

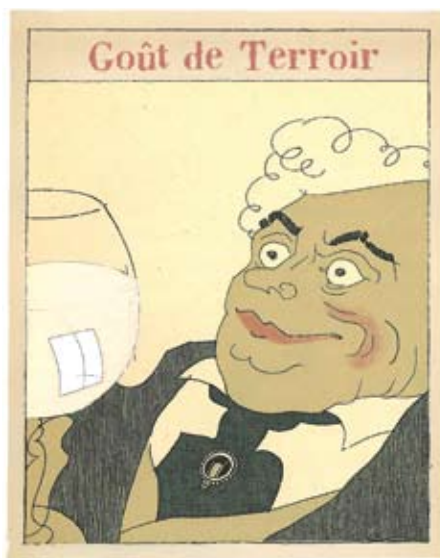
# PUREST OF INTENTIONS AUSTRALIAN RIESLING

Australian Riesling exists in its own bubble, markedly distinct both from its German antecedents and from other Australian white wines. **Margaret Rand**, fresh from a visit down under, assesses the direction that Australian Riesling is taking. **Gérard Basset MS MW** and **Alex Hunt** contribute to a lively discussion

Tasting South Australian Rieslings with a bunch of young show judges schooled in sensory studies, part of the course of the Australian Wine Research Institute, is a salutary experience. It's also rather harder work than anything *The World of Fine Wine* puts its tasters through. The Royal Adelaide Wine Show preceded this *WFW* tasting by only a few weeks and is relevant because judging there demonstrated exactly what Australians—or at least those who subscribe to the show system—are looking for in Riesling. And what they are looking for, with greater or lesser degrees of rigor, is purity. That's purity with no stuck ferment characters, no volatile characters, and no sweetness. They want delicacy, and they never, ever use terms like “distinguished.” It's all about sensory analysis.

The shows see their role as directing wine styles in Australia. Not everybody wants to take part: There are producers who criticize what they see as the narrowness of show-judge taste and prefer to go their own way. But Australia is perhaps the only country in the world where residual sugar in Riesling can still be considered almost shocking.

That, then, is the context of these wines, and it is very unlike the context of German, Austrian, or Alsace Riesling.



However, Riesling is no newcomer to Australia: The Clare and Eden Valleys have been growing Riesling since the 1840s, and it was the classic Australian white until Chardonnay came along. It has always been one of the longest-lived of Australian wines, developing a toasty, limey character that marks it out from other classic Rieslings of the world. But there was a time when the word “Riesling” nearly lost its meaning altogether. As recently as the late 1980s, there was a big-company move to adopt the term for any old white wine regardless of variety—and usually any old white wine in a cask. (Makers of Riesling that really *was* Riesling were

supposed to label it “Rhine Riesling.”) Jeffrey Grosset’s opposition to the plan earned him threats, but he won the battle, and Riesling still means Riesling. In view of this, it is probably just as well that Riesling has remained, by and large, the province of small- to medium-sized companies, where individuality has a chance to flourish.

That individuality is currently feeling its way toward more powerful, richer wines—wines with more complexity, wines with more generosity. This, to Riesling lovers, is reassuring: Yes, we want purity in Riesling, but we want risk, too.

Does that mean compromising purity? To ask the question at all reveals one's Old World background—a background in which complexity has traditionally been seen as a series of low-level faults. Perhaps that definition is outdated; in any case, one wouldn't expect it to cut much ice in an Australian winery.

Low-level faults can of course easily become high-level faults; this is where the risk comes in. But can a wine be safe

austere, mineral, tight, and lean. Eden, one might think as one puts on a jacket, can be a bit of a misnomer. But of course it's not homogenous. Keyneton, at an altitude of 1,300ft (400m), is warmer than Pewsey Vale at 1,600ft (500m). But both Eden and Clare have cool nights, and those plunging temperatures once the sun is down are crucial to the success of Riesling. In 2008, when, for a period of 15 days, temperatures were well into the

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and exciting? And if you insist on purity, are you making complexity much harder to attain?

"The two are not mutually exclusive," says Louisa Rose, head winemaker at Yalumba. "But starting with purity and going to complexity is harder than starting off with complexity as a series of low-level faults." She adds: "A lot of the texture in European Riesling is indicative of botrytis, in a positive way. You get that extra depth of texture and complexity that we don't have in Australia. There's also terroir complexity, especially from slate soil, and it's also the winemaking. In Australia we make Riesling in a very clean manner."

Lees stirring or other techniques may be common for other grape varieties, but not for Riesling. "If you were making a wine to age for longer, it might be appropriate," muses Rose, "but we get so much beautiful fruit..." Stainless-steel vats and refrigeration have been standard in Australia for 40 years; what is innovative is using wild yeast and big old-oak vats. "We're trying to get away from predictability toward more texture, more complexity," she says. So yes, purity—but not at all costs. There are now some low-alcohol Rieslings with residual sugar being made in Australia. They may even be the future. But they're not mainstream just yet.

The classic style of Australian Riesling comes from the Clare and Eden valleys. Elsewhere, Tasmania is developing a reputation for the grape, but so far it's producing a series of individually good wines rather than showing a distinct style. So the twin poles are still Clare and Eden.

Clare wines tend to have more natural generosity than Eden: It's warmer—warm enough for olive trees to look perfectly at home. Clare soil ranges from Watervale's red soil over limestone to the slate and shale of Polish Hill. Soils are poor in both, though Watervale has a more abundant feel to it. The two styles are very different: Watervale gives savory, rich wines; Polish Hill, intensity and power, and more austerity and leanness—more like Eden, perhaps.

The hills, part of the Barossa Range, that make up the Eden Valley, can be almost bleak, and Eden wines are

90s F (30s C), the night-cooling effect failed, and it was hardly any cooler at midnight than during the day. In this vintage, the best wines are those picked before the heat. Otherwise, the grapes raisined on the vines and had to be picked willy-nilly, even during the heat of the day.

As for fashion—well, Riesling isn't trendy in Australia at all at the moment. "We don't want it to be," says Rose. What goes up comes down. Much better to be niche. And pure—mostly.

**Average and range of scores**

	Average	Range
Gérard Basset MS MW	13	12–17.5
Alex Hunt	15	8–15.5
Margaret Rand	15.5	13–18.5

**Gérard Basset's top wines**

- 2007 Pipers Brook Vineyard Riesling Tasmania 17.5
- 2007 Grosset-Hill Smith Mesh Riesling Eden Valley 17
- 2007 St Hallett Riesling Eden Valley 17
- 2007 Ferngrove Cossack Riesling Frankland River 16.5
- 2007 Knappstein Hand Picked Riesling Clare Valley 16.5
- 2008 Mount Horrocks Watervale Riesling Clare Valley 16.5
- 2007 Ninth Island Riesling Tasmania 16.5

**Alex Hunt's top wines**

- 2005 Henschke Julius Riesling Eden Valley 15.5
- 2005 Leasingham Early Release Riesling Clare Valley 15.5
- 2008 Grosset Polish Hill Riesling Clare Valley 15
- 2007 Knappstein Hand Picked Riesling Clare Valley 15
- 2007 Mitchell Watervale Riesling Clare Valley 15
- 2007 Jim Barry The Florita Riesling Clare Valley 14.5

**Margaret Rand's top wines**

- 2005 Henschke Julius Riesling Eden Valley 18.5
- 2005 Peter Lehmann Riesling Eden Valley 17.5
- 2005 Tamar Ridge Riesling Tasmania 17.5
- 2007 Grosset-Hill Smith Mesh Riesling Eden Valley 17

# (goût de terroir)

## 2005 Henschke Julius Riesling Eden Valley - 16.5

**GB:** Star-bright, medium green-yellow. Fairly pronounced; baked apple and lime cordial. Steely and refreshing. Plenty of summer fruit on the palate. Medium-long finish. **15**

**AH:** Composed, elegant nose, showing mellowed citrus-fruit aromas. Well knit on the palate, too, with a nice interplay between fresher citrusy notes and the honeyed aspects of the evolution. **15.5**

**MR:** Supple, peachy, and smoky. A compelling wine of great complexity and finesse. **18.5**

## 2008 Grosset Polish Hill Riesling Clare Valley - 15.5

**GB:** Star-bright, green-yellow with beautiful silver tinges. Moderately open; pear and wildflowers. Lively and very fresh, quite mineral with some nectarine flavors. Medium-long. Quite appealing. **15**

**AH:** Inviting, intense, quintessential nose of lime and white peach, with a slight sherbety pungency. Sleek and concentrated on the palate, with the guts to age, but with some harmony already. Good grip and definition. **15**

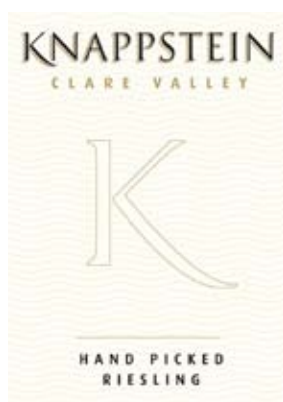
**MR:** Clean, focused wine; pure, transparent in flavor, limpid, and very long. The epitome of Aussie Riesling. **16**

## 2007 Grosset-Hill Smith Mesh Riesling Eden Valley - 15.5

**GB:** Star-bright. Medium silver-yellow with green tinges. Extremely pronounced elderflowers and mirabelle. Juicy and crisp. Lovely nuances of ginger and also mineral notes. Long finish. Exuberant wine. **17**

**AH:** Classic lime-cordial nose. Bright acidity, good positive palate entry, but then disappoints with a short, hot finish. **12**

**MR:** Penetrating nose, a concentrated palate; quite a blockbuster. Very good finish. A big, powerful wine, still very well-balanced and harmonious. Sleek and confident. **17**



## 2007 Knappstein Hand Picked Riesling Clare Valley - 15.5

**GB:** Day-bright, medium green-yellow. Fairly pronounced apple, pear, and apricot. Crisp and tonic, green apple and wildflowers in the mouth. Well-balanced, medium-long finish. Very appealing. **16.5**

“I thought the overall quality level was very high. It was an extremely enjoyable tasting, and some of the wines were truly exciting. My only slight reservation is that on occasion the wines could taste a bit samey. I would have liked to see a bit more stylistic difference, perhaps” Gérard Basset

**AH:** Quite generous stone-fruit and orange aromas, and on the palate, round and full-flavored, with some mineral poise and lovely balance and integration of fruit with acidity. Long, tapered finish. **15**

**MR:** Sleek, confident, but no standout personality. Pure, correct, and very enjoyable, with well-bred contours and some honeyed lime fruit and a big finish. **15.5**

## 2005 Leasingham Early Release Riesling Clare Valley - 15.5

**GB:** Star-bright, medium green-yellow. Fairly pronounced wildflowers, stone fruit, and lime. Very juicy on the palate, with lime and nectarine. Medium finish. **15**

**AH:** Closed, despite some signs of development. Tight on the palate, with bright acid, youthful citrusy fruit, good harmony, and length. A powerful, balanced style for further aging. **15.5**

**MR:** Pretty, delicate, complex. A wine made with a very light hand; very successful. **16.5**

## 2007 Ferngrove Cossack Riesling Frankland River Western Australia - 15

**GB:** Star-bright, silver yellow of light intensity. Quite pronounced tangerine and fresh flowers. Lively and juicy, excellent concentration of citrus flavors, long and pleasant aftertaste. Overall enjoyable. **16.5**

**AH:** Some interesting red-fruit aromas here, alongside apple and lemon. Quite full in the mouth, relatively soft for this style of wine. Decent grip and length, though. **13**

**MR:** Apricot on the nose and some softness on the palate. A ripe, balanced wine that just seems a little lacking in weight on the mid-palate. It's a very pretty wine, and the finish is big and powerful, so this might just be a closed stage. The mark assumes that it is. **16**

## 2005 Jacob's Creek Steingarten Riesling Barossa - 15

**GB:** Day-bright, medium green-yellow. Fairly pronounced herbal character, with some hints of lime. Lively, strong citrus in retro-olfaction; medium finish. **15.5**

**AH:** A toasty quality, with an attractive reductive-developed note of mustard

seed. Harmonious on the palate, if quite dry and savory. A little short and alcoholic, perhaps. **14**

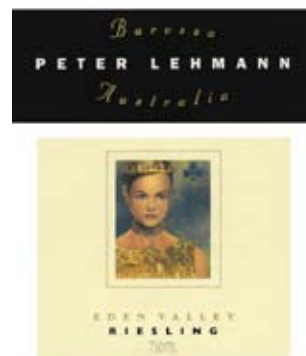
**MR:** Ripe and mature, savory and apricotty. There's something faintly coarse-grained about it, but it's very enjoyable. **16**

## 2007 Leasingham Bin 7 Riesling Clare Valley - 15

**GB:** Star-bright, medium-deep green-yellow. Quite pronounced lime cordial and summer fruit. Crisp and very refreshing in style; apricot and yellow plum in retro-olfaction; medium-long aftertaste. **15.5**

**AH:** Citrus-oil nose; good depth. On the palate, the fruit is becoming slightly thin, while the structure holds firm. **13**

**MR:** Austerity and lime: sounds like a cocktail for our times. Piercing acidity and pungent lime-cordial fruit—very fresh and pure. Classic and well made. **16.5**



## 2005 Peter Lehmann Riesling Eden Valley - 15

**GB:** Star-bright, medium green-yellow with silver tinges. Fairly pronounced stone fruit and citrus fruit. Quite crisp; lime and tangerine on the palate; medium-long finish. **15**

**AH:** Attractive citrus- and stone-fruit aromas with herbal (lavender) notes. A dry, austere feel on the palate. Good flavor but could do with a bit more “bulge” mid-palate. Herbal finish. **13**

**MR:** Complex, nutty, toasty, and smoky; very mineral, rich, powerful and detailed. **17.5**

**2005 Tamar Ridge Riesling Tasmania - 15**

**GB:** Brilliant, medium green-yellow. Fairly pronounced baked-fruit character. Powerful with a very steely structure; stone fruit on the palate; medium-long finish. **14.5**

**AH:** The fabled toast-and-honey aroma of more mature Aussie Riesling is here, alongside a dried-peach character; good depth on the nose. The palate is more of a mixed bag; the toasty notes and peach flavor work well together, but it is losing vigor and becoming rather thick-textured. **13.5**

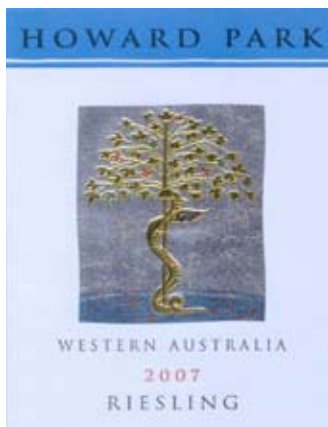
**MR:** Very smoky nose, and a ripe, peachy, smoky palate—complex and enticing. The acidity is piercing, and the contours of the wine are refined and delicate; the core powerful. Very, very good. **17.5**

**2007 Jim Barry The Florita Riesling Clare Valley - 14.5**

**GB:** Star-bright, beautiful green-yellow with silver tinges. Fairly open nose; herbal and mineral notes. Lean and crisp; mouth flavors dominated by green apple; medium finish. **14**

**AH:** Interesting nose, with some clean-earth aromas, as well as apple fruit. Quite a savory, mineral palate, and quite a linear style. A fair whack of acidity, but enough concentration on the finish to temper it. **14.5**

**MR:** Very lean acidity with lime-cordial fruit and mineral notes. Very long, pungent finish. Textbook stuff. **15.5**



**2007 Howard Park Riesling Great Southern - 14.5**

**GB:** Brilliant, light pale yellow. Extremely pronounced appley nose, complemented by lovely mineral notes. Lean but still fresh and crisp; well-balanced flavors; medium finish. Fairly elegant. **15**

**AH:** [First bottle: Sadly, the palate shows signs of premature flatness. The structure is still in place, but the fruit flavors are tired, already turning to lavender.] Second bottle: Classic lime sherbet, slightly petrolly nose. Some development on the palate. This is not a particularly fruity style and is less expressive than the nose would suggest. **12**

**MR:** A year older, and a year richer. A touch of honey developing; lovely delicate nose,

and palate showing some lime-cordial notes. A filigree wine of great purity and finesse. **16.5**

**2007 Leasingham Magnus Riesling Clare Valley - 14.5**

**GB:** Star-bright, medium-deep green-yellow. Quite pronounced, candied apricot and hints of ginger. Very fresh on the palate; marked herbal character in retro-olfaction; medium-long finish. **15**

**AH:** Orange and banana aromas; something slightly confected here. Clean, reasonably well balanced; a slight hardness mid-palate. Sound, but not the most thrilling example. **12.5**

**MR:** A balanced, supple wine with good lime fruit and satisfactory level of ripeness. It's confidently handled, and the length is very good. It doesn't offer fireworks, just very well-made wine with everything in the right place, which gives great pleasure. **16**

**2008 Mount Horrocks Watervale Riesling Clare Valley - 14.5**

**GB:** Brilliant silver-yellow of medium intensity. Fairly open; quite ripe, tropical fruit and pear. Fairly juicy, strong Williams pear. Lovely mouthfeel; medium-long finish. Very pleasant to drink. **16.5**

**AH:** Notably dark given its youth—mid-straw. Slightly heavy, waxy aromas. Decent dried-apricot fruit but feels overadvanced for a 2008. Rather blunt and clumsy on the finish, with disjointed acidity. **11**

**MR:** Broader, still citrus. Glass-like transparency of texture—almost brittle, but with an underlying suppleness and elasticity. Does this make sense? Never mind; it's very good. **16.5**

**2007 Ninth Island Riesling Tasmania - 14.5**

**GB:** Star-bright, medium-light silver-yellow. Quite pronounced white pear and wildflowers. Crisp and tonic; lime and mineral; long finish. Very enjoyable. **16.5**

**AH:** Rich nose of apricot and peach, showing late-harvest ripeness and concentration. There's an aggressive quality to the palate—a vegetal character—that shatters

the expectations of lush deliciousness given by the nose. Disappointing. **11**

**MR:** Nice, neat, limey nose and a vivid palate. A come-and-get-me wine of great appeal. A touch of smoke, a lot of minerality, and considerable power underlying the fruit. Very confident. **16.5**

**2007 Pipers Brook Vineyard Riesling Tasmania - 14.5**

**GB:** Day-bright, light silver-yellow with green tinges. Extremely pronounced pear, wildflowers and mirabelle tart. Lively, fresh, and juicy; beautiful touches of tropical fruit complemented by mineral notes; long aftertaste. Excellent wine. **17.5**

**AH:** Flat, cardboardy nose with a hint of floral aroma. Good weight and structure on the palate, but the flavor is perfumy and lightweight—it can't stand up. **12**

**MR:** The acidity is quite green and vivid. It's a colorful, assertive wine that pulls no punches. But I'm not sure that it has huge complexity. Does it need it? Probably not. **14.5**

**2007 Cascabel Riesling Eden Valley - 14**

**GB:** Day-bright, medium-light silver-yellow. Fairly pronounced red apple and apricot. Very juicy mango and lime in the mouth; medium-long finish. **14.5**

**AH:** Still closed, with flashes of apricot and citrus. Concentrated, pent-up palate, developing a strong mineral streak. I suspect it needs some more time, but will there be any fruit left? A bit of a gamble. **14**

**MR:** Bright. Pure, fresh. It doesn't have any particular personality, but it does what it does very well and stylishly. Its purity is exactly what Aussie Riesling aspires to. **14**

**2008 Grosset Springvale Riesling Clare Valley Watervale - 14**

**GB:** Day-bright, medium green-yellow. Quite pronounced, plenty of stone fruit, in particular peach and young apricot. Fresh and crisp, medium-light body with an excellent concentration of flavors. Medium-long finish. Overall, a charming young wine. **14.5**

**AH:** Aromatic, with a strong diesel-like nose

“Certainly, as a group, they were identifiably Australian—which is to say not particularly fruity. Riesling in Australia is a very tight and structured type. You find more fruit in Alsace, Germany, or Austria. I found them quite austere—a combination of a lack of fruit and a lack of sugar” Alex Hunt

## (*goût de terroir*)

and some tropical fruit. Already open and accessible on the palate, though with an appropriate seam of acidity. Straightforward, appealing, well balanced. **13**

**MR:** Some peachy notes, plus high acidity. An almost sherbety, citrus note on the finish, which feels just a touch raw. Good; focused; very dry. **15**

### **2007 Mitchell Watervale Riesling Clare Valley - 14**

**GB:** Star-bright, medium green-yellow. Fairly pronounced, mostly stone fruit. Very crisp; young peach and apricot; medium finish. Quite simple. **13**

**AH:** Striking nose of pink grapefruit and apricot jam. Same character on the palate, with perky (but not excessive) acidity, plenty of vigor and freshness, and good depth of flavor. Idiosyncratic but successful. **15**

**MR:** A big, powerful wine with just a touch of alcohol dominating and adding a coarse note. It's faint, but these wines are so finely balanced that it's worth noting. It means that it lacks the grace of some; and the finish, while long and powerful, is slightly clumsy. **13.5**



### **2007 Petaluma Hanlin Hill Riesling Clare Valley - 14**

**GB:** Day-bright, medium green-yellow. A touch subdued at first; herbal and very pear. Very juicy; one-dimensional on the palate, with powerful pear Williams. Medium finish. **14.5**

**AH:** Some darkening to the color, and a rather flat, cardboardy nose. A good positive palate entry, with juicy peach and berry fruit, is marred by an abrupt finish. **12**

**MR:** Honeyed, mineral wine, quite earthy, ripe, and peachy. There's the merest shadow of alcohol on the palate but not enough to spoil it. A good, flavorsome match for many foods. **15.5**

### **2008 Pewsey Vale Riesling Eden Valley - 14**

**GB:** Star-bright, green-yellow, medium intensity. Fairly pronounced sherbet, a touch of green apple; simple. Lean, a bit Austere, light-bodied; one-dimensional in flavor; short on the aftertaste. Just very simple. **12**

**AH:** Clean, tight nose with a bit of citrus warmth coming through already, as well as a touch of minerality. At the moment, youthful and tight-knit on the palate despite a certain ripeness and breadth. This combination gives a sweet-and-sour

character that I hope will recede as the wine develops. **13**

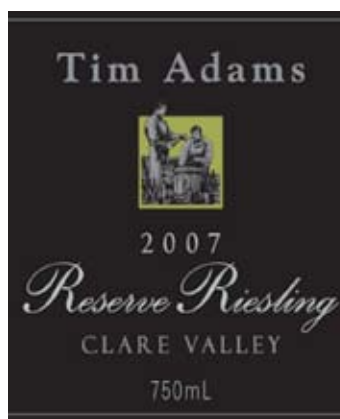
**MR:** Good, austere fruit, lean and mineral. A touch of lime and a faint touch of smoke. Very long finish. A very elegant, linear wine of considerable breeding; tight and focused. **16.5**

### **2007 Yalumba Y Series Riesling South Australia - 14**

**GB:** Day-bright, medium green-yellow. Quite open; candy fruit and baked apple. Lively and juicy; apricot and tangerine in retro-olfaction; medium finish. Well-made wine. **14.5**

**AH:** Concentrated nose with more exotic notes of pineapple, apricot, and pink grapefruit. Quite a delicate style in the mouth—not dilute, but with softer acidity and a pithier texture than some here. **14**

**MR:** Ripe, balanced, and pretty; quite a light, frivolous version. But the finish is still long and lean, so it's a bit Paris Hilton—in a good way, of course. **13**



### **2007 Tim Adams Reserve Riesling Clare Valley - 13.5**

**GB:** Star-bright; silver yellow with a light intensity. Medium intensity, fresh candied lemon and green apple. Crisp and fresh; apricot and nectarine on the palate; medium finish. Nicely made. **14.5**

**AH:** Good depth on the nose, with red apple and berry notes. Flat, cardboardy palate, though, with hard acidity. **10.5**

**MR:** Good fresh attack; high acidity and plenty of fruit underneath. A touch of greenness to the acidity, which doesn't quite knit with the fruit—but the disjunction is small. A touch more ripeness at picking might have been easier on the palate, but it is pure and focused. **15**

### **2008 Plantagenet Riesling Great Southern - 13.5**

**GB:** Star-bright, very light silver-yellow with fine bubbles of CO<sub>2</sub> visible. Very pronounced stone fruit and golden apple. Crisp and fresh, retro-olfaction confirming nose with apricot and ripe apple. Simple aftertaste. Easy drinking. **14**

**AH:** Rubbery nose—this is in a fairly reduced

state. Lean and sour on the palate, with that reduction not helping matters. I'd like to think it will soften out a bit, and there is reasonable concentration in there, but there's no guarantee. **12**

**MR:** Lean; could perhaps do with a touch more ripeness. It's very green. A touch of Saar-Ruwer acidity, before climate change hit. Very pure to the point of austerity. **14.5**

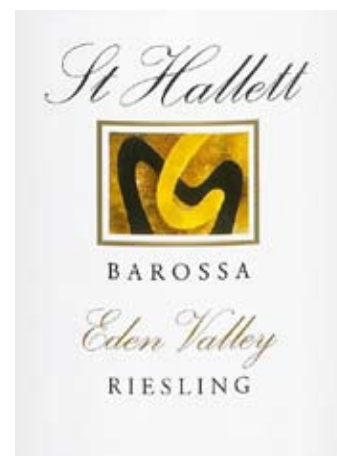


### **2006 Tamar Ridge Riesling Tasmania - 13.5**

**GB:** Brilliant, medium-light silver-yellow. Exuberant nose: oranges, mirabelle, and guava. Lively, with a very suave texture; tropical fruit in the mouth; medium-long finish. **16**

**AH:** Closed at first, but some attractive stone-fruit aromas emerge, alongside a vegetal note. The palate begins well, but alcohol threatens to take over mid-palate, and the hard vegetal aspect detracts from the whole. **11.5**

**MR:** Curiously floral nose. Very piercing acidity. It's pure and balanced, but in the end it's fairly straightforward. **13**



### **2007 St Hallett Riesling Eden Valley - 12.5**

**GB:** Brilliant, medium silver-yellow. Extremely pronounced, candied tangerine, tarragon, and papaya. Lively and juicy; great flavors of tropical fruit and wild spices; long finish. **17**

**AH:** Attractive, delicate red-berry aromas, but then also a sulfide whiff and a sign of oxidative flatness. Not a happy wine. **8**

**MR:** Ripe acidity and even a touch of hay lurking in the background. There's the merest touch of coarseness here, but it's an attractive wine nevertheless. **13**

**Commentary (after the wines' identities had been revealed):**

**GB:** I thought that the overall quality level was very high. It was an extremely enjoyable tasting, and some of the wines were truly exciting. My only slight reservation is that on occasion the wines could taste a bit samey. I would have liked to see a bit more stylistic difference, perhaps.

**AH:** Certainly, as a group, they were identifiably Australian—which is to say not particularly fruity. Riesling in Australia is a very tight and structured type. You find more fruit in Alsace, Germany, or Austria.

fruit and a lack of sugar. Thankfully they were all dry. I was looking for something a bit easier.

**MR:** A bit more fun!

**AH:** More flavor or sugar, or something that appeals to the baser instincts rather than simply looking for fuel. The great antagonistic quality of the finest wines is pure hedonistic quality on the one hand and being able to withstand any amount of intellectual analysis on the other. There was much that was admirable about these wines, though.

**MR:** They are slightly puritanical. They

through all the wines.

**AH:** On average, the Eden wines showed just as much diversity as Clare. Henschke was very good.

**MR:** Yes, excellent, and my top mark.

**GB:** My top mark was for a Tasmanian wine.

**AH:** I was a bit disappointed by the Tazzie wines. Pipers Brook was flat and cardboardy.

**MR:** But they were an interesting batch of wines. One might ask if they're performing well in Australian terms or in our terms? They want purity, purity, purity, and we want something else.

“The wines were mostly one-dimensional. A definition of fine wine is the antagonistic quality of purity despite complexity, concentration despite elegance. For me, these wines didn't find that apparent line of contradiction and were therefore in the good-but-not-great category” Alex Hunt

**MR:** There were one or two wines that could have fooled me into thinking they were from the Saar or Ruwer. They had that tense acidity that perhaps one doesn't find so much now in the Saar or Ruwer, and also a smokiness and complexity that I wouldn't associate with “traditional” Australian Riesling. Recently it has become more interesting and more complex. The standard here was extremely high.

**AH:** The quality was middling for me, though generally consistent. I didn't get excited about much.

**GB:** It was slightly disappointing for me. The wines were well made, but I didn't find any stars. They were all easy to drink, though perhaps they were lacking in complexity.

**MR:** They aim for purity, which means complexity isn't really apparent.

**GB:** There were one or two that were more interesting.

**AH:** But they were mostly one-dimensional. A definition of fine wine is the antagonistic quality of purity despite complexity, concentration despite elegance. For me, these wines didn't find that apparent line of contradiction and were therefore in the good-but-not-great category.

**MR:** I agree. Good to very good, but not great. I found one or two that had lightness despite power.

**AH:** Yes.

**MR:** But complexity has never been a big thing for Australian Riesling. The good news is that they're more complex than they were, but you can't be fixated on purity and then allow extraneous flavors in.

**AH:** I was looking for a bit more pleasure. As a group, I found them quite hard-going, quite austere—a combination of a lack of

reflect the fruit rather than terroir of their origins, which results in a certain sameness—and consistency! In terms of vintages, the 2005s and 2008s tasted pretty good.

**AH:** Yes—2008s promising and 2005s still vigorous.

**MR:** They should be, since they're really not very old!

**AH:** But even dry Germans don't last more than a few years.

**MR:** Perfectly true. There seemed to be a slight nervousness with a few wines about picking late. There was some very green acidity in some of them. I'm not sure anything stood out as being a classic example of its type, and I rarely got a great sense of Clare or Eden or wherever.

**AH:** A few seemed overevolved, with dark colors and flat noses, like Italian white wines used to be. If there was a characteristic of the 2007 Clare wines, it was that they are atypical compared to what I was expecting. Only the Leasingham had a marked citrus character, whereas the others seemed to be doing their own thing. It was a very diverse group—the most diverse of the tasting—and quite unexpected. But quite nice to see they're not all following the same recipe.

**MR:** Age is a factor. If they're going to close up, then they have closed up. If they're forward, then perhaps they're not showing at their freshest. But I agree it was a very diverse school. The Grosset Springvale was a bit raw and felt a touch awkward...

**AH:** The Leasingham was classic Clare...

**MR:** The Plantagenet was austere...

**AH:** And rubbery and reduced. The Howard Park was not lean in the way the Plantagenet was. The Frankland River was quite soft.

**MR:** There was a common thread running

**AH:** There is a distinctiveness to them. A Kiwi winemaker once remarked to me that the Aussies had their winemaking sorted out, and if they had New Zealand-quality fruit, the wines would be fantastic.

**MR:** So why isn't New Zealand making better Riesling?

**AH:** Well, that's a digression! Riesling fits into a defined niche in the Australian wine landscape. It's too hot for Sauvignon Blanc, so Riesling is their crisp, dry, out-in-the-garden white wine.

**MR:** The alcohol rarely showed, which is to be applauded these days.

**AH:** They are wines to be drunk rather than analyzed. It doesn't necessarily put a dent in the notion of Australian regionalism as a whole, but it does possibly with regards to Riesling.

**MR:** These are good regions, but they don't seem very different from each other.

**AH:** They're the right regions for Riesling.

**MR:** It doesn't taste like there's much sugar. They're largely anti-residual. They're nearly all worth a year or two in bottle.

**AH:** Stelvin should have affected how the wines have been made. There were no reduced wines today. Stelvin has probably influenced how the wines were made—but probably not how they've turned out—and will enable them to age better. Reductive handling makes the wines fragile. Australian Riesling has a significant record with Stelvin. There are bottles from the 1960s that still taste good.

**GB:** I thought it was a great tasting with an above-average level of quality. My slight disappointment was that I did not find a real superstar and also, perhaps, that so many of the wines tasted so similar. ■