

# Riesling Rapture

**HERMANN J. WIEMER VINEYARD HAS HAD A MAJOR HAND IN BRINGING THE FINGER LAKES WINE REGION TO THE ATTENTION OF A GLOBAL AUDIENCE**



PHOTO: PAUL BRISSMAN

Fred Merwarth (left), co-owner and Winemaker with Oskar Bynke, co-owner and Manager, in the barrel room at HJW.

**Career Highlights: 1999–2001 :**

Oskar Bynke earns a Master of Science in Agriculture & Economics from the Swedish University of Agriculture and Cornell University while working in the cellar at Hermann J. Wiemer Vineyard.

**2002–2007:** Bynke joins Atlantic Wines and Spirits as Wine Portfolio Manager for Moët Hennessy & Diageo Chateau and Estate wine portfolios in NYC. **2007–present:**



Joined forces with Cornell friend, winemaker Fred Merwarth, and took over Hermann J. Wiemer Vineyard, becoming co-owner and Manager.

**WITH A LAUNDRY LIST OF ACCOLADES**

and praise from critics like Robert Parker, Eric Asimov and Stuart Piggott, Hermann J. Wiemer Vineyard enjoys a strong national presence, and the wines are also exported to places like Shanghai, Sydney, Singapore, Tokyo and London—all from humble vineyards abutting the western shores of Seneca Lake in western New York State.

**Q: Jonathan Cristaldi: Who is Hermann J. Wiemer and why is he important to the Finger Lakes region?**

**Oskar Bynke:** Hermann was educated in Geisenheim in the Rheingau and trained in Pfalz; he comes from a long family history of expertise in viticulture from the Mosel. He is a stubborn, hilarious and a fascinatingly entertaining man who has dated more models than Donald Trump, and has a full head of real hair at age 73. Hermann's father was in charge of the agricultural experimental station in Bernkastel; from there, he brought over a Riesling clone, dubbed the HJW clone, and grafted it onto SO4 rootstock in the Finger Lakes.

**Q: How do you and winemaker Fred Merwarth work together to farm your vineyards?**

We put a lot of effort into separating qualities such as different pressings, rows and even panels in the vineyards, in order to differentiate site nuances and levels of ripeness—it's that kind of detail that enables us to make a consistent product over the years.

**Q: You are big advocates of minimal intervention, so how does that translate to your production process?**

We do not use any sulfur on the crush pad, and six weeks before harvest we refrain from using any sprays for mildew, hence avoiding residue on our grapes. Fred over-

sees all production aspects and we work closely with a year-round staff—the same team that grafts vines in our nursery also prunes the vineyards, hand harvests the grapes and helps out with winemaking, an asset when dealing with the unpredictable weather conditions of western New York State. We use no fining or filtering agents and we never adjust our wines with acidity or sugars—and only rely on blending the wines from different sites and pickings for the final product. Critically, the winery relies exclusively on cold fermentations with indigenous yeast for our Riesling, which means that wine is active for four to ten months in the tanks.

**Q: You mentioned an on-site nursery—what are you cultivating?**

We are one of the only winery/vineyard/nursery operations in the country, and we can graft any *vinifera* variety. Most of the mother plants for our grafted vines are from our own vineyard. However, if, for example, a Virginia producer wants Viognier plants, which we don't grow, we can get cuttings from them and custom graft whatever the grower wants. We graft for any winery around the country, many in California, but as Riesling is our specialty, the majority of our vines end up in cooler-climate regions such as New York, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

*The 2014 Finger Lakes vintage is shaping up to be a "classic," according to Bynke. Current vintages of Hermann J. Wiemer retail between \$18 and \$39 and are available via their website, [www.wiemer.com](http://www.wiemer.com), as well as through distributors in New York, Washington D.C., Maryland, Chicago, Massachusetts, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, New Jersey, California and soon Florida and North Carolina. SJ*

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