

A close-up photograph of a pair of hands holding a bunch of green grapes. The hands are positioned on either side of the grapes, with fingers gently cupping them. The grapes are small, round, and have a light green color with some darker spots. The background is dark and out of focus. A white octagonal frame is overlaid on the top half of the image, containing text.

Rieslingfreak

Est. 2009

Reverence of Riesling



“When I named my winery Rieslingfreak, many thought it would be limiting for a winemaker, being unlikely to provide room to make anything else bar Riesling. But I didn’t see it that way, because Riesling is my obsession and entirely fuels my winemaking ambitions. Undistracted, I can be fully consumed with exploring and expressing its remarkable possibilities through my collection of wines, each given its own number to represent a different style, region or vineyard.

What began as a passion project in 2009 has grown to a portfolio of a dozen wines. The origin of each can be traced to the vineyards of six growers - two in Clare Valley, and four in Eden Valley; to my mind, Australia’s premier Riesling regions. Being more akin to family than suppliers, we’re constantly engaged in a candid exchange of knowledge and thought, encouraged by a shared purpose to create great wine from the ground up. Their commitment to my ambitions is very special to me, as it ensures we can fulfil the purpose of Rieslingfreak.

My wife Belinda, an award-winning Riesling maker in her own right, joined me at the winery from the 2021 vintage. We share a long and friendly rivalry over who makes better Riesling, and in the process have accumulated between us a swag of awards and humbly welcomed critical acclaim. We’re equally consumed with exploring and discovering Riesling styles from across the globe, and applying them to our winemaking endeavours at home. This helps us continually raise the quality standards associated with the Rieslingfreak name, whilst also uncovering new possibilities.

Albeit an unintended consequence of our reverence for Riesling, we’re very proud that Rieslingfreak has become integral to the Riesling conversation in Australia. We’re humble people by nature, but comfortable with our new found ‘fame’. It aligns with a shared love for Riesling, and a personal mission to spread the word and enlighten more to its wonders.”

John Hughes, Rieslingfreak



Winemaking at Rieslingfreak

The winemaking program at Rieslingfreak has a singular purpose; to produce a collection of wines that expresses the quality and diversity of Riesling encompassing the defining character of the vintage and different regional expressions and winemaking styles. Each wine is given a number to identify its origin and style, which is retained from one vintage to the next. This allows Riesling drinkers the opportunity to pursue the progression of a particular wine across multiple vintages, or to compare and contrast the many different wines produced in a single vintage year.

As we approach each harvest, our focus turns to the growers' vineyards. We assess ripeness and taste fruit for flavour development and concentration before determining the ideal picking date for each site. Vintage conditions do vary from year to year, and we adapt to highlight the character strengths of each vintage, whilst maintaining the distinct identity of each wine. Being able to draw on knowledge accumulated working independently and now together over many years allows us to rely on an acute sense of taste in the vineyard and the winery to deliver a balanced Riesling that is true to type each year.

Most of the vineyards are harvested by machine in the cool of the night, and the fruit arrives at the winery early in the morning for processing. Unlike many Riesling producers, we employ the 'spin and drain' method rather than pressing the fruit. This ensures the berries are treated as gently as possible to preserve the purity of the juice and retain distinct character of the vineyard site.

We believe our responsibility as Riesling winemakers is to deliver a 'balanced' Riesling that harmoniously combines three elements; fruit flavour, acid, and sweetness. Acid levels in the juice are adjusted if necessary to promote palate length and vitality. There is plenty of debate over the use of 'wild' vs 'cultured' yeast, but at Rieslingfreak cultured yeasts are preferred. They help deliver the consistency and authenticity of regional and stylistic expression we're aiming for, and therefore play a major role in determining winemaking outcomes.



The 2023 vintage

For Belinda and I, the first half of each year are the premiership months at Rieslingfreak, akin to a long run finals campaign.

Beginning with pre harvest rounds of the vineyards in February, assessing ripeness and tasting fruit for flavour development and concentration before determining the ideal picking date for each site. This was a vintage where patience was the ultimate virtue. Where time spent in the vineyard was critical to producing quality Riesling. Then long days at the winery, followed by endless classification rounds. Drawing on knowledge accumulated working independently and now together over many years to the task of crafting a collection of Riesling wines true to type, and reflective of the vintage. Perhaps a task of limited glamour but of utmost importance, we must then cast a watchful eye as the product of the toils of our growers, the nuances of the season, and our own sweat (no blood and only tears of joy this year) heads down the bottling line in the third week of June.

To say that we are merely excited about releasing the 2023 collection and only thrilled with the abundant quality and exceptional character of these Rieslings would do the wines and the vintage a grave injustice. For 2023 will go down as a winning year in every way. We look forward to showcasing and enjoying these wines with our customers throughout 2023 and beyond.

John Hughes
Winemaker/ Owner - RIESLINGFREAK

After a winter of average rainfall and temperatures across most of South Australia, the Spring of 2022 brought record breaking rainfall, more than double the long-term average in Clare and Barossa. Added to the wet conditions were record breaking low temperatures, 3°C below the long-term average daily highs.

The cold and wet spring led to significant delays in budburst and shoot growth, with growth milestones occurring 5-6 weeks later than normal. Good sub soil moisture levels and plentiful supplemental water courtesy of the wet spring countered the drier than average summer conditions, helping to maintain vine health and support ripening across the Clare and Eden Valleys. Cooler than average day and night-time temperatures persisted, with mild and temperate conditions extending into early autumn, ensuring a long, slow ripening season with remarkable acid retention in the grapes.

Rieslingfreak commenced harvest on 14th of March, 4 weeks later than the previous year and exactly 12 months from the date of our final crush in 2022. The 2023 harvest began with a small parcel of grapes from the Polish Hill River Vineyard for our No.8 "Schatzkammer" Riesling. This was quickly followed by grapes from our White Hutt, Polish Hill River, Eden Valley and Flaxman Valley vineyards, completing our entire harvest in just 11 days. Our final crush was completed on the 24th of March with fruit from Ben Zander's vineyard for No.12 Flaxman Valley Riesling.

While vintage has been one of lengthy delays and numerous challenges, we at Rieslingfreak are ecstatic with the entire range of 2023 Rieslings. While the after-effects of the 2021 hailstorm are still felt across Eden Valley with reduced crop loads due to physical damage to the developing buds, crop levels from Clare and Polish Hill River are above average, and the quality of the wines from all regions are looking truly exceptional. To this point, it will be a truly difficult task to pick a favourite region, let alone a favourite wine, from the 2023 vintage. All we can do is continue to appraise the wines on a very regular basis!



Clare Valley

The Clare Valley is nestled in the Mount Lofty Ranges about 60 miles north of Adelaide, the capital of South Australia. Vineyards are located between 1300 and 1900 feet above sea level, planted in ancient sedimentary soils that lie over an undulating landscape of north-south hill ranges that form a series of ridges, foothills and valleys. The climate is Mediterranean, with typically warm to hot summers and cool to cold winters. Annual rainfall is in the region of 24 inches falling mostly in Winter & Spring, with occasional summertime thunderstorms providing the vines welcome refreshment during the dry growing season.

The game changer for what is a generally warm climate region are the maritime breezes that originate in the Spencer Gulf 100 miles to the west. They have a drastic cooling effect on the vineyards during summer and autumn, plunging night-time temperatures well below daytime highs, creating a diurnal temperature range of up to 70F degrees. This creates slower and more even ripening conditions, ideal for producing what we reckon to be some of Australia's greatest Riesling.



“Our Clare Rieslings display plenty of green lemon and lime character, with the wines from my family’s White Hutt Vineyard showing riper citrus notes of mandarin and orange peel. The Polish Hill River district is very special, producing flinty, slate, rocky, grapefruit and passionfruit characters in the wines”

John Hughes



Rieslingfreak Clare Valley growers

Richard & Anne Hughes - White Hutt Vineyard

Richard and Anne Hughes are family in the truest sense of the word, better known around the dinner table as John's dad and mum. Situated on the flats in the middle of a valley 4 miles north of the town of Clare, the White Hutt vineyard has a distinct microclimate. Situated at 1,500 feet above sea level with an average annual rainfall of 22 inches, the vines are planted in heavy loam and *terra-rossa* soils over limestone. The vineyard contains five individual Riesling sites, showcasing two different clones. This allows for hand selection of grapes for individual Rieslingfreak wines, ensuring each wine is different, yet truly representative of our style and region, and this vineyard.

Rob & Lyn Jaeschke - Hill River Vineyard, Polish Hill River Clare Valley

The first vines were planted on this site approximately 3 miles south-east of the Clare township by Max Schubert of Penfolds Grange fame in 1981, suggesting a notable and prosperous future which we're working with Rob & Lyn to realise. Situated in the district of Polish Hill River, the vineyard is planted 1500 feet above sea level and receives an average annual rainfall of 24 inches. The vines are planted in grey brown loam, over sandy limestone and shale rock. The Jaeschke's are a Certified Member of Sustainable Winegrowing Australia.

Sandow Vineyard -Watervale

Planted in 2003, the Sandow's Trelawney Vineyard is located in Watervale in the heart of the Clare Valley. The vines (clone GM198) grow in dark red terra rosa soils, with the clone. They are spur pruned, and double lifting wires are used to train the vine vertically to protect the fruit during the warm ripening and harvest seasons. Straw mulch is used under the vine to assist with soil moisture retention, and a mid row cover crop serves as an organic source of vital nutrients.



Eden Valley

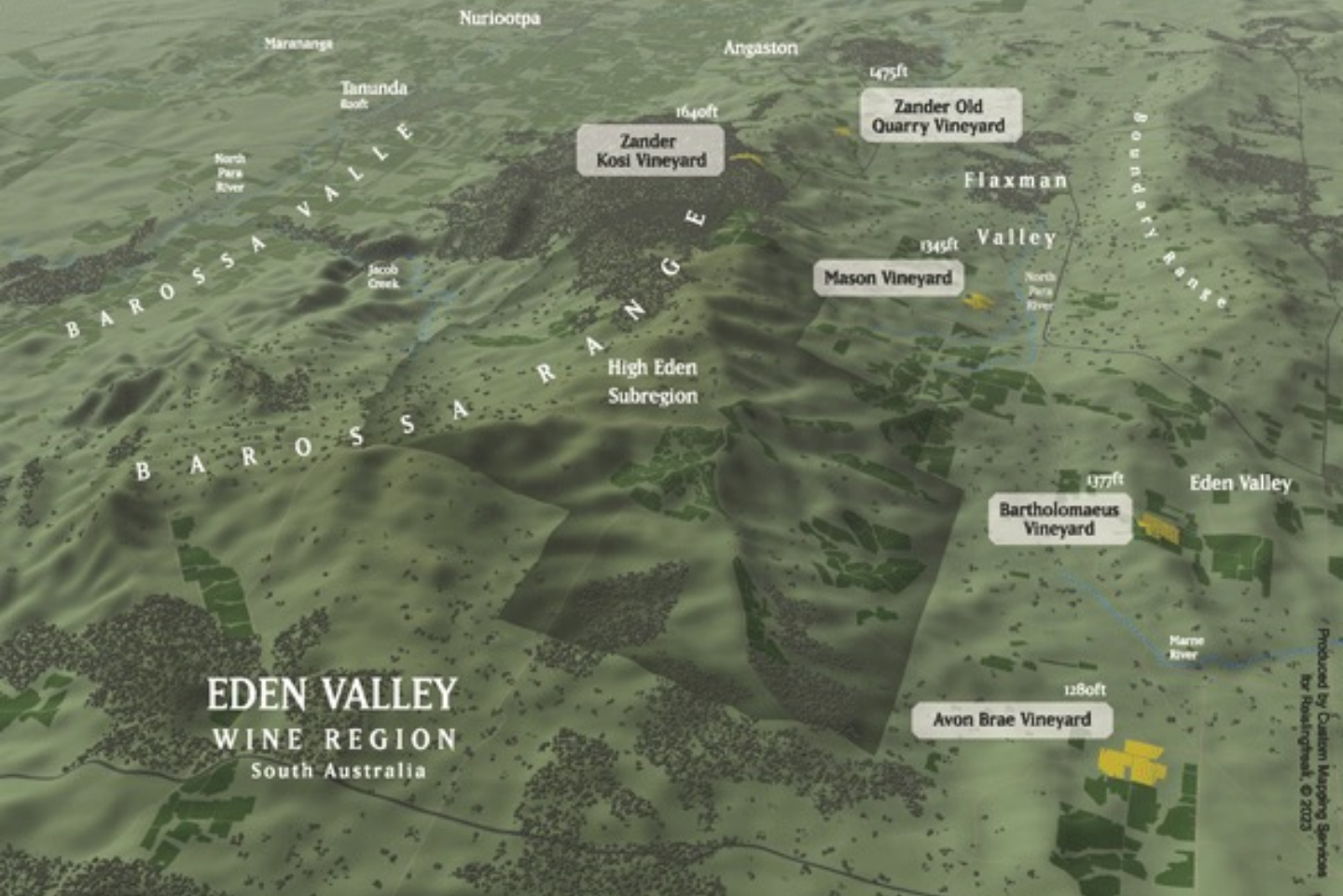
The Eden Valley lies 40 miles northeast of Adelaide, adjoining the eastern boundary of the Barossa Valley at the highest point along the Barossa Ranges that intersect the two regions. The first vineyards were planted in 1847, and today there are over 2,500 hectares of vines scattered across an undulating landscape of rolling hills dotted with ancient gum trees.

Sparse rainfall and free draining grey sandy loam soils riddled with ancient schist rock and outcrops of granite stone, combined with elevations that range from 700 – 2,000 feet above sea level, provide the perfect slow ripening environment for producing world class Riesling – a variety that has become the region’s calling card.



“Eden Valley Rieslings typically display a signature slate, mineral character, strong lime juice and fragrant floral aromas and great intensity of flavour on the palate.”

John Hughes



Rieslingfreak Eden Valley growers

Ben Zander – Flaxman Valley, High Eden

Ben Zander is a second-generation grape grower, widely known for the exceptional quality of his Eden Valley Riesling. This vineyard is planted in loam soil over light medium clay, with high quartz rock and gravel content. Situated at 1550 feet above sea level, the vineyard receives approximately 24 inches of rainfall a year.

Mark Bartholomaeus

The Bartholomaeus vineyard is situated in the heart of the Eden Valley township at 1100 feet above sea level. The vines are over 65 years old, among the oldest plantings of Riesling in the area, and produce wines of intense flavour and exceptional natural acidity.

Avon Brae

Located on the outskirts of the township of Springton, the Avon Brae vineyard contains several blocks of Riesling planted on a variety of soils and aspects. This us allows us to create a range of Riesling expressions ranging from lean and elegant to rich and full-flavoured. Situated in the South-Western corner of Eden Valley adjacent the Adelaide Hills, the cooler temperatures and higher rainfall in this area creates extended ripening periods compared to the rest of the region.

Michael Mason – Flaxman Valley, High Eden

High Eden is a designated sub region of the Eden Valley, an area highly regarded as home to some of Australia's finest Riesling. The Mason vineyard is situated 2 miles north-west of the Eden Valley township at 1500 feet above sea level. The vines are planted in shallow grey sandy loams over shale rock with average rainfall of approximately 27 inches per annum.



No.2 – Polish Hill River

From Rob and Lyn Jaeschke's Polish Hill River vineyard sited at 500 meters above sea level, 5km South-East of the Clare township. The Jaeschke's are a Certified Member of Sustainable Winegrowing Australia. The 15-year-old vines are planted on 40-year-old root stock in grey-brown loam-based soils, over sandy limestone and shale rock. Average annual rainfall is 600 millimetres.

The Polish Hill River district is renowned for producing Riesling of elegance, and the 2023 No. 2 is no exception. The bouquet is highly perfumed with aromas of fresh grapefruit, jasmine, chamomile and apple blossom, with a hint of peachy sweetness. The palate is crisp yet silky- soft, with a fine, talc-like minerality imparting a pleasing slipperiness to the texture in the mouth. The bright citrusy flavours run a fine line between sweet and tart, anchored by the acerbically mouth-watering flavours of pink grapefruit and kumquat, wrapped in the subtly- sweet flavours of Nashi Pear, apricot and white peach. The elegant and complex palate is punctuated with bright natural acidity, imparting exceptional length and a clean, crisp finish.



No.33 – Clare Valley

This wine incorporates fruit from our Clare Valley grower family - Richard & Anne Hughes at White Hutt, the Sandow family at Watervale, and Robert and Lyn Jaeschke at Polish Hill River.

This Riesling strikes an excellent balance of the contrasting characters of each of the 3 vineyard sites. The inherent richness and generosity of the fruit from the family vineyard in White Hutt, the delicate structure and highly perfumed bouquet of Riesling from Watervale, and the lean, mineral-driven elegance of the fruit from Polish Hill River make a beautifully compatible trio. The wine is richly imbued with aromas of crisp apple, guava and pink grapefruit; with floral top-notes of orange blossom and elderflower. The palate is softly textured and richly flavoured with white peach, tangerine and passionfruit, while the bright natural acidity draws through to a crisp, clean finish.

A wine of immediate appeal and absolute approachability, it is poised for ultimate enjoyment on release and complements a variety of cuisines.



No.44 – Eden Valley

This wine is made from fruit sourced from our Eden Valley grower family – Ben Zander, Michael Mason and Mark Bartholomaeus in Flaxman Valley, and Avon Brae Vineyards near Springton.

Eden Valley Rieslings are renowned for their delicacy and refinement, and this wine highlights this distinctive character in a beautifully composed symphony of aromas and flavours. A sweetly perfumed bouquet of rosewater and apple blossom dances above citrusy notes of fresh lime, and the exotic aromas of lychee and kiwifruit. The palate is bright yet richly flavoured with slate-like minerality synonymous with Eden Valley providing ballast for the lifted citrus and sweet floral notes that run the length of the palate through to the crisp, lingering finish.

A wine for immediate enjoyment and complementary to a range of cuisines.



No.5 – Clare Valley

The fruit for No.5 is harvested from the family vineyard, situated in White Hutt, just north of the Clare township. The vineyard in grey clay over limestone, with the vines planted in an east/west direction.

The site produces fruit with an abundance of natural acidity in the grapes, which is ideal for exquisitely balanced off dry Rieslings.

The bouquet is richly imbued with intense tropical fruit aromas of passionfruit, pineapple and papaya, with floral top-notes of orange blossom and honeysuckle. These sweetly succulent aromas transition seamlessly onto lusciously flavoured palate, where the sweet tropical flavours are balanced by a delightful zing of sherbet-like acidity. The natural sweetness of the style adds an unctuous richness to the mid-palate, while the driving natural acidity imparts linearity and length with a crisp, clean finish.



No.10 – Clare Valley/ Eden Valley

No.10 ‘Zenit’ Riesling is our ultimate multi-regional blend. A wine that captures the essence of the vintage and our definitive expression of Riesling. The label was originally created in 2017 to celebrate our wedding and to be served exclusively to our family and friends. But its role has been elevated, and now represents the very best of Rieslingfreak, produced in minute quantities from the most exceptional vintages.

Each vintage fruit for the No.10 is sourced from purposefully selected sites across our most outstanding vineyards of the year. Our aim is for the wine to effortlessly harmonise the distinctive characters of each site, creating a Riesling that is perfectly balanced with knife-edge precision. The bouquet is exquisitely perfumed, an enticing symphony of fresh lime, pink pomelo, lemongrass and rosewater. The palate is equally seductive; perfectly pure and pristine with a soft, velvety texture and gentle acidity that imparts a lithe elegance and graceful persistence to the finish. The ultimate expression of the Riesling vintage.

No.12 – Flaxman Valley

Rieslingfreak No.12 is harvested from individually selected vines from the Zander and Bartholomaeus family vineyards in Flaxman Valley in High Eden, a premium sub-region of Eden Valley renowned for growing world-class Riesling of unrivalled elegance. This wine captures the very essence of the High Eden and all its splendour. First released in 2021 to celebrate John being proclaimed Barossa Winemaker of the Year, this wine celebrates the beauty of High Eden Riesling via a distinctive and highly perfumed bouquet, and elegantly structured palate.

No.12 displays intensely perfumed with aromas of Kaffir lime, guava, passionflower and rosewater with a classic Eden Valley mineral accent of wet-slate. The palate is assuredly structured and perfectly balanced with heady flavours of zesty Tahitian lime, piquant lemongrass and the sweet-floral pungency of fresh quince, grounded with a lick of stony, flint-like minerality. Crisp natural acidity imparts length and vibrancy, bringing laser-sharp focus to the driving, persistent finish.



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