

RESTAURANT WINE

The Full Service Guide to On Sale Beverage Profits



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SURVEY: Your Riesling Sales

RIESLING RISING

Other Varietals May Be Flashier and More Popular, But Riesling Offers Exactly What Many Customers are Seeking: Quality, Value, Drinkability, Versatility, Pedigree, and Diversity

Questions: Are you offering Riesling by the glass? Do you have a range of Riesling styles? Do you indicate Riesling styles on your wine list?

Some years ago, we wrote here about Riesling's renaissance in U.S. restaurants. At that time (late 2002), Riesling was in the process of breaking out again (it had previously done so in the 1960s and 1970s) as a mainstream varietal—a wine that increasingly appeared alongside Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Pinot Gris/Grigio in by the glass programs, on tasting menus, and on wine lists.



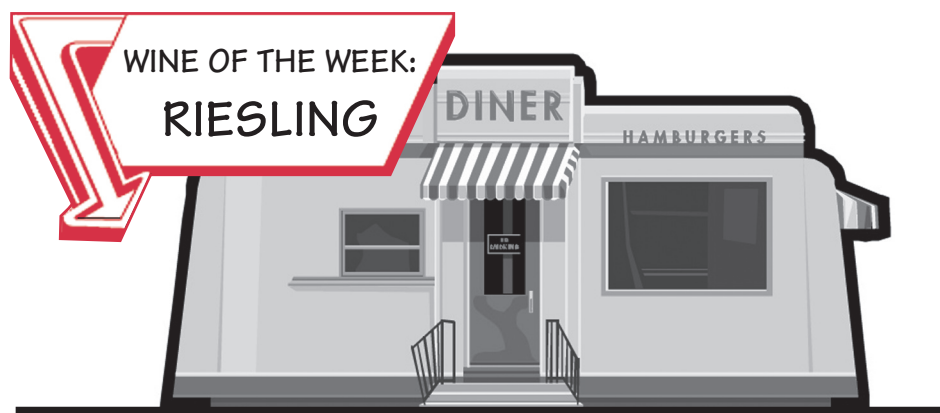
In the past six years, Riesling sales have more than tripled in volume in restaurants, and will likely reach a milestone this year—the one million case mark—and this, during a period of slowing—even stagnant—economic growth.

What's driving Riesling's sales? A range of factors, among them:

- **Value**—Rieslings are generally moderately priced wines—the majority of them sell for under \$240/case in the USA—and thus represent remarkable value, especially when compared with wines of similar quality from other noble varieties.
- **Character**—Riesling has distinctive, often intense, varietal character, which is quite pronounced and extremely appealing, especially to novice wine drinkers. (It is often described as being a combination of fruity and floral characteristics, with spicy, resin-like overtones.)

This being said, it is important to note that Riesling reflects its origins more completely and in greater detail (in the form of nuances) than virtually any other white wine variety—and more so than the majority of red wine varieties, as well. Thus, Riesling is also capable of satisfying the taste expectations of devoted aficionados—as reflected by the large number of sommeliers and wine directors in this country who state that Riesling is their favorite white varietal.

- **Drinkability**—Most Rieslings are produced in a manner that highlights the variety's character—both geographic and varietal. Such widespread white wine practices as encouraging malolactic fermentation and new oak aging are rarely utilized at all in the production of Riesling (most of the Riesling produced never sees a barrel at all), meaning that its character is not masked by other strong aromas and flavors.



Too, while some Rieslings definitely improve with 2 to 10 years of bottle aging (and sometimes much more), nearly all versions—from bone dry to very sweet—can be enjoyed upon release—and thus are very suitable for on-premise wine programs.

- **Versatility at the Table** – Few varietals or wine types can begin to match the extraordinary versatility of Riesling at the table. The variety’s stylistic diversity (it comes in dry, off dry, moderately sweet, and dessert versions), flavor intensity and firm acidity enables it to be paired with a wide range of dishes and cuisines, especially those that are problematic with other table wines, because of their pungency, spiciness, sweetness, and/or heat (Thai, Tex-Mex, etc.).

Make sure to indicate the style of every Riesling offered on your wine menus (by the glass, bottled wines), so customers who are wary of sweeter styles will not be confused by the styles of wines being offered.

Riesling in Your Wine Program

With Riesling’s popularity on the rise, it is a good time to take stock of Riesling’s role in your wine program. Start by looking over your sales figures, which you should be able to sort—at the very least—by color and type/variatal, if not region of origin.

Riesling Sales

What percentage of your total sales does Riesling account for—all Rieslings together, including dessert versions? In most restaurants, it constitutes between 2% and 5% of total sales, and a bit more in terms of volume (5% to 10%) since Rieslings generally are moderately priced. However, in Riesling focused restaurants, it can easily account for 10% to 20% of total wine sales, and even more in volume.

Next, look at your Riesling offerings themselves, by number, style, and price point. How many are served by the glass, if any? Virtually any by the glass selection that has more than 8 or 10 wines should include a Riesling, perhaps as a substitute or upsell to white Zinfandel.

On your bottled list, do Rieslings represent at least 2% of your offerings?

Riesling by Style

Equally important, do you have the two most popular Riesling styles—dry and off dry—adequately represented? (Generally, “dry” Rieslings have less than 1% residual

Here are some suggestions. Please note that these are general guidelines only.

	Total Rieslings	Style	#	How	Price Point(s)
Casual Restaurant	2-4	OD	1-2	glass	L, M
		D	1-2	bottle, 1/2 bottle	M
Midscale Restaurant	6-8	OD	1	glass	L
		D	1	glass	M
		OD	1-2	bottle	M, H
		D	1-2	bottle, 1/2 bottle	H, E
		D	1	bottle	E
		DS	1	glass (1/2 bottle)	L
		DS	1	glass (1/2 bottle)	M
Upscale Restaurant	10-30	OD	1-2	glass	M, H
		D	2-3	glass	M, H
		OD	3-6	bottle, 1/2 bottle	M, H
		D	4-8	bottle, 1/2 bottle	M, H, E
		MS	1-2	bottle, 1/2 bottle	H, E
		DS	1-2	glass	H, E
		DS	2-3	1/2 bottle, bottle	H, E

Notes

Style — D = dry, OD = off dry, MS = medium sweet, DS = dessert

Price Points — L = low (base tier), M = medium (middle tier), H = high (high tier), E = expensive (top tier)

**Two styles of Riesling—
'dry' and 'off dry' should be
represented in nearly every
wine program, since they
account for roughly 90% of all
on-premise Riesling sales.**

sugar, and “off dry” up to 3% or so.) Ideally, both of these Riesling styles should be represented in every wine program, since they account for roughly 90% of all on-premise Riesling sales (our estimate).

The other two major Riesling styles are: “medium sweet” and “dessert”. “Medium sweet” Rieslings normally have between 4% and 8% residual sugar (equivalent to many German Ausleses) and can be matched with slightly sweet and intensely flavored main courses, such as some curries. However, this style of Riesling tends to be the one that is the least frequently ordered in restaurants, because its sweetness level is considered too high to go with first or main courses, and not quite rich enough to accompany most desserts.

“Dessert” Rieslings are exactly this—rich enough to accompany many desserts or to be served in place of dessert. They typically have 9%+ residual sugar. Because dessert Rieslings are ideal accompaniments for many desserts—specifically fruit- and nut-based cakes and pastries—they are most frequently sold by the glass, in 1/2 glass portions and sometimes less, when the wines are very expensive. Of course, dessert Rieslings should be merchandised with desserts on your menu.

Do you have the four major styles represented in your wine program? Are your servers trained to explain the differences among them, especially in terms of their relative sweetness levels? They should be. Also, make sure to indicate the style of every Riesling offered on your wine menus (by the glass, bottled wines). This way, customers—many of whom are wary of sweeter styles of Riesling—will not be confused, especially between those in the “dry” and “off dry” styles.

Riesling by Price Point

As mentioned above, the majority of Rieslings sold in US restaurants wholesale for \$240/case (case #1 non-discounted) and under.

To maximize your Riesling sales, review your current Riesling offerings, identifying those that sell the most (both in terms of dollars and glasses/bottles sold). Make sure that their pricing is staggered, especially if you have several in one style, so you are not wasting valuable “shelf space” with Rieslings that overlap each other.

How many Rieslings, at what price points, and in what styles might different restaurants offer? That depends on your customer base, cuisine, check average, climate, season, and inventory limitations. 🍷

Some Riesling Reminders

Riesling is pronounced “Reese-ling” (not “Rice-ling”).

Riesling is also called White Riesling, Rhine Riesling, and Johannisberg Riesling. There are many other varieties with the word Riesling in their names—including Welschriesling, Grey Riesling, etc.—but these do not have the same pedigree as true Riesling.

Many Rieslings today are being bottled with alternative closures, especially screwcaps. Because Rieslings reveal ‘cork taint’ or ‘corkiness’ quite easily, we recommend purchasing Rieslings with screwcap or Vino-loc closures whenever possible. You will find them on bottles of nearly all New Zealand Rieslings, many Australian ones, and an increasing number of German, Austrian, and American Rieslings, as well.

Don’t forget to add a Riesling or two to your half-bottle list! Many quality Riesling producers are bottling a percentage of their better off dry and dry Rieslings in half-bottles, in addition to their sweeter Rieslings.

Your servers should be able to describe to guests the basic differences among all the Rieslings you offer in your wine program. Thus, it is imperative that they know whether a specific Riesling is dry, off dry, medium sweet, or dessert in style; how to describe it in terms of body, flavor intensity, and acidity (since Riesling can be very crisp); what dishes on the menu to recommend it with.

Riesling Training Tools

- For more information on pairing Riesling with food, go to the website, <http://destinationriesling.com>, where you can find food recommendations for Rieslings from Alsace, Austria, and Germany in multiples styles, as developed by publisher Ronn Wiegand.
- An excellent 40-page, educational guide to Riesling, Riesling Rules, was recently published by Pacific Rim winery. The booklet contains detailed, practical information and opinions on Riesling styles, history, service, regions, and producers around the world. It is free to the trade upon request (info@rieslingrules.com), and is also available in its entirety on the company website, www.rieslingrules.com.

International Sources for Quality Rieslings by Style

		Dry	Off Dry	Medium Sweet	Dessert
Australia	Adelaide Hills	x			
	Clare Valley	x			
	Eden Valley	x			
	Great Southern	x	x		
	Tasmania	x	x		
Austria	Kamstal	x			
	Kremstal	x			
	Neusiedlersee			x	x
	Rust			x	x
	Wachau	x			
Canada	Niagara Peninsula	x	x	x	x
	Okanagan Valley	x	x	x	x
France	Alsace	x	x	x	x
Germany	Baden	x	x	x	x
	Franken	x	x	x	x
	Mosel-Saar-Ruwer	x	x	x	x
	Nahe	x	x	x	x
	Pfalz	x	x	x	x
	Rheingau Rheinhessen	x x	x x	x x	x x
New Zealand	Canterbury (Waiapara)	x	x	x	x
	Central Otago	x	x	x	
	Marlborough	x	x	x	x
USA	California	x	x	x	x
	Michigan	x	x	x	x
	New York	x	x	x	x
	Oregon	x	x	x	x
	Washington	x	x	x	x