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KEEPING RIESLING SIMPLE

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Trockenbeerenauslese is the longest word I can use in a sentence. You know, the German wine term from the Prädikatswein system?

Yup, it's yet another one of those big, complex German wine terms found on labels, confusing many on a daily basis. (For the record, it's the highest level in the sugar-content system of classifying wines, and in this case includes grapes that have been affected by botrytis, or 'noble rot'.)

Winemaker Martin Tesch of Tesch Vineyards in Nahe, Germany, family-owned since 1723, was growing tired of the global frustration with German wine terms. In particular, his concern honed in on those hoping for a quality, dry Riesling, but abstained from a purchase due to an inability to decipher labels and fear of something too sweet and not to their liking. To the dismay of traditionalists, he decided to do away with them.

In his mind, Riesling should be more about site, or terroir, than its sugar levels, and besides – he really wasn't a fan of the sweet stuff anyways. He colour-coded his Rieslings according to the five single-vineyard sites on the small, 20-hectare estate they came from. He also ditched cork in favour of stelvin closures (screw caps); the critics howled, his customers balked, and his sales initially plummeted 40 per cent.

As he'd anticipated, there was redemption and the new generation came to his wines, first as a trickle and then as a flood. Many of them got to know each wine's character based on the vineyard-name and colour on each label; each one dry, delicious, and unique. Those labels, including a sixth 'entry level' black-labeled Riesling dubbed Unplugged, all include a portrait of his great-grandfather, a gesture of respect to the winery's heritage.

A slew of fresh 2012 vintages are heading to our market; here's what you can find in the meantime. Don't let the older vintages be of concern, these wines age and evolve well. Scoop 'em while you can!

Tesch 2010 Unplugged Riesling | Nahe, Germany | \$19.99 | BC Liquor Stores

A fresh and pure, honest Riesling that's the epitome of a handful of gravel with a generous squeeze each of Meyer lemon, lime, and pink grapefruit. Easy and crisp.

Tesch 2009 Königsschild Riesling | Nahe, Germany | \$32-35 | Everything Wine/Kits Wine Cellar

I find the blue-labeled Riesling coming out of the Königsschild vineyard block has slightly more candied notes; lemon Jolly Rancher, wine gums and SweetTarts dominated the otherwise fresh mandarin orange fruit, with a nice rip of acidity throughout. Make no mistake, it's still dry, but with nicely rounded, supple edges.

Tesch 2009 Karthäuser Riesling | Nahe, Germany | \$27.99 | BC Liquor Stores

Tasting alongside colleagues recently, this brown-labeled wonder was the favorite of the bunch. Steely and bold, pomelo and lime offer an intensity and zip that leaves your mouth watering and ready for another sip. A nice crack of white-pepper spice keeps it lively as well.

As always, if you're having trouble tracking something down or just want to say hi, find me via KurtisKolt.com

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