

# NorCal Wine

Articles, wine reviews & events  
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## 24 Sonoma County Zinfandel Well Worth Trying

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A winter view of Montafi Vineyard in Russian River Valley. Photo: Carlisle Winery

[Zinfandel Advocates and Producers \(ZAP\)](#) held their annual Sonoma County tasting on Sunday, August 12 at [Cline Cellars](#). 55 different producers were represented, most of them pouring multiple wines. Only Zinfandel and Zinfandel blends were allowed.

This ZAP event is primarily a consumer event, but I and a handful of other writers attended as well. The tasting took place in a large tent behind the Cline tasting room. Along with the wine, attendees enjoyed live music and food from [The Girl and The Fig](#). The tasting was well-attended, but not over-crowded. If you're a Zin fan and live in or near Sonoma County, check out next year's event.

I don't write formal reviews based on walk-around tastings. And, with this event being outside, it wasn't the right forum for doing serious, critical tasting. However, I was able to get a good sense of the style and quality of the wines I did taste. I tried about 48 of the 150+ wines on offer.

Overall, the wines were quite good, almost all would probably earn between 88 and 94 points were I to taste them formally. (All of the wines I list below fall into the higher end of that spectrum.) There were a range of styles, from lean and juicy to rich and mouth-coating. Though alcohol can run quite high with Zinfandel, most of the wines were well-balanced. Even the high-octane wines had enough fruit to prevent the elevated alcohol from sticking out. Likewise, some of the wines showed a lot of oak-derived flavors, but not so much as to overwhelm the fruit.

Here are some of the wines I tasted which I highly recommend. This isn't an exhaustive list by any means, but there's plenty here to keep you in superb Zinfandel for a while.

### **Nalle Zinfandel, Dry Creek Valley 2015 \$45**

Nalle always produces balanced wines with refreshing acidity and this vintage is no exception. At just 13.8%, this wine is no exception. And the 90+ year old vines deliver plenty of character and complexity. Best 2020 – 2030.

### **A Rafanelli Zinfandel, Dry Creek Valley 2016 \$NA**

Balanced intensity with rich, mouth-coating fruit complemented by high-quality oak. 9% Petite Sirah adds backbone. Drink now through 2030.

### **Mauritson Zinfandel, Dry Creek Valley 2015 \$37**

Complex and flavorful with a core of blackberry adorned with spice and savory notes. The palate is smooth and lightly creamy.

### **Quivira Zinfandel Anderson Ranch, Dry Creek Valley 2016 \$48**

An elegant take on Dry Creek Valley with the expected jammy fruit and complex range of spices, but medium body and mouthwatering acidity. Flavorful but carries itself lightly.

### **Quivira Zinfandel Black Boar, Dry Creek Valley 2016 \$48**

Like its namesake, the Black Boar Zinfandel is powerfully built with loads of flavor locked beneath a layer of sinew. Hold this in the cellar for several years while you drink the Anderson Ranch.

### **Ridge Lytton Springs, Dry Creek Valley \$44**

The Zinfandel blends from this classic, Ridge vineyard never disappoint. With just 69% Zinfandel, it's not legally a varietal wine, but who cares. The 23% Petite Sirah, 6% Carignane and 2% Mataro make it a complete, complex wine that's delightful now but will age for a decade. Red and black fruit with spice, medium-plus body.

### **Ridge Zinfandel Geyserville 2016 \$40**

Richly flavorful with plenty of soft, sensuous tannins. Another blend, this is 73% Zinfandel, 17% Carignane, 7% Petite Sirah and 3% Alicante Bouschet. Generous cherry and plum fruit with sweet and savory herb.

### **Wilson “Tori” Zinfandel, Dry Creek Valley 2015 \$42**

Coming from the highest elevation vineyard in the valley at 2,400 feet, the fruit here is concentrated, syrupy and oh, so delicious. Full-bodied and long with plenty of freshness for drinkability.

### **Wilson “Nolan” Zinfandel, Dry Creek Valley 2015 \$38**

Full-bodied and super rich, this wine fears no food, but has enough restraint to play nicely.

### **Zialena Zinfandel, Alexander Valley \$36**



**The Zialena tasting room in Alexander Valley. Photo: Zialena**

Zialena is a fairly new brand, but represents one of the oldest wine-growing families in Alexander Valley. Giuseppe Mazzone began growing grapes and making wine for Italian Swiss Colony more than 100 years ago. Zialena is operated by his great grandchildren, Mike and Lisa.

Mike is lead winemaker and, prior to founding Zialena with Lisa, worked at Kenwood, Vineyard 29, Flanagan and made wine with Philippe Melka. Assistant winemaker Jesse Giacomelli has worked with Aaron Pott and at both Hanzell and Elyse.

There were three vintages of Zialena Zinfandel to taste and all were excellent. The 2013 Zialena Zinfandel had medium-plus body and a beguiling mix of dark fruit, savory notes and fine tannins which were actually reminiscent of a fine, aged Cabernet Sauvignon are totally in character for top-quality Alexander Valley Zinfandel.

The 2014 Zialena Zinfandel knocked my socks off and was easily my favorite wine of the day. Beautiful, soft, mouth-coating texture carries rich fruit and a complex array of spices, led by white pepper.

The 2015 Zialena Zinfandel shows the ripeness for which that warm, dry year is known, but the wine remains balanced and complex.

At just \$36, wines are great values. Put Zialena and its beautiful, new tasting room on your must-visit list.

Carlisle Winery is an excellent producer focused on preserving historic vineyards and making flavorful, complex wines of balance. They offered three Russian River Valley wines at the tasting, all well worth seeking out.

**Carlisle Zinfandel Mancini Ranch, Russian River Valley 2016 \$47**

A rich and fruit-forward, yet structured, mix of 85% Zinfandel with Carignane, Abouriou, Valdiguié, Alicante Bouschet, Grand Noir, and Petite Sirah. Predominantly red-fruited with lovely spice.

**Carlisle Zinfandel Montafi Ranch, Russian River Valley 2016 \$47**

Less fruit-forward and a bit more structured than the Mancini. Look for red fruit and savory herb. The mix here is 89% Zinfandel with Alicante Bouschet, Aubun, Grand Noir, Petite Sirah, Peloursin, Trousseau noir, Syrah, Petit Bouschet, and Cinsault

**Carlisle Zinfandel Papera Ranch, Russian River Valley \$47**

I didn't catch the vintage on this one. 2015 is the current release. This wine was notable for its intensity and mouthwatering acidity. Ripe red fruit with both sweet and savory herb.

**Harvest Moon Zinfandel Pitts Home Ranch, Russian River Valley 2013 \$42**

One of the most distinctive wines of the tasting, this mouthwatering, medium-bodied wine channeled whole-cluster Pinot Noir. Red fruit, lots of white pepper and no obvious oak. Just 14.2% alcohol.

**Harvest Moon Zinfandel "Savage," Russian River Valley 2016 \$48**

This wine couldn't be more different from the Pitts Home Ranch. Savage is full-bodied, full-throated, ripe and spicy with flavor for days. Pair it with grilled or braised red meat. The winery recommends decanting it for an hour.

**Limerick Lane 1023 Red Blend, Russian River Valley 2015 \$68**

A yummy, hedonistic wine replete with fruit, chocolate and dark mineral. The blend of estate fruit here is 52% Zinfandel, 45% Grenache, and 3% Syrah.

**Martinelli Zinfandel Giuseppe & Luisa, Russian River Valley 2016 \$58**

Intense, yet balanced, with ripe, syrupy black and blue fruit accented by mocha. Full-bodied and smooth.

**Seawolf Zinfandel Love Vineyard, Russian River Valley 2016 \$42**

Seawolf is a new brand and a collaboration between husband and wife Jesse Hall and Emma Kidritzki Hall. Among the wineries they've worked at (separately) are Martinelli, MacRostie, Spring Mountain Vineyard and Mauritson. Production is still quite low—just 48 cases for this Zinfandel—so they're not widely distributed and you'll want to join their mailing list.

The 2016 Seawolf Zinfandel Love Vineyard, a field blend with Petite Sirah, was made without any yeast additions and aged in used barrels. It has lovely fruit and spice with plenty of balancing acidity.



Emma and Jesse Hall of Seawolf. Photo: Seawolf

#### **Wattle Creek Zinfandel, Rockpile 2016 \$40**

Wattle Creek is one of the wineries in the Boisset collection. This was the first of their wines I've tasted in many years. The winemaker now is Katie Carter, who is also the assistant winemaker at DeLoach. This Zinfandel is very tasty in a full-bodied and somewhat sweet, easy drinking style.

#### **Ravenswood Zinfandel Barricia Vineyard, Sonoma Valley 2015 \$39**

The historic Barricia Vineyard holds ten acres of Zinfandel—six of which were planted in 1892—and two of Petite Sirah. The latter are the youngest vines, but those are still 20 years old. The wine is has a strong core of fruit with plenty of structure and notable acidity. Joel Peterson often brings 20+ year old wines to tastings. I hope to see him with pouring this one in 2038, but it will be great with dinner now.

#### **Ravenswood Zinfandel Old Hill Vineyard, Sonoma Valley 2015 \$60**

The Old Hill Vineyard, one of Sonoma Valley's most famous old vine sites, was right in the middle of the fires and I was worried it might have been lost. I was relieved to hear that it came through fairly well, as its mixed blacks, some of which defy identification, are irreplaceable. This wine, 96.8% Zinfandel despite the 30 some varieties found in the vineyard, shows the depth, power and complexity for which old vines are prized. It's a balance of red fruit and an array of savory herbs and spices with tannins and acidity to last. Buy some for yourself and a case to give your yet unborn child or grandchild to open when they're of age.

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