

To help producers and consumers...

IRF “Riesling Taste Profile” featured on over a million cases

January 2010—More than a million cases of Riesling wines marketed in the United States this year will include a “Riesling Taste Profile” designed to make it easier for consumers to predict the taste they can expect from a particular bottle of Riesling.

The Riesling Taste Profile was created by the International Riesling Foundation (IRF), a global nonprofit organization formed to promote Riesling as the world’s most noble white wine variety. The need became apparent when IRF-commissioned market research by Wine Opinions reaffirmed that many consumers still think of Riesling only as “a sweet white wine” despite the wide range of tastes it can represent.

Major producers in the largest Riesling producing states—Washington, California, Oregon, Michigan and New York—will be using the Taste Profile, along with some wineries from other states and countries including Germany, Australia and New Zealand. A partial list of wineries using the Taste Profile is shown below, with the range of wines dramatically illustrating why such a consumer-friendly tool is needed.

Riesling was the fastest growing varietal in the United States in 2009, with an 8.3% increase in sales, according to data from the Nielsen Company. Widespread use of the Riesling Taste Profile is likely to accelerate that growth by making Riesling more understandable, predictable, and consumer-friendly.

(In some countries such as Canada, Germany, and South Africa there are regulatory restrictions preventing its use on labels of wines sold within the country, but wines exported to the United States may include it. In addition, some wineries like Cave Spring in Canada and Paul Cluver Wines in South Africa are using the Taste Profile on point-of-sale merchandizing materials, which is perfectly allowable.)

The Taste Profile involves voluntary technical guidelines for Riesling producers in describing their wines for consumers along with four graphic options that may be used on a back label, point-of-sale materials, and elsewhere. Several examples of such use are shown in the Riesling Taste Profile section of the IRF web site, www.drinkriesling.org, which also contains everything necessary to download and customize the Taste Profile and related point-of-sale materials.

“Riesling may be made in many styles from bone dry to sweet, and this versatility can be both a strength and a weakness,” said California wine journalist Dan Berger who spearheaded the IRF project in consultation with many Riesling wine makers. “Riesling’s many styles can fit almost any taste preference, but consumers may be put off if they are expecting one taste and get another. The taste profile will enhance Riesling’s strength by letting consumers know the basic taste before they open or even buy the bottle.”

To help wine makers consider which terms to use for various wines, the committee developed a technical chart of parameters involving the interplay of sugar, acid, and pH which helps determine the probable taste profile of a particular wine. Another key step in the project was to identify appropriate terms for describing the relative dryness or sweetness of the wine. After extensive deliberations, the four categories selected are: Dry, Medium Dry, Medium Sweet, and Sweet. (Some producers continue to use Semi-Dry or Semi-Sweet on their front labels, but the Taste Profile uses “Medium” in both cases.)

“It is important to understand that these are simply recommended guidelines which we think may be helpful, but the program is entirely voluntary,” said Berger. “We are encouraged that many Riesling producers are already using the system because it will help consumers, and therefore help the wineries as well.”

The next step was to develop a simple graphic design showing the four levels from Dry to Sweet, and a simple indication of where a particular wine falls. This design may be used on back labels, merchandising materials, web sites and elsewhere. The goal is to have a common, simple, consumer-friendly system for identifying Riesling tastes.

With substantial input from IRF Board members who are Riesling producers, New York-based artist Book Marshall developed four options (shown below) which may be used by wineries, depending on their back label space and design. The preferred design is #1, which includes the words, “This Riesling is...” above the bar, and “International Riesling Foundation” with a logo below it.

“This is a very important project, and we’re grateful to Dan Berger and others who spent many hours on this,” said Jim Trezise, President of the IRF. “With Riesling’s surging popularity among consumers, making this versatile wine more understandable and user-friendly could accelerate its growth.”

The Riesling Taste Profile was developed in time to be available for use by northern hemisphere wineries on wines from the 2008 vintage. While several producers used it on those wines marketed in 2009, its use in 2010 will be far more widespread. There is no fee to use it, and the copyright was obtained only to protect against incorrect use.

The IRF Riesling Taste Profile is also being adopted by major international wine judgments such as the Los Angeles International Wine & Spirits, and Riverside International, competitions, as the basis for their Riesling categories.

The IRF’s mission is: “To increase awareness, understanding, trial and sales of Riesling wines through a comprehensive, integrated system of industry cooperation, research, trade education, and consumer communication.”

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NOTE: RIESLING TASTE PROFILE ARTWORK WILL BE INSERTED HERE

RIESLING PRODUCERS USING THE IRF TASTE PROFILE IN 2010

The following lists some of the many Riesling producers who are using the IRF Riesling Taste Profile on wines from the 2009 vintage, with the total number of cases where known, as well as those of individual Riesling wines. An asterisk(*) indicates that the winery's use of the Taste Profile is shown at www.drinkriesling.com.

Washington State

***Chateau Ste. Michelle** (Columbia Valley Riesling; Chateau Ste. Michelle Harvest Select Riesling; Chateau Ste. Michelle Dry Riesling; Chateau Ste. Michelle Waussie Riesling; Chateau Ste. Michelle Winemaker's Cabinet Riesling)

***Pacific Rim Winemakers** (Dry Riesling, Sweet Riesling, Organic Riesling, Sparkling Riesling, and Riesling (Medium Dry))

Sageland Vineyards

Oregon

Argyle Winery

Bridgeview Vineyards Blue Moon Riesling

Brooks Wines (Willamette Valley Riesling, Ara Riesling, Sweet P Riesling)

***Chehalem** (Reserve Riesling—Dry; Corral Creek Vineyard Riesling—Medium Dry; SEXT—Riesling Sekt, Sweet)

***Willamette Valley Vineyards**

California

Hagafen Cellars

***Jekel**

***Scott Harvey Wines**

***Trefethen**

New York

***Anthony Road Winery—4500 cases (Dry Riesling, Semi-Dry Riesling, Riesling)**

Atwater Estate Vineyards

Hunt Country Vineyards

***Keuka Lake Vineyards**

***Lakewood Vineyards (Dry, and Medium Sweet)**

***Lamoreaux Landing Wine Company**

Sheldrake Point Vineyards

***Wagner Vineyards (Vintners Reserve Riesling, Select Riesling, Semi-Dry Riesling)**

Michigan

***Black Star Farms (Montana Rusas Riesling, and Capella Riesling)**

Bowers Harbor Vineyards (Block II Riesling—Dry; BHV Estate Riesling—Medium Sweet; Landley Vineyards Riesling—Late Harvest)

***Chateau Grand Traverse (Chateau Grand Traverse brand—Dry Riesling, Semidry Riesling, Whole Cluster Riesling, Late Harvest Riesling; Grand Traverse Select brand—Semidry Riesling, Sweet Harvest Riesling)**

***St. Julian Winery**

Australia

***Xabregas (Sweet Riesling, Show Reserve)**

Germany

***Schloss Johannisberg (Riesling Spatlese)**

New Zealand

Neudorf Vineyards (Moutere Riesling, and Bridgewater Riesling)

Comments by Riesling Producers on the IRF Taste Profile

“The Taste Profile is the most powerful communication tool conceived by the IRF. There is no greater challenge for the IRF than educating the consumer of the variety and versatility of Riesling. And there is no better tool to meet that challenge than the Taste Profile. Time and time again, I have received rave reviews from consumers, wholesalers and buyers regarding the value and helpfulness of this tool.”

–Shawn Bavaresco, Pacific Rim Winemakers, Washington

“We use the IRF Taste Profile on the back label so the customer can easily choose the style of Riesling. This variety varies dramatically from growing conditions and winemaking approaches, making it the most versatile food—and mood—companion.”

–Jim Bernau, Founder/President, Willamette Valley Vineyards“, Oregon

“Riesling’s greatest attribute is that it is made in a wide range of styles from dry to sweet, but that is also Riesling’s greatest challenge We make up to nine different Rieslings at Chateau Ste. Michelle and this taste profile is a way to help our customers decide which one will appeal the most to them.”

–Bob Bertheau, head winemaker, Chateau Ste. Michelle, Washington

“My experience in using it – it is still new to the consumer – is that once I point it out their reaction is very positive. The consumer will start to look for it and expect it, so consistency will be critical.”

– John Martini, Co-owner, Anthony Road Winery, Finger Lakes, New York

“We have long felt buying unfamiliar Riesling was like playing sugar roulette. The IRF scale provides a quick easy way to inform the consumer of the balance of the wine thus increasing consumer satisfaction and reducing confusion.”

–Chris Stamp, Winemaker, Lakewood Vineyards, Finger Lakes, New York

“For me the Taste Profile is an easy to understand tool to demystify the World of Riesling! You don’t need to learn about it, just use it!”

– Christian Witte, Schloss Johannisberg, Germany