Ch Grand Traverse Riesling, Lot 49 2010 Michigan

9 Feb 2012 by Jancis Robinson

$21

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I spent Monday and Tuesday this week at FEIRT, a two-day international Riesling love-in in Sydney organised on a regular basis by Frankland Estate of Western Australia. They used to hold it every two years but, as reported in Developments in Rieslingland, will now be holding it every three years, in rotation with the Rheingau event and one in Washington state organised largely by Chateau Ste Michelle.

Since the beginning, Berlin-based wine writer Stuart Pigott has played a significant role in finding good non-Australian Rieslings for them to show, while Peter Bourne has done the same for the Australian Rieslings. They both did a superb job. In all we tasted blind 87 top-quality Rieslings from around the world, of all ages and levels of sweetness – in suitable flights assembled by Stuart. One of the most remarkable wines was my favourite wine in the very first flight of dry Rieslings, in which the other five wines were made by Freycinet of Tasmania, Robert Weil and Rebholz of Germany, Nigl of Austria and Cave Spring of Ontario.

To my mind – and I was by no means alone in my enthusiasm – the most interesting wine by far, a wine I thought might be a wild-fermented dry German, was **Chateau Grand Traverse, Lot 49 2010 Old Mission Peninsula**, a relatively new addition to the range of wines made by this energetic Riesling specialist of the Old Mission Peninsula, an 18-mile spit of land projecting into Grand Traverse Bay of Lake Michigan that moderates the climate up here in what is almost Canada. Chateau Grand Traverse is the oldest of the cluster of wineries in this tourist mecca and was founded in 1974 by Ed O'Keefe to specialise, unusually then for Michigan, in vinifera wines. Ed's sons Eddie and Sean are now at the helm and have been experimenting with small, superior lots of their favourite grape Riesling – but not with rapacious pricing.

Their website currently offers no fewer than nine different Rieslings, including this newish offering. The 2010 Lot 49 was made from a particular block, in a warmer than usual year and began life in stainless steel before being transferred to a 1,200 litre cask. You can read the technical sheet here and see that it has 13% alcohol and 6.5 g/l residual sugar. I loved the energy in this wine, the slightly funky but extremely interesting nose and the fact that it tasted bone dry (total acidity is 7.8 g/l, pH 3.25) but had such an impressive array of wild-flower aromas. I gave it 17 points out of 20 for what it is worth and would drink it with great pleasure from now for the next five years.

At just $21 a bottle for a wine of which only 130 cases were made, it is a real steal.

Alas I cannot find any stockists other than the winery itself although the O'Keefes have assured me, thanks to the wonder of Twitter, that it can be found in several local restaurants and possibly still at Michael's Genuine in Miami.

I know it is a bit frustrating to have such a small-production, hardly distributed wine showcased here but I do hope that I can encourage more people to take first-class American Riesling seriously. See also Wollersheim in Wisconsin and the top examples of New York state's Finger Lakes.

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