

INTO THE VALLEYS

Riesling has begun to carve a real niche for itself Down Under. At a recent seminar, **Chris Losh** joined a team of eager sommeliers as they got to grips with the regional styles of Clare and Eden Valleys – and marvelled at the grape's ability to provide wines that represent astonishing value for money

RIESLING

Perhaps one of the most surprising success stories in the Australian wine trade of recent years has been the rise of Riesling. This, after all, is a grape variety that has as its homeland some of the coolest areas of Europe; it's a long way from the Barossa to Bernkastel in more ways than one.

But despite this there are a good (and growing) number of producers Down Under who are creating exciting expressions of the grape, which are undeniably regional, yet still unmistakably typical for the variety.

Imbibe teamed up with Wine Australia to conduct a varietal workshop, that aimed to showcase some of the key regions and styles of Riesling coming out of the country. It was a chance for our assembled sommeliers to get their heads round not just Australian Riesling in general, but also (given the expressive nature of the grape) the country's terroir.

Chez Bruce's Terry Threlfall led the sommeliers through the regions, selecting a handful of wines that he felt best illustrated the various styles.

CLARE VALLEY

First planted in the 1840s, The Clare Valley – located roughly a two-hour drive north of Adelaide – has heritage to burn. 'We tend to think of Australia as a young country, but grapes have been grown here for a very long time,' said Threlfall.

Set around the Mount Lofty Ranges, it's a beautiful part of the world, with a central north-south running valley giving birth to a series of east-west river valleys that allow for myriad exposures.

The Clare Valley is a fairly warm area, but things cool off rapidly at night, thanks to a combination of afternoon breezes and

400–500m of altitude. Central heating, as Threlfall pointed out, tends to be on for eight months of the year, which is probably more than in the UK.

There are three key soil types, with the two most sought after for Riesling being the Limestone Terra Rossa of Watervale and the hard rock shale/gravel found in Polish Hill. The north of the valley is more alluvial and tends to be mostly planted with reds.

It is this combination of full-bodied red wines alongside delicate minerally Rieslings that outsiders tend to struggle with. 'It's a bit like having Hermitage in

the Mosel,' reflected Threlfall. The key being to plant Rieslings on higher land and west-facing slopes.

Stylistically, Threlfall commented that Rieslings from Watervale tended to be more generous and accessible earlier than those from Polish Hill, which are more taut and mineral, particularly in their youth – something that was backed up by the sommeliers when they tried them.

'I loved the flinty stoniness of [the O'Leary],' commented the Boxwood Cafe's Charlotte Jonasson. 'It was my favourite wine of the three.'

'Some of them are still quite tight,' mused Threlfall. 'I'd consider decanting them for a bit first.'

In fact, each of the wines tasted had its champions, with the sommeliers marvelling both at the combination of delicacy and punch and the incredibly reasonable prices.

TASTED

- O'Leary Walker Polish Hill Riesling 2008, Clare Valley (Fortitude)
- Skillogalee Trevarrick Riesling 2008, Clare Valley (Enotria)
- Grosset Springvale Watervale Riesling 2008, Clare Valley (Liberty Wines)

EDEN VALLEY

The Eden Valley has a long history, too. South of the Clare Valley, it's just outside the Barossa.

Riesling is the third most-planted grape variety here after Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon, and again altitude (at 380–550m above sea level) is a factor. But so, too, is wind. In fact, so severe can the latter be that vineyards tend to be planted behind windbreaks of trees, particularly on the higher, more exposed lands that tend to form the Riesling vineyards.

Altitude, again, explains why this same region can be home to one of the country's most famous Cabernets, Henschke Hill of Grace, and also to minerally, elegant Rieslings. With temperatures a couple of degrees cooler

TASTED

- Creed of Barossa Wild Child Riesling 2008, Eden Valley (B&C Wine Company)
- Pewsey Vale Riesling 2008, Eden Valley (Negociants)
- Mesh Riesling 2008, Eden Valley (Negociants)



Sommelier comments

'You do get slightly riper wines from the Eden Valley, but the balance is still really good. I don't know many wines with the character and balance of [Pewsey Vale Riesling] for £7.'

Simon Howland, Wine By Simon



'I thought that as a group the three Rieslings from the Clare Valley showed more variation and complexity – probably due to the differences in terroir.'

Robert Giorgione, consultant

'I loved the Grosset Watervale Riesling. I found it really complex, with mineral and citrus notes, and on the palate it was just perfect – so well integrated.'

Luigi Buonanno, Etrusca Restaurants



THE TASTING

Having been exposed to the theory of the various regions, our sommeliers were let loose with a free-pour of 13 Australian Rieslings. Tasted blind, we asked the sommeliers to score the wines out of 20 and also to select any that they thought were particularly good food matches with the dishes that had been prepared by Brett Graham from The Ledbury restaurant in London.

These were ceviche of hand-dived scallops with seaweed and herb oil, kohlrabi and frozen horseradish, and flame grilled mackerel with cured mackerel, avocado and shiso.

91 Pikes Traditionale Riesling 2008, Clare Valley

Precise, delicate and fresh, with pure acidity and good concentration, this was loved across the board by our tasters. 'Concentration, depth and some nervosité,' said Olivier Gasselien. 'It matches the scallops really well.' £8.60, Seckford's, 01206 231188

78 Petaluma Hanlin Hill Riesling 2008, Clare Valley

Concentrated and powerful, yet also floral and elegant, with good weight and a creamy texture. A fine balance of fruit, texture and oiliness. 'This would be good with sashimi,' said Sue Jones. 'It copes with the spice.' £10.05, Bibendum, 020 7722 5577

74 Skillogalee Single Vineyard Riesling 2008, Clare Valley

Quite light and citrusy: smoky mandarin and grapefruit. 'Bitter oranges, blossom and racy acidity,' said Emily Pearl Campbell. 'Polished, intense and very complex,' praised Olivier Gasselien. £7.69, Enotria, 020 8961 4411

73 Tamar Ridge Kayena Vineyard Riesling 2006, Tasmania

Grassy green fruit, with crunchy acidity. Floral, herbal and quite intense. 'Flinty, clean and very pure,' said Katie Exton. 'Musky nose, with lime, honey blossom and a classic Riesling oiliness over the top,' said Louise Gordon. £8.48, ABS, 01372 274065

73 Pewsey Vale Prima Riesling 2008, Eden Valley

Chalk, petrol and toast, with lemon/lime flavours, lean acidity and just a little residual. 'This would really work with seared scallops or goats cheese,' said Robert Toszer. 'Restrained tropical fruit and lovely acidity,' said Nicola Thomson. £8.02, Negociants, 01582 462 859

72 Howard Park Riesling 2008, Great Southern

Mineral and grapefruit characters with plenty of trademark acidity and a gentleness in the mouth. 'Restrained on the nose, but elegant in the mouth with good minerality,' said Joris Beijl. £9.92, Bibendum, 020 7722 5577

71 Pirie Estate Riesling 2005, Tasmania

Dry, zingy and mineral, but backed up with toast and honey characters. 'Developing and delicious,' said Miriam McLachlan. 'Lovely nose with a dry finish and softer delivery — classic New World Riesling,' commented James Hopkins. £11.46, Stratford's, 01628 643519

71 Knappstein Hand Picked Riesling 2008, Clare Valley

Acacia and honeysuckle, along with fresh grapefruit and a flinty, shale character. 'The integrated acidity balances the palate,' said Louise Gordon. £7.40, Bibendum, 020 7722 5577

69 Annie's Lane Riesling 2006, Clare Valley

This wine had pretty classic Australian Riesling characters, with oily lemon and lime fruit characteristics, white peach behind, and the first suggestions of kerosene. 'Good concentration of fruit,' said Nicola Thomson. £ POA, Fosters EMEA, 020 8843 8418

67 Plantagenet Riesling 2008, Great Southern

'Typical Riesling nose. Refreshing, floral and food-friendly,' said Miguel Leal. Luigi Buonanno praised its 'piercing, rapier-like, zesty acidity.' £7.38, Liberty Wines, 020 7819 0333

67 Wakefield Estate Riesling 2008, Clare Valley

Talcum powder, with vibrant tangerine, citrus and green apple fruit. Fresh, steely and mineral. 'Nice and floral,' commented Robert Toszer. 'Excellent with the scallops,' agreed Sue Jones. £6.90, Stratford's, 01628 643519

BEST FOOD WINES

Knappstein Hand Picked Riesling 2008, Clare Valley

Universally popular with the tasters as a match for the scallop ceviche, with its floral characters and slatey character beautifully held together by a fine, integrated acidity. £7.40, Bibendum, 020 7722 5577

Mount Horrocks Watervale Riesling 2008, Clare Valley

Still young, but a wine of real pedigree, with persistence, minerality and structure. Worked with both of Brett Graham's dishes. £6.80, Liberty Wines, 020 7819 0333

BEST VALUE WINE

Pikes Traditionale Riesling 2008, Clare Valley.

£8.60, Seckford's, 01206 231188

PROMOTIONS

The following agents are currently offering promotions to *Imbibe* readers who order any of the Rieslings mentioned in this article

ENOTRIA

Contact: Lyn McKnight
l.mcknight@enotria.co.uk
020 8961 4411

LIBERTY WINES

Contact: Pippa Askham
pippa.askham@libertywine.co.uk
020 7819 0333



64 Jim Barry The Lodge Hill Riesling 2008, Clare Valley

With its lemons, limes, grapefruit and apple flavours, this was a quite Germanic style. Quite tight and austere still, though it worked well with the scallop ceviche. £7.13, Negociants, 01582 462859

64 Mount Horrocks Watervale Riesling 2008, Clare Valley

Stone fruits, citrus zest and a chalky minerality. A wine of real potential, but still very young and tart. Would probably score better in a couple of years, though Olivier Marie, for one, praised its 'raciness' — and it scored very highly for its food-matching potential. 'Great Clare Riesling,' said Jules Watson. £6.80, Liberty Wines, 020 7819 0333



FOOD AND WINE MATCHING TIPS from Ledbury chef Brett Graham

'While the fresh, citrusy acidity of Riesling contrasts well with the richness of the scallops, the mineral, green apple flavours complement the seaweed and herb oil. As an oily fish, mackerel requires that same cleanness of acidity, and the pure, aromatic nature of the grape matches well with the Japanese herb shiso.'



Sommelier comments

'There's stylistic similarity with Clare Rieslings. They all have a lot of freshness and minerality. And they were fantastic with the scallops.'

Nicola Thomson, Practical Matters



'The food provided and prepared by Brett Graham was outstanding and delicious. It showed off both his creativity and the versatile food-friendliness of the wines.'

Robert Giorgione, consultant

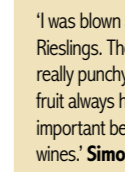
'I'm a big fan of Clare Valley Rieslings. They're really crisp, fresh and lemony. The higher alcohol levels compared to Eden Valley make them really food-friendly, too. I'd drink Eden Valley more as an aperitif.'

Luigi Buonanno, Etrusca Restaurants



'There were definitely regional styles in the tasting. My top match was quite edgy on its own but worked brilliantly with the scallops. There were a lot of really taut wines here — it's interesting to think that they're like that, yet still obviously New World.'

Charlotte Jonasson, Boxwood Café



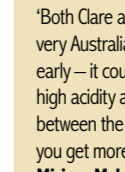
'I was blown away by the quality of the Rieslings. There were a lot of wines with really punchy acidity, but even those with less fruit always had enough to balance. That's important because it's hard to sell off-dry wines.'

Simon Howland, Wine By Simon



'I really liked the driving minerality in the Rieslings. They had fantastic balance for the most part, with lovely aromatics, and the value for money is fantastic. The Clare wines would really work with food that has a citrus vinaigrette.'

Emily Campbell, Chez Bruce



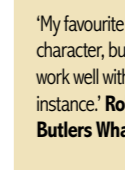
'Both Clare and Eden Valley show that very Australian petroleum character quite early — it counters the other elements of high acidity and primary fruit. The difference between the two is the toastiness, which you get more in Eden Valley wines.'

Miriam McLachlan, Zuma



'I'm a huge fan of Aussie Riesling, and I thought the Clare wines were generally showing really well. They're great with the likes of turkey and goose.'

Roger Jones, The Harrow at Little Bedwyn



'My favourite Rieslings had a good honeyed character, but were still dry. They would work well with grilled goat's cheese, for instance.'

Robert Toszer, Butlers Wharf Chop House

