

# US Riesling

Producers west to east across the US are increasingly enthused by the fruit-filled exuberance of the white grape that's such a popular choice among many in the wine trade globally

WORDS & SELECTION MAIAH JOHNSON DUNN

Too often, Riesling gets a bad rap. Through much of the 20th century, American bottlings were often confusing. There was little consistency in labelling and wines made using unrelated varieties or distant relatives often adopted the name, such as Grey Riesling or Missouri Riesling.

A 1996 ruling by the TTB (US Treasury department's Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau) cleared up a lot of the ambiguities around the use of the name 'Riesling' on US wine labels, but it wasn't until 2006 that TTB regulations doing away with the last of the misleading Riesling-based names came into force. In 2008, a sweetness scale developed and launched by the International Riesling Foundation debuted on American Riesling bottles to help dispel the locally held belief that all Rieslings are sweet.

'Versatility is a large part of why we enjoy working with Riesling,' says Bryanna Cramer, assistant winemaker at Hermann J Wiemer Vineyard in the Finger Lakes, New York state. The Demeter-certified biodynamic producer manages several Riesling sites around Seneca lake. 'The ability for the variety to showcase a wide range of styles, from sparkling and bone-dry to semi-dry or trockenbeerenauslese dessert wines, allows us to produce wines that not only reflect the vintage and different ripeness levels, but also remain site-specific and terroir-driven.'

## SPECTRUM OF STYLES

Expressiveness is Riesling's most intriguing quality. Floral and herbal aromatics flow through a tapestry of fruit such as citrus, pear, nectarine and apricot. The wines are fresh and mineral-driven with mouthwatering acidity. Each



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flavour sits on a sliding scale driven by place and vintage.

'You can see incredibly different wines coming from sites that are only a few miles apart,' says James Frey of Trisaetum Winery in Oregon. 'With vineyards in three different AVAs, it's one of the reasons we bottle so many Rieslings.' From the 2022 vintage, he bottled nine: four dry, four medium-dry and one sweet.

'I can't tell the full story of Riesling in one wine,' agrees Dave Bos of Bos Wine in Michigan. Using grapes from several Old Mission Peninsula vineyards, he made two Rieslings in 2021, one of which

is 'made only in the years where I can get physiological ripeness'. Harvested just five days later than the rest, the resulting wine (*see p118*) is a fruit-forward limited release. 'Riesling shows time and place better than any other grape,' Bos says.

At Chateau Ste Michelle in Woodinville, Washington – its annual production exceeding nine million bottles makes it potentially the world's largest Riesling producer – the wines are bold. 'We have the advantage of our dry climate, which provides long, sunny days and cool temperatures in the evenings,' says head white winemaker Taylor Butterfield. 'This creates ideal conditions to help retain Riesling's natural acidity and intensify the aromas and flavours.'

Graham Tatomer of Tatomer Wines in Santa Maria, California believes the window of opportunity is largest with Riesling. 'There is always a choice to leave fruit on the vine longer or to take it today and make wine with a racier style,' he says. 'Other varieties simply do not work this way.'

When the season allows, a longer hang time is often beneficial. For Oregon vigneron Evan Martin of Martin Woods Winery, this can mean nearly 100% of his grapes will be botrytis-affected when picking starts for his late-harvest Riesling in late October. The result is a wine of some decadence (*see opposite, 2018 Hyland Vineyard*).

Discovering America's Riesling today is like seeing in technicolour after a lifetime in shades of grey. The US wine industry's embrace of the grape has opened up a world of compelling and delicious wines worth exploring.



Graham Tatomer, Tatomer Wines

PHOTOGRAPHS PAUL BRISSMAN, ERIN FEINBLATT

## Lamoreaux Landing, Sparkling, Finger Lakes, New York 2019

US\$45 lamoreauxwine.com  
A single-vineyard fizz from the sustainably managed Yellow Dog vineyard, just 2km from Seneca lake on its eastern bank. Produced using the traditional method, with secondary fermentation in the bottle, it's a refreshing sparkler with lipsmacking acidity, notes of orange citrus and cream, and lively, delicate bubbles. **Drink** 2024-2040 **Alcohol** 12.8%



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## Brooks, Ara, Willamette Valley, Oregon 2021

US\$38 (2022) brookswine.com  
A light, bright and balanced blend of old-vine plantings from two biodynamically farmed vineyards. The 2021 vintage brought optimal growing conditions to Oregon, which resulted in heightened flavours. Beautifully aromatic. On the palate are tangerine, pear, jasmine and key lime pie. Salinity, minerality and exuberant acidity linger through the finish. **Drink** 2024-2041 **Alc** 12.5%



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## Long Shadows, Poet's Leap, Columbia Valley, Washington 2022

US\$20-\$28 Black Bear, Fine Wine House, K&L, Mad Wine, Napa Cabs, Oly Wines, Shop Wine Direct, Timeless, Tower, Wine.com, Woods Wholesale Wine  
From a cooler vineyard site than most in Washington's Columbia Valley, which adds lingering acidity to the long finish. The 2022 vintage offered record-high temperatures in October, allowing longer hang time for extended ripening. As a result, the acidity is softened by intense juicy nectarine and honied ginger. **Drink** 2024-2032 **Alc** 12.4%



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## Hermann J Wiemer, HJW Bio, Seneca Lake, New York 2020

£37.50 (2019) Wanderlust Wine  
US\$45 wiemer.com  
An exceptional example of the fruit-forward Rieslings from the epic 2020 vintage. Wildflower aromatics and juicy grilled peaches and pineapples intermingle with lemon pulp, lime zest and honeyed ginger. Biodynamic. **Drink** 2024-2040 **Alc** 12.5%



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## Eroica, Columbia Valley, Washington 2022

£25-£25.75 NY Wines of Cambridge, Vinvm  
US\$22 ste-michelle.com  
A collaboration between Riesling greats Chateau Ste Michelle and Dr Loosen, this off-dry wine offers floral aromatics, succulent ripe pineapple, dried apricot and grilled citrus fruit accompanied by candied ginger. Elegant, with spirited acidity and a forgiving touch of residual sugar. A perfect companion for spicier foods. **Drink** 2024-2052 **Alc** 12%



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## Tatomer, Steinhügel, Santa Lucia Highlands, Monterey, California 2022

US\$20-\$24 K&L, Solano Cellars, Wine.com  
Steinhügel means 'stone hill' in German – the grapes are sourced from a vineyard laden with decomposed granite. The crisp bite of Bosc pear, green apple and energetic acidity join notes of crushed gravel and chalky tannins. **Drink** 2024-2042 **Alc** 12.5%



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## Authentique, Bremen Town, Eola-Amity Hills, Willamette Valley, Oregon 2020

US\$55 authentiquewinecellars.com  
The 2020 vintage in Willamette Valley was a nightmare – a challenging spring reduced the crop and there were unprecedented wildfires. This wine is a beautiful outcome from a formidable year: rich, with peach, grapefruit and the spice of honeyed ginger. Bright acidity and a mineral-driven chalkiness round out the palate. Biodynamic. **Drink** 2024-2038 **Alc** 12%



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## Forge Cellars, Breakneck Creek Dry, Seneca Lake, New York 2021

US\$28 forgecellars.com  
Two clones of Riesling were vinified and aged separately in neutral barrels then later blended. Driven by notes of grilled lemon peel, salt and crushed stone. Dried herb, smoky flint and floral notes peek out of this reverberating Riesling. Delicious to contemplate alone or a fantastic pairing with food. **Drink** 2024-2036 **Alc** 12.8%



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## Trisaetum, Ribbon Ridge Estate Dry, Willamette Valley, Oregon 2022

US\$30-\$40 Fame Cigar & Wine Lounge, Fine Wine House, Napa Cabs, Shop Wine Direct  
A beautifully balanced wine. Ribbon Ridge is the warmest of Trisaetum's three sites, providing ripe apricot, nectarine and lime citrus aromas and ginger spice, dusty chalk and petrol on the palate. Salinity echoes the marine sediment of the dry-farmed vineyard. Aged in neutral oak and concrete. **Drink** 2024-2042 **Alc** 13% ▶



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**Cobb, Cole Ranch Vineyard, Mendocino, Sonoma County, California 2021**

£43.40-£48 (2020) hic, Strictly Wine, Vinvm  
US\$35 cobbwines.com  
Elevation of 400m and higher means a cool climate helps to create a fruit-forward style. Candied lime, mango and orange blossom mingle with a whiff of cotton candy. Aged in neutral puncheons for six months, the wine is reminiscent of Chablis in body, acidity and bottle choice. **Drink** 2024-2040 **Alc** 13.8%



**Hosmer, Limited Release, Cayuga Lake, New York 2022**

US\$30 hosmerwinery.com  
From the oldest Riesling vines at Hosmer Estate Winery, which are more than 40 years old. Deliciously ripe notes of kiwi, apricot, orange blossom and fresh herbs. Lemon curd, petrol and a healthy lime acidity add depths of flavour and texture. Opulent and delicious. **Drink** 2024-2037 **Alc** 12.4%



**Left Foot Charley, Le Caban, Old Mission Peninsula, Michigan 2022**

US\$20 leftfootcharley.com  
A blend of fruit from three small vineyards. Its name an anagram of 'balance', the wine achieves just that with its perfumed aromatics on the nose and ripe, juicy peach, pear and apple on the palate. A striking acidity pierces the fruity notes, making this off-dry Riesling a great candidate for ageing. **Drink** 2024-2030 **Alc** 11.5%



**Zeitlos, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County, California 2022**

US\$70 @zeitloswines  
Sourced from vineyards on the western side of the Mayacamas mountains, planted on a 40° slope. Grapes are whole-cluster pressed, with native-yeast fermentation partly in stainless steel tanks and partly in neutral, 600L German oak puncheons, then eight months on the full lees. Beautiful floral aromatics open into notes of honey and pineapple, wet stone and a bolt of lemony acidity. **Drink** 2024-2034 **Alc** 12%



**Sleight of Hand Cellars, The Magician Evergreen Vineyard, Ancient Lakes, Columbia Valley, Washington 2022**

US\$22 softcellars.com  
Sweet and tangy notes of juicy apricot and crisp green apple are followed by a light salinity that dances on the palate in this off-dry Riesling. Made using fruit from the Evergreen vineyard, which sits at a higher elevation and is the area's largest at about 486ha. Electric, mouthwatering acidity encourages another sip. **Drink** 2024-2034 **Alc** 11.6%



**Bos, All That is Gold, Old Mission Peninsula, Michigan 2021**

US\$26 boswine.com  
From vineyards in Michigan's Old Mission Peninsula AVA, the grapes selected for the 2021 All That is Gold (created only in ideal years) were harvested five days later than the rest. This wine is juicy, fruity and delicious. Honeysuckle and dried thyme on the nose are joined by melon, orange citrus and stone fruits on the palate. There is a slight minerality and only moderate acidity due to warmer temperatures during harvest. **Drink** 2024-2035 **Alc** 12%



**Folklor, Row Boat, Tip of the Mitt, Michigan 2020**

US\$25 (2023) folklorwinecider.com  
Made using fruit from Altonen Vineyard & Orchards in Michigan. The moderating effects of nearby lakes Michigan and Torch benefited the grapes during this mild vintage. Jasmine, thyme, orchard apples, a fresh, moderate acidity and lower alcohol levels make for a quaffable, almost cider-like Riesling. **Drink** 2024-2027 **Alc** 10.5%



**Wagner, Caywood East Vineyard, Finger Lakes, New York 2021**

US\$25 wagnervineyards.com  
New York was riddled with rain in 2021 and this wine is a bright point in an otherwise challenging vintage. The grapes benefited from a slightly warmer microclimate on Seneca lake's east side, often referred to as the Banana Belt. A longer hang time resulted in ripe stone fruit herbal aromatics, and striking acidity. **Drink** 2024-2035 **Alc** 11.5%



**Martin Woods, Hyland Vineyard Noble Rot, McMinnville, Willamette Valley, Oregon 2018**

US\$45/37.5cl K&L  
A late-harvest organic Riesling that turns the volume up to 11. Caramel, baking spice, and citrus blossom are balanced by candied ginger, dried apricot and grilled pineapple. Age has brought petrol, beeswax and apple pie. Vibrant acidity balances the 108g/L residual sugar and adds crisp texture to this luscious wine. **Drink** 2024-2048 **Alc** 12.3% **D**

