

Session 3: Perception vs. Reality— Balance in Riesling

Revisiting ageability...

Do wines go through a “dumb phase”?

Is there such thing as bottle shock?

What are the best conditions for aging wine?

How do you know when an aged wine is ready to drink?



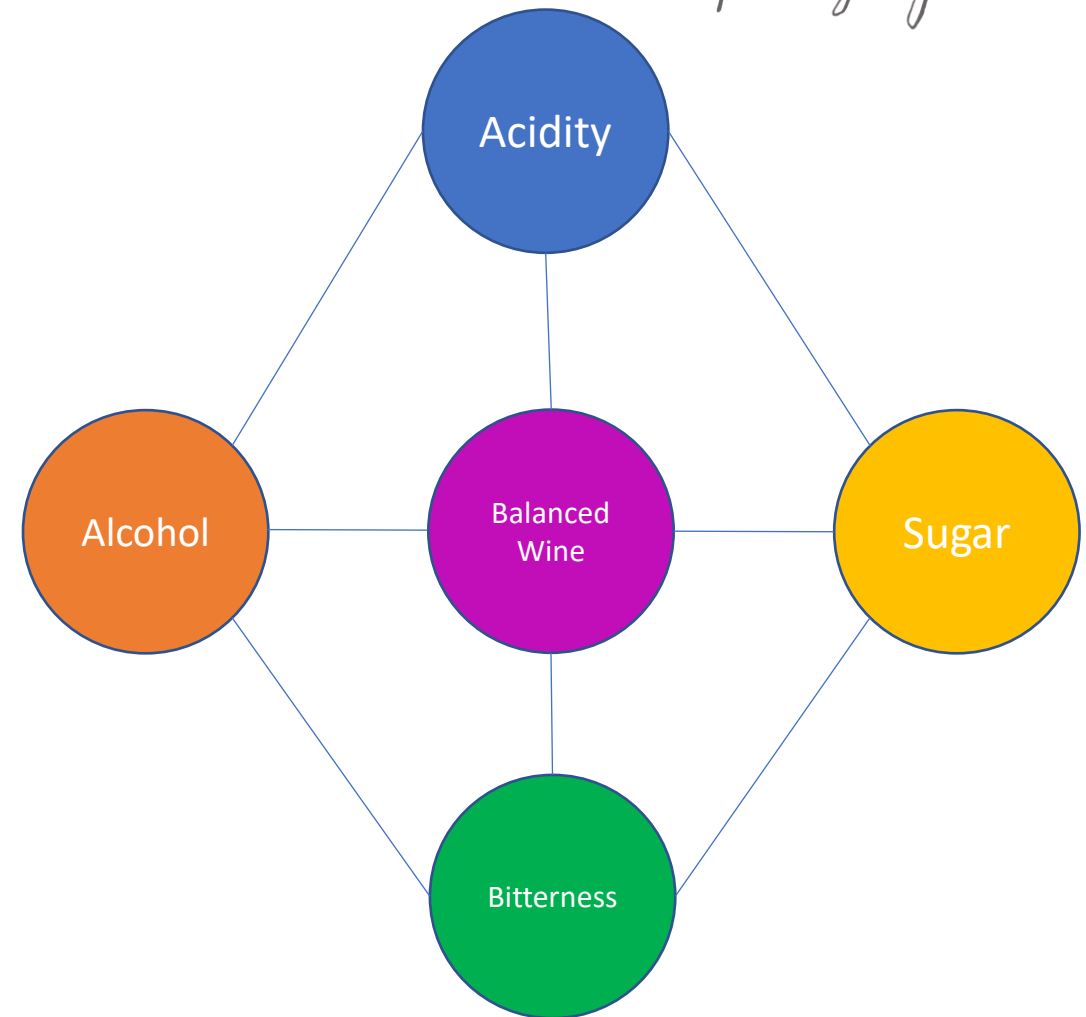
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Balance

What makes a wine “Balanced”?

A wine “has balance” or “is well balanced” when alcoholic strength, acidity, residual sugar, tannins and fruit complement each other so that no single one of them is obtrusive on the palate.

This extremely important wine characteristic is quite unrelated to flavor.



Definitions: *Oxford Companion to Wine third ed.; Robinson J.; 2006*

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Residual sugar alone can be deceiving



| | Estate Riesling 2021 | Riesling 2019 (semi-dry) | Semi-dry Riesling 2018 |
|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Residual sugar | 11 g/L | 24 g/L | 24 g/L |
| Titratable acidity | 7.3 g/L | 8.6 g/L | 8.4 g/L |
| Sugar/acid ratio | 1.5 | 2.8 | 2.9 |
| pH | 3.16 | 2.93 | 3.22 |
| IRF level | Medium dry | Medium sweet/medium dry | Medium sweet |

| IRF RIESLING TASTE PROFILE, TECHNICAL GUIDELINES SUMMARY | | | | | | |
|--|---------------------|------------|---------------|----|-----------------|------------|
| | SUGAR TO ACID RATIO | pH | | pH | SHIFT DUE TO pH | |
| DRY | < 1.0 | 3.1 to 3.2 | If = or > 3.3 | | Med Dry | |
| | | | | | 3.5 or > | Med Sweet |
| MEDIUM DRY | 1.0 to 2.0 | | = or > 3.3 | | Medium Sweet | |
| | | | | | < or = 2.9 | Dry |
| MEDIUM SWEET | 2.1 to 4.0 | | = or > 3.3 | | Sweet | |
| | | | | | < or = 2.9 | Medium Dry |
| | | | | | < or = 2.8 | Dry |
| SWEET | = or > 4.1 | | < or = 2.9 | | Medium Sweet | |
| | | | | | < or = 2.8 | Medium Dry |

Good article on Balance in Riesling from International Riesling Foundation:
<https://drinkriesling.com/riesling-rules-book/beauty-in-balance-sweetness-to-acidity>

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Other Factors Influencing Balance

- Alcohol
- Vineyard Flavor (Gridley vs. Estate)
- Winemaking



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When Sweetness is Desirable

- To balance high acid
- To accentuate fruity character
- To help a wine age longer
- To achieve higher body/more viscosity



Sweetness in Riesling

Sucrose = fructose + glucose

Fructose in wine:

- Fructose tastes sweeter than glucose
- Yeast consume more glucose early in fermentation, leave fructose for the end
- Wines made sweet by arrested fermentation have more fructose in their residual sugar than those made by back-sweetening with sucrose
- Arrested fermentation can make a medium-sweet wine that has less actual sugar due to the fructose/glucose imbalance



Balance is Subjective

...so always remember,
the best wine
is the wine you like best!

(as long as it's Riesling)



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Glossary of Terms: *Oxford Companion to Wine third ed.; Robinson J.; 2006*

Acidity—the fresh, tart or sour taste produced by the natural organic acids present in a liquid

pH—a scale of measurement of the concentration of the effective, active acidity in a solution. Low values indicate high concentrations of acidity and the tart or sour taste that occurs in lemon juice. Values near 7 are effectively neutral. Values between 7 and 14 are found in basic or alkaline solutions such as washing soda. The pH range of most wines is between 2.9 and 4.2. Wines with low pH taste very tart while those with high pHs taste flat or flabby.

Residual Sugar—the total quantity of sugars remaining unfermented in the finished wine, including both glucose and fructose. Riesling is made at all levels of residual sugar.

Sweet Wines—have been popular since ancient times; the most admired wines of ancient Rome, Italian City-states of the Middle Ages, and 17th and 18th Century Europe were sweet white wines. Examples include Sauternes, Tokaji, Constantia and Vin Doux Naturel.

Sweet Wine Making—sweetness in wine can be achieved by 1.) concentrating the sugar in grapes (noble rot, frozen grapes, or dried grapes), 2.) adding sugar or sweet grape juice (sussreserve) after fermentation, 3.) arresting fermentation (through chilling, filtering out yeast and/or addition of sulfur dioxide) and 4.) adding spirit to grape juice during fermentation (vin doux naturel).

International Riesling Foundation—The International Riesling Foundation is a not-for-profit organization devoted to increasing the awareness, understanding and enjoyment of Riesling, and to facilitating cooperation among Riesling producers and other members of the wine trade to that end. IRF developed the Riesling Taste Profile, an at-a-glance indicator of where a wine fits on the dry-to-sweet scale. The Riesling Taste Profile makes it easier for consumers to predict the taste they can expect from a particular bottle of Riesling. Based on IRF guidelines for the interplay of sugar, acid and pH, winemakers calculate where to place the arrow on the profile for use on the back label to help consumers choose the Riesling that best matches their taste.