

Wine matters by Jo Burzynska

Ravishing rieslings shake off past

Making one grape the sole focus of your label could be considered something of a risky strategy, especially when the grape is the underrated riesling. However, for Max Marriott and his partners at Auburn Winery "it was always going to be riesling".

The serious attention they've given it since the label's first releases in 2009 has resulted in wines that rate as some of the best in the country, with demand outstripping supply.

Auburn is a joint venture between three riesling-mad friends. Marriott, the man on the ground in the label's Central Otago vineyards, is an Australian who abandoned a career in astrophysics to make wine in New Zealand. David Paterson, who was Marriott's lab buddy when the pair were studying winemaking at Lincoln University, now makes one of Canada's top rieslings at Tantalus, in the Okanagan Valley. Then there's Brisbane-based Andrew Burge, the business brains behind the venture.

"Taking inspiration from the 'Old World', we wanted to specialise on one variety and make that our focus," explains Marriott. "Riesling has the ability to express its origins more than any other grape variety."

As the trio's aim at Auburn is "to express the sub-regions of Central Otago through riesling", Marriott considers it



One drop for all: David Paterson in Canada, Max Marriott in New Zealand, and Andrew Burge in Australia focus solely on riesling.

prices higher than the greatest bordeaux and burgundies. It simply goes through lulls."

Getting great rieslings into consumers' wine glasses is the way ahead, he believes, and to that end his winery is participating in the Summer of Riesling event.

"It's a fantastic initiative," he says. "The more people we can enlighten to the versatility and wondrous adaptability of riesling, the better."

If anything can spark a riesling renaissance, it's the enthusiasm of winemakers such as Marriott and the quality of examples such as those of Auburn.



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As the trio's aim at Auburn is "to express the sub-regions of Central Otago through riesling", Marriot considers it serendipitous that "Central Otago happens to be the best place in New Zealand to grow riesling; high altitude, continental climate, southern latitude and schist soils".

Auburn now produces six rieslings from around the region, all displaying distinct characters

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of their different sites. My personal pick of the current portfolio is the amazingly intense Auburn Bendigo Riesling 2012, with its notes of white peach, jasmine and grapefruit zest and powerful line of mineral, and Shining Dawn 2012, a botrytised dessert whose 6 per cent alcohol belies its huge concentration in

its palate layered with notes of honey, apricot, creme brulee and fresh lemon.

These are rieslings to convert those who've written off the variety after tasting insipid examples from the past or the confusion surrounding the grape's many styles.

"The older generation was

scarred by riesling in the '70s and '80s, but we're coming out of that hole well and truly now, with a new generation of culturally active wine consumers," Marriot says.

"Back in the day, the great rieslings of the world attracted



Auburn riesling: One variety, many styles.

One grape to rule them all

In 2008, New York restaurateur Paul Grieco decided that in order to get more people to try riesling, he'd make it the only wine he'd serve by the glass over the whole summer.

It was something of a risk, but this singular focus proved a success and now his "Summer of Riesling" movement has gone global with a wave of activity happening here in Christchurch this weekend.

Kicking off the event in Christchurch is a riesling tasting on Friday in Lyttelton, hosted by *Zest* columnist Jo Burzynska, in

collaboration with Lyttelton restaurant Roots.

Burzynska's selection of rieslings will be accompanied by canapes from Roots' chef Giulio Sturla, who is also creating a riesling-themed degustation following the wine tasting.

On Saturday, a multi-story riesling extravaganza will take place in C1 Espresso (corner of Tuam and High streets).

Throughout the "rolling riesling" day from 11am till 4pm, rieslings from Waipara wineries Black Estate Wines, Pegasus Bay and Tongue in Groove Wines will be available for sampling.

The entire C1 building will be open - basement to rooftop vineyard - with five wines accompanied by tasters created by the chefs of the individual wineries matched to each example of riesling.

In addition, C1 Espresso is also



offering a "wild card" tasting in the building's basement.

"We wanted to continue to engage the city with Waipara Valley wines, and mark this strange time where we miss so many of our favourite central city bars and restaurants," says Black Estate's Penelope Naish. "We thought we'd bring riesling into the CBD, to celebrate C1's innovative and central space under the banner of one of the greatest wine varieties in the world".

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