

GERMAN RIESLING RENAISSANCE

WSET DIPLOMA THESIS

FERENC TAR PHD

SUMMARY

The objective of this thesis is to explore the recent success, expansion and revival of the Riesling grape variety with special attention to recent market success of German Rieslings.

The direct objectives of the Thesis is to find explanations and evidences to the Renaissance of the German Riesling through the exploration of the following factors: changes in global wine consumption trends, expansion of Riesling vineyard and wine production in New World wine regions, food and gastronomy trends, high quality vintages in classic wine regions, climate change aspects, new, innovative marketing tools, market restructuring and success stories of top German wine producers.

Riesling has been arguably the world's most undervalued grape for long time. It is a unique and great vine variety of Germany and could claim to be the finest white grape variety in the world on the basis of following factors: its versatile styles (the whole range from light, dry, fruity through complex, mineral full-bodied dry wines to sweet dessert and sparkling wines), its longevity and extreme aging potential and ability to transmit the characteristics of a terroir without losing its own style.

Following to the overview of Riesling's story and current situation with special attention to recent changes in export market situation the influencing factors are envisaged and analysed, how far are they accounted for the success and revival of Riesling recently, and the following conclusions are formulated:

Factors of success and revival

- **Wine market trends:** all the overviewed wine market trends (new discoveries, Millennials leading role in nowadays wine culture, sustainability, interest for cooler climate wines, lower alcohol preference, etc) seem to be (very) positive for Riesling, so the current boom still has plenty of "fuel", the tendency in the popularity increase is expected to continue.
- **Riesling styles "en vogue" again:** sweet versus dry? Sweet Rieslings apparently lost the battle to the dry ones, Riesling fever rooting from the fruity, aromatic but more dry versions of the variety both in the soaring US and European markets, sweet Rieslings are narrowed down to a niche products of Asian markets and the Asian/fusion restaurant scene.

- **Food match and gastronomy** The main key to the success of Riesling is that it is a perfect wine for all kinds of food matches because of its balance of sugar and acidity, thus, it is a terrific partner for many types of cuisine (modern European, international haute cuisine, Thai, Chinese, Middle Eastern, Asian and Fusion)
- **Climate change aspects** Interestingly, mostly positive aspects of the visible climate change are pointed out with better, riper vintages, possibility for great dry and sweet wines, more stability for both quantity and quality, nevertheless certain problems and challenges are (higher alcohol, acidity loss, heavier styles, canopy management, extreme and very variable weather conditions, more hand work, yield control, etc) which have to be properly addressed.
- **Innovative marketing tools:** probably one of the most important success factors of all listed, as the fresh, new ideas of advertising, educating, entertaining, fascinating techniques combined with the excellent wines resulted in an extremely successful attention raising for the variety and huge amount of new fans, winelovers who turned to Riesling and started to discover and enjoy its many faces and depths, styles, creating the image: **“Riesling is COOL!”**

German Riesling – new Superstar born?

- **Popular by demand – market transformation for German Rieslings:** the game has completely changed for Riesling as former, classical markets for (mostly sweet) are down and new markets emerged and dominate exports both in Europe (Scandinavia, Netherlands, UK) and in the US, the primary focus on dry, elegant, balanced wines. There is a huge share of US sales which is now the leading export market for German Riesling – changes related to the US market are the main driving forces for the Riesling Renaissance/Revolution.
- **Success stories :** there are many successful experiences in the last decade which directly related to the Riesling story with brilliant names like Dönnhoff, Loosen, Markus Molitor, Leitz. There is a huge amount of human talent, effort, creativity and value which fuels the Riesling boom.
- **The future: is bright?** Although there are certain challenges, the overall expectations from both from winemakers, consumers and wine experts is the same: yes, future is bright for Riesling!