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## REECE-ling; needs an introduction and a second warning.

A legion of wine writers are perplexed, a world of consumers are pleased and perplexed (sorry dads this is not about your daughter's first date). Wine writers continue to foretell about the Riesling Revolution and Riesling

Maybe this is why it's such a slow-burn revolution - the converted don't want to spread the word too wide as demand might just push up the prices to reasonable levels. Not to be confused with Cape or Paarl Riesling (actually Crouchen Blanc) German a.k.a Rhine a.k.a Weisser Riesling is arguably THE classic variety (and is also planted in the Cape). Now before you cough up your Chardonnay let's consider:

### **Against:**

Germany used to produce a lot of insipid sweet wine - remember Liebfraumilch - bottled in the same elegant flute shape used to bottle Riesling. Allied to this is the varying sweetness levels found in the wine but not necessarily on the label. Then how do you pronounce it? It's well known that people are weary of ordering wines they don't know how to pronounce. Riesling has very little - if any - affinity for oak. (this also qualifies it for the 'for' section). But there are plenty of consumers who believe they like Chardonnay while it's really the oak. While heavily oaked wines are now less fashionable, oak is also used in other whites like Chenin, Semillon and Viognier.

Riesling will never be as widely grown as Chardonnay because its terroir's white equivalent of Pinot Noir (another one for 'for'). It is a cool climate variety with fastidious and sometimes temperamental habits and an affinity for slate soils.

### **For:**

No other whites age as well as Riesling and one can say that without necessarily including the much more expensive botrytized (noble rot) and ice wine Rieslings. Thanks to racy natural acidity and extract these wines don't need the fortification of alcohol - another plus - to go the distance.

While Rieslings are not easy to mistake for other white varieties, Riesling is one of those varieties that most accurately reflect a sense of place, or provenance, just like King Cabernet. Wherever its produced, Riesling is also notable for its intense aromas, variously described as floral, steely, honeyed, limes, green apple and various mineral-type aromas. In warmer climates it can show grapefruit, peach and pear.

Riesling can combine lightness of touch (lower alcohols) high extract (small berries, compact bunches) and intensity of flavour to achieve the holy grail of fine wine - power and elegance. Riesling can also make fine wine at many different sweetness levels largely due to its high natural acidity ranging from austere and steely through refreshing off-dry to intensely sweet with botrytis. And like many great wines, the best drink well young but age beautifully too. Riesling goes brilliantly with food including Asian dishes and is probably one of the most versatile wines to match with food, complimenting flavours and aromas rather than drowning them in oak or alcohol.

Although highly regarded EU and UK wine writers like Jancis Robinson have been calling Riesling the greatest white grape for some time now, its North American consumers who have become the foot soldiers or pioneering palates of the Riesling Revolution after decades of demand for anything but Riesling.

The rising quality of the Finger Lakes region of New York state, the ice wines of (Canada's) Ontario Niagara Peninsula to rival those of Germany, and Washington state where Chateau Ste. Michelle sets American records by producing 500 000 cases annually are all evidence of another tea party and America's fastest growing white variety.

Meanwhile Germany's exports of heavily commercial blends have fallen and thanks partly to climate change and to a highly ambitious generation of winemakers the quality of German Riesling has risen sharply along with the ability to fully ripen Riesling grapes. Locally good examples include Jordan,

Klein Constantia, Paul Cluver and Howard Booyen. Glen Carlou stocks Riesling from Australian sister estate Peter Lehmann, winner of 5 best Riesling in the world at London's International Wine and Spirit Competition, distributed locally by **Reciprocal Wine Trading** Cape Town-based importers **Wine Cellar** stock classic Mosel and Alsacian Riesling and some Australian.

Jonathan Snashall

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