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THE TRUTH ABOUT RIESLING

By Joelle Thomson

IT'S NOT trendy, it's not popular and it's not even in the top three most consumed wines in New Zealand, but it has inspired a national tasting, a series of t-shirts and an underground movement with stronger adherents than Pinot Gris could ever hope for. Riesling.

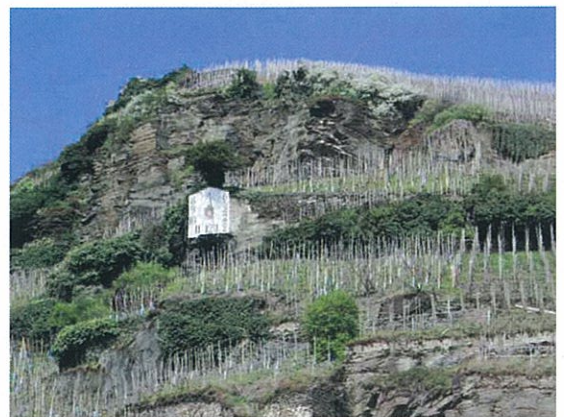
Ten years ago it was New Zealand's third most planted white grape and fifth most planted grape overall but its intense personality polarises people. And it has fallen from third most planted white grape; a position occupied today by Pinot Gris.

Marlborough winemaker Andrew Hedley from Framingham Wines is one of the country's biggest Riesling devotees and he reckons that New Zealand will never compete on volume or price with Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Pinot Gris. So why all the fuss about Riesling?

"Riesling is the greatest grape in the world," says Hedley. Not everyone is as unequivocal but many winemakers, writers and drinkers adore this grape – and a bunch of them enjoyed a long day and a great evening of it at New Zealand's third National Riesling Tasting in early February.

The movement began three years ago when two independent wine producers, Angela Clifford and Duncan Forsyth, picked up a banner that the United States restaurateur, Paul Grieco, began in New

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York when he insisted Riesling would be the only white wine served on his list one summer. This year is the third Summer of Riesling in New Zealand and the first time that New Zealand Winegrowers has supported the National Riesling Tasting; coordinating logistics, collecting information about wines entered and collating tasting sheets. Clifford was thrilled. While Riesling is thrilling in itself, it doesn't sustain an entire, two-person-run movement – especially a non-profit making one.

So what is the future of New Zealand Riesling? The lack of profit in the annual Summer of Riesling almost echoes the

lack of profitability in Kiwi Riesling, but that doesn't deter the country's best producers from making this great white wine. Riesling's natural affinity with New Zealand's cool climate, its outstanding consistency in style – particularly in the South Island and the Wairarapa – and its incredible ability to age and still taste fresh... what more could anyone wish for in a white wine?

This year's National Riesling tasting was a stunning day and night devoted to the white wine which is nearest to my heart and mind – and mouth. The vineyards may not be full of it but my glass often is and Riesling rarely disappoints. **db**

Joelle's top New Zealand Riesling producers

Aurum Wines	Central Otago	Mount Edward	Central Otago
Babich Wines	Marlborough	Neudorf Vineyards	Nelson
Black Estate	North Canterbury	Nga Waka	Martinborough
Cloudy Bay Wines	Marlborough	Palliser Estate	Martinborough
Forrest Estate	Marlborough	Pegasus Bay Wines	North Canterbury
Framingham Wines	Marlborough	Prophet's Rock	Central Otago
Fromm	Marlborough	Seifried	Nelson
Greenhough	Nelson	Terrace Edge	North Canterbury
Greywacke	Marlborough	Tongue in Groove Wines	North Canterbury
Maude	Central Otago	Waipara Hills	North Canterbury
Misha's Vineyard	Central Otago	Zephyr	Marlborough