

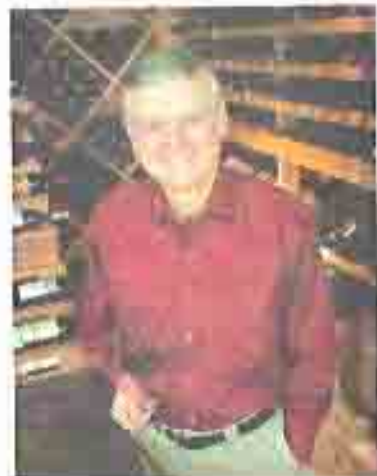
Three Cheers for Dry Riesling

By George M. Taber

My favorite white wine is probably Riesling. I also enjoy Chardonnay, another popular white, such as Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio, Gewürztraminer. Riesling, though, is usually my go-to white wine. I first started learning about it many years ago, while working in Germany for a summer after graduate school.

But unfortunately every once in a while, I am surprised and disappointed when I happen to get a Riesling that is a little sweet. There may be the same varietal name on the label, but the taste was not what I had expected. So a Riesling may be a Riesling or may not be a Riesling. I won't pour a sweet Riesling down the drain, but I am disappointed.

A few weeks ago, I got an email from Randy Agness, a winemaker who makes wine in the Finger Lakes region of New York, which is one of the better growing areas for Riesling grapes. We had met at the Finger Lakes International Wine Competition



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in Rochester. He said that he had recently been making Riesling and wondered if I would swap a bottle of his wine for a copy of my book *Judgment of Paris*, which recounts the story of a famous 1976 wine tasting in Paris, when unknown California wines beat the best of France in both the Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay competition. That put California

on the world wine map.

I'm always looking for new wine, so I agreed. A few days later, the bottle arrived on my doorstep. The name of the wine was Agness Cellars. It was the 2015 vintage. The surprising thing was the term Semi-Dry Riesling on the label. I immediately thought that meant it was a semi-sweet wine. But when I poured it from a beautiful green bottle, I was surprised that I was wrong. It was dry.

When I tasted it, Wow! It was delightful. Soft, fruity, fresh. A perfect wine to go with the chicken pot pie that my wife had made for dinner. This was not sweet at least to my palate. It was a perfect match for the pot pie. I wasn't surprised that it had won a double-gold award at the famous Indy Indianapolis Wine Competition.

He told me later that the wine tasted in the range of 1.5-1.8% residual sugar. That to me is a dry wine. I did not get even a hint of any sweetness in his wine.

A few days later, I called

Randy to talk about his wine. He told me that he is a new winemaker and this was his first vintage. He does not yet own a vineyard, but buys grapes from growers near where he lives, and Riesling is their top product. Randy said he had made only 100 cases, which he soon sold in shops around the area where he lived. The price was in the range of \$15 a bottle. He's looking forward to making a larger production this fall, and he is going to stick to Semi-Dry Riesling. I think he's got a winner, and a good plan for success.

George M. Taber is the author of *Judgment of Paris—California vs. France and the Historic 1976 Paris Tasting that Revolutionized Wine* and other wine books.