THE RIESLING RENAISSANCE

Germany's bestknown wine is regaining its place beside those of Burgundy and Bordeaux

PARANI CHITRAKORN SPECIAL TO THE NATION

ou don't speak German but you enjoy a nice Riesling with dinner. Fortunately it just got easier to get past the language barrier and the confusing German wine laws, with an Erste Lage (Grand Cru) designation.

Riesling wines have their own globetrotting ambassador, American Joel Payne, to explain the technicalities. He works for VDP – Verband Deutscher Naturweinversteigere, meaning the Association of German Estates, a centuryold organisation whose wines are sold at

Payne was at the German ambassador's residence in Bangkok recently conducting a workshop, co-hosted by local importer Fin (Fabulous is Needed).



VDP. Prädikatsweingut

Payne – who has thrice been named Germany's best sommelier but remains best known for his annual guide to German wines – explained that the regulations there rank the top quality as QmP (Qualitaetwein mit Praedikat), and others, mainly "chaptalised" wines, as QbA (Qualitaetwein bestimmter Anbaugebeite).

Chaptalisation is "sugaring" – adding sugar to grape juice before or during fermentation. It's entirely legal in Germany because cold temperatures sometimes prevent the grapes from fully maturing.

Other classifications are for the table wines - Tafelwein and Landwein.

The QmP category grades the grapes by recess, from Kabinett, Spaetlese and Auslese to Eiswein, the sweet so-called "ice wine".

The VDP seeks to preserve Germany's traditional viticulture heritage by encouraging high standards among its members, as well as practices that are environmentally friendly.

The organisation has 194 member estates in all 13 of the country's wine-growing regions.

RIESLING ambassador Joel Payne



THE WORKSHOP'S guests were treated to 'The Finest German Wines of the 2008 Vintage'.

Together they cultivate some 4,000 hectares, accounting for 4 per cent of Germany's total vineyard area, but they harvest only 2 per cent of the crop.

In terms of sales, VDP members produce 30 million bottles a year, worth 217 million euros (Bt9.1 billion).

Just over half of the members' holdings are planted with Riesling grapes, representing 10 per cent of Germany's Riesling vineyards – and 6.5 per cent of Riesling plantings around the world.

The VDP logo on any container of wine signifies the highest quality and guarantees ecologically responsible vineyard maintenance and cellar procedures. It means the wine has been produced using only traditional methods, and amid regular inspections.

By giving consumers such assurances, the VDP aims to restore German Rieslings' glory – they were, after all, once spoken of with the same reverence accorded the products of Bordeaux and Burgundy.

Such efforts have generated a global "Riesling Renaissance", greatly assisted by the introduction of new categories such as Classic (dry wines for daily consumption)



JOEL PAYNE, back row centre, had among his guests, from left, Malik Araimi of Wine Connection, Marco Casanova of PB Valley, Pattira Kietvanichanon of Ameba Film, Isolde Felskau of the Germany embassy, Benjawan Wisootsat of Fin, writer Parani Chitrakorn, Stefan Duppel of the embassy and Anindam Choudhury of Jet Airways.



PAYNE shares his enthusiasm for Riesling.

and Selection (dry premium wines).

There are ripeness levels, too, since quality categories beginning at Spaetlese

are restricted to wines with natural sweetness - with no chaptalisation.

All phases of production are strictly controlled according to VDP standards. The grapes must be handpicked, especially varietals that are indigenous to a specific area, such as Riesling, Silvaner, Weissburgunger (Pinot Blanc), Granburgunder (Pinot Gris) and Spaetburgunder (Pinot Noir).

Erste Lage means "first growth" and is synonymous with Grosses Gewaechs. This is a private brand of the VDP, designating top-quality wines from the Rheingau region.

The second level is Klassifizierte Lage/ Ortwein/Terroirwein – signifying wines from sites classed for superior quality. The third level, Gutwein, refers to high-quality wines for everyday drinking.

Having explained Erste Lage in theory, Payne guided his guests through a tasting of the wines, the part of the evening we were obviously looking forward to the most.

There were a
dozen wines on offer
- 10 whites of 2008
vintage and two
reds from 2007.
On the list
were Lump
Silvaner from
Franken;
Mandelberg

Burgunder

from Pfalz; Feubergerg Grauer Burgunder from Baden; both Garkammer and Wildenstein (both Spaetburgunder) from Ahr and Baden, respectively.

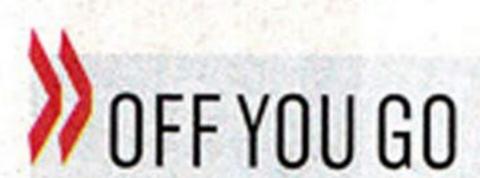
The dry Rieslings were Felseneck, Hohenmorgen, Idig, Kirchenstueck, Schloss Johannisberger and Morsten, which invariably hailed from wine regions such as Nahe, Pfalz, Rheingau and Rheihessen.

The only Spaetlese, or late-harvest Riesling, was Jeffer-Sonnenuhr from Mosel-Saar-Ruwer.

It was an informative and impressive experience. We ended a pleasurable night with that eternally reassuring German phrase, Endes gut, Alles gut!

The 12 wines we tasted haven't yet been imported to Thailand. If you'd like to taste some non-VDP wines from the same producers, though, contact Benjawan Wisootsat of Fin.

Parani Chitrakorn is a food-and-winepairing consultant who took wine courses in London and Napa Valley, California. She's certified as an expert, is one of 178 accredited international Bordeaux wine educators and is a member of the Guild of Master Sommeliers.



There are two big wine shows coming up in Germany: ProWein 2011 from March 27 to 29 in Duesseldorf and VDP Weinboerse on April 18 and 19 in Mainz.