Wachau, Austria (16.46/18)
- 31= Rangén de Thann 1997**; Zind Humbrecht, Alsace, France (16.46/16.5)
- 33 Hochheimer Hölle Auslese trocken 2002**; **Franz Künstler**, Rheingau, Germany (16.43/18)
- 34 Gaisberg, Alte Reben 1997**; **Schloss Gobelsburg**, Kamptal, Austria (16.21/15)
- 35 Hommage a Jean Hugel 1997**, Hugel, Alsace, France (16.11/17)
- 36 von den Terrassen 1997, Mittelbach**, Dürnstein, Wachau, Austria (15.79/17)

Where to find out more

See my full tasting notes and scores at [The world's best dry Rieslings](#) in purple pages.

The tasting itself

London's louche Groucho Club in Soho is known for many things but does not have a natural affinity with the pristine white wines of Austria. It has nevertheless now been the setting for two of the most seminal blind tastings in the history of Austrian wine. I reported on the first one, in which Austria's native Grüner Veltliner grape trounced some of the finest Chardonnays in the world, [on these pages](#) two years ago.

But the Austrian Wine Marketing Board was keen to prove its prowess with its dry Rieslings too, and therefore organised a repetition of the first tasting in which the Austrians put up 18 of their finest dry Rieslings in various age groups against the most obvious competition. It was left to me and Bavaria-based fine wine merchant Jan Paulson of rare-wine.com to decide what that competition might be. And it was because Jan Paulson is by day a Swedish dentist, London-trained, who joined the Groucho in memory of his student days in Soho, that the two Austrian tastings have been held there. Paulson has no formal connection with Austrian wine - indeed most of the wines he sells are French classics made before the Second World War - but he is an interested observer of the dramatic revitalisation of Austrian wine in the last 20 years.

Many of the tasters were the same in both Grüner Veltliner and Riesling taste-offs, but the Riesling one saw a particularly high proportion of (notably punctual) sommeliers, including an Australian and a Frenchwoman. The other tasters last week were either wine merchants or wine writers. The scoring was overseen by David Hunter of the Wine & Spirit Education Trust who worked for many years with German wines. I was determined that this time the Austrian candidates would be set against the finest dry Rieslings I could think of.

We were to taste the 36 wines in six flights of six, three flights ranging over the vintages 2001-2003, two flights of wines made 1995-1997 and one flight of 1990s, a great vintage in most of Europe. But it can be difficult to source top-quality Australian Riesling with any age on it, as I found. The last flight was therefore bereft of representatives from Down Under and one of our middle-aged flights had to do without Petaluma Riesling 1997 which arrived from Australia only after the tasting.

Australia apart, the obvious places to look for top quality dry Riesling are relatively few and far between. New Zealand is making more, better and drier Riesling with every year but has not yet established a copper-bottomed reputation for this variety. South Africa seems thoroughly out of love with Riesling, even though the likes of Klein Constantia and Buitenverwachting have shown they can make fine examples in cool Constantia, Mark Thatcher's old manor. Chile is just starting to get serious with Rieslings from the far south. Navarro of Mendocino would have the greatest claim to submit a dry Riesling from California and, as I wrote here last April, there are more and more creditable versions from Washington and Oregon, but I could not easily think of an American world champion dry Riesling.

Within Europe I have tasted dry(ish) Rieslings made in virtually every country, but they generally lack finesse, the potential to age magnificently which is one of Riesling's hallmarks, the ability to express terroir which is another, and can easily tend to coarseness and bitterness.

To find truly great, satin-smooth, dry Riesling, it seemed to me it was necessary to go to Alsace and Germany itself, although even in Germany, home of Riesling, dry wines have only recently become (hugely) fashionable once more. It was relatively easy to pick out a couple of potentially great dry German Rieslings, from Gunderloch and Koehler-Ruprecht, made in 1990 whereas in this decade the choice is becoming increasingly overwhelming. Many of the most successful German wines in this tasting were older wines labelled Auslese trocken, meaning they were dry wines made from exceptionally ripe grapes, but this is a category fast being replaced by the new Grosses Gewächs designation within Germany.

There were no wines from as far north as the Mosel in this collection - the Mosel is generally better suited to making fruitier, more delicate Rieslings - but there were two from the Nahe (including one of my favourites of the entire tasting) and three from the Rheingau as well as the Gunderloch from the Rheinhessen and three from the Pfalz.

Alsace, just over the Rhine from the southern Pfalz, has been making fine dry Riesling for decades so I decided to concentrate on the top wines of the most established names in this extremely varied French region: Faller, Hugel, Trimbach and Zind Humbrecht who between them supplied six wines. Faller's was my favourite of the entire tasting but was a mere middle ranker with most other tasters. In fact, I was generally much keener on Alsace Rieslings than the group as a whole which put every single Alsace other than Trimbach's Clos Ste Hune 1990 in the lower half of the overall ranking.

What the group liked best was, much to the relief of the head of the Austrian Wine Marketing Board, Austrian Riesling. One Wachau Riesling in particular, Prager/Bodenstein's Weissenkirchner Achleiten 1990 Smaragd was the group's clear favourite, and eight of the group's top 14 wines were from Austria - although since half the wines tasted were Austrian, this is not quite such a walk-over as Austria enjoyed in the Grüner Veltliner tasting.

The other non-Austrian group favourites were, in declining order, that miraculous Clos Ste Hune 1990 from Trimbach in Alsace in second place; in third place Rudesheimer Berg Schlossberg 1997 from George Breuer who had died suddenly in his early 50s this summer; Christmann's seriously exciting and nervy 2002 in equal fourth place; and wines from Gunderloch, Emrich Schönleber and Johannes Leitz.

Although I gave it 18 points out of 20, I found the Prager/Bodenstein winning wine just a little too full and developed for my, obviously warped, taste. In truth the marks for this stunning selection of one of the most refreshing wine styles in the world were all very close together (much closer than those for the Chardonnays had been). My marks varied from 15 for a rather old 1997 from Austria's Schloss Gobelsburg to 19.5 for the Faller 1997. The group average mark varied from 15.79 for another tired Austrian 1997 from Mittelbach to 18.71 for the Prager/Bodenstein 1990.

Overall I found rather to my surprise that I had marked the Alsace wines highest, with an average score of 18 points out of 20 over its six wines. Germany's generally racy nine examples came next, averaging 17.67, while my personal average scores were 17.33 for both Australia's distinctively lime-flavoured three wines and for Austria's 18 satisfyingly plump examples, but there was just a whisker in it. A whisker of the finest white wine grape in the world, wherever it is grown.

My favourite dry Rieslings

Group placings in brackets after mine.

1 (18) **Schlossberg Riesling Grand Cru Cuvée Ste Catherine 1997** Weinbach-Faller, Alsace, France

2 (2) **Clos Ste Hune Riesling 1990** Trimbach, Alsace, France

3 (4=) **Gimmeldinger Mandelgarten Riesling Spätlese trocken 2002 Christmann**, Pfalz, Germany

4 (13) **Monzinger Halenberg Riesling Auslese trocken 2001 Emrich Schönleber**, Nahe, Germany

5 (6=) **Vinothekfüllung Riesling Smaragd 2002 Knoll**, Wachau, Austria

6 (15) **Loibenberg Riesling Smaragd 1997 Alzinger**, Wachau, Austria

7 (4=) **Kellerberg Riesling Smaragd 1995 F X Pichler**, Wachau, Austria

8 (8) **Loibenberg Riesling Smaragd 1990 Knoll**, Wachau, Austria

The overall group ranking and my own tasting notes and scores are at [The world's best dry Rieslings](#) on purple pages.