



THIS IS AMERICA'S MOST VERSATILE WINE GRAPE It's Zinfandel

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The history of Zinfandel in America can be traced back to Italian Immigrants who planted it all over California for a number of reasons including its hearty nature. For that reason it was also the dominant choice of home winemakers in other parts of the country who were purchasing grapes shipped east from California. For years it was thought that Zinfandel was a genetic descendant of Italy's Primitivo. However genetic testing discovered that both Zinfandel and Primitivo are genetic matches for the Croatian grape Crljenak Kaštelanski.



Over time Zinfandel fell out of favor in comparison to some other varieties and a number of great old vineyards were pulled out. Some were actually saved because they were being used for the production of White Zinfandel. Many of those parcels are now the source of some great Single Vineyard Zinfandels. Old Vines matter for Zinfandel as much as any other grape, and more than most. There are many Zinfandel Vineyards in California over 50 and 100 years old, some dating to the 1800's. When they produce less fruit and struggle somewhat to give what they do, the results are often naturally more intense and layered with character a younger vine simply isn't capable of.

A sense of place is as important for Zinfandel as any grape. Single vineyard Pinot Noirs get a lot more press attention but the truth is that site to site variance for Zinfandel is even more dynamic. Zinfandel thrives in nearly all of California's regions, and brings different characteristics to the forefront depending on place. While Zinfandel flourishes all over California, there are a few areas few that really raise the flag on what has become the Heritage grape of the Golden State.

Dry Creek Valley – Located in Northern Sonoma County Dry Creek Valley is home to some of the best Zinfandels in the world. A number of multi-generational family producers in Dry Creek Valley are focused on Zinfandel which is their signature red grape. The classic Dry Creek Valley Zinfandels have structure, spice, and proportionate fruit in common. Some of the most famous

and well regarded single vineyard parcels of Old Vine Zinfandel call Dry Creek Valley home.

Lodi – This Central California region is home to a number of heritage old vine Zinfandel vineyards. A group of winemakers there founded “The Native Project.” Each winemaker commits to producing a Zinfandel each year from a true Old Vines Vineyard. Winemaking protocols are the same across the board and all that changes is the fruit source. This project really highlights how important site is to Zinfandel. Lodi Zinfandels tend to have an abundance of fruit. Tended properly they can also be well structured.

Napa Valley – Due to the popularity of Cabernet Sauvignon and the prices it can fetch there’s not nearly as much Zinfandel in California’s most famous wine growing region as there once was. However the old vines that do exist can produce excellent wines. Great Napa Valley Zinfandels are loaded with red fruit, proportionate and structured, often with more tannins than Zinfandel from many other regions.

Paso Robles – Initially known for big, fruity Zinfandel, there are now more producers focused on wines of structure and nuance that still have those fruity flavors Paso is famous for. Diverse climatic conditions in various parts of Paso Robles also assure lots of variance within the region for factors outside of site alone.

Russian River Valley – While it’s best known for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay these days, cool, foggy Russian River Valley is the source of distinct Zinfandels too. The Zinfandels from here tend to feature lots of spice and fruit that is a bit more reticent in nature. Great Russian River Valley Zinfandels tend to age very well due in no small part to the wonderful acid they feature.

Well-made Zinfandel is fruity, balanced and a versatile food wine. Whether you’re having a classic Italian Sunday Dinner, Smoked Brisket, Pizza, Traditional Mexican cuisine or so much more the terrific fruit, acid and structure of great Zinfandel is a great pairing choice. And of course there is no better pairing with the most of American of meals, The Burger, than Zinfandel.

Suggested Bottles:

Cline Cellars 2016 Old Vine Zinfandel – Lodi (\$11)

Red fruit aromas and hints of vanilla lead the way. The soft palate is stuffed with strawberry. Bits of tea emerge on the finish. This is a great value and would make a good choice as an everyday house red.

Angry Bunch Winery 2016 Zinfandel – Lodi (\$18)

Hints of tar emerge on the nose alongside black cherry. Sweet red raspberry jam and black pepper are evident on the palate. A hint of leather shows up on the above average finish.

Oak Ridge Winery 2014 Moss Roxx Zinfandel – Lodi (\$23)

Black raspberry aromas explode from the nose here. White pepper and blackberry are evident

on the palate. Bits of chocolate sauce dot the long finish.

Redhaus Wines 2015 Ancient Craft Old Vine Zinfandel – Lodi (\$25)

The aromas bring to mind a bowl of fresh, ripe red and black cherries. The palate is studded with black raspberry and plum. Bits of cinnamon and clove emerge on the finish.

Pedroncelli 2015 Bushnell Vineyards Zinfandel – Dry Creek Valley (\$26)

Black pepper and savory herb aromas underpin raspberry aromas. Blackberry, dark chocolate shavings and a core of spices drive the full flavored and well-proportioned palate. Earth and hints of vanilla close things out. Delicious today this Zin will age gracefully.

Bella Grace Vineyards 2015 Old Vine Zinfandel – Amador County (\$28)

Red and black fruit aromas are joined by hint of bay leaf. Plum flavors and associated spice characteristics are evident on the juicy palate. The finish is lush and stuffed with a continuing mélange of red and black fruit flavors.

Ridge Vineyards 2016 East Bench Zinfandel – Dry Creek Valley (\$32)

Dark fruit aromas and hints of savory herb burst from the glass upon the first whiff. The palate is filled with black raspberry and blackberry accompanied by a nice complement of spices. Wisps of earth are evident on the long finish.

Artezin 2015 Collins Vineyard Zinfandel – Russian River Valley (\$35)

Red and black violet aromas lead the way. Flavors of red plum and raspberry are accompanied by hints of Bay Leaf. Sour plum, spice and bits of dark chocolate are all evident on the long, clingy finish.

Ravenswood 2015 Dickerson Vineyard Zinfandel – Napa Valley (\$37)

Red plum and candied strawberry aromas burst forth from the glass. Blackberry, oodles of spice and lite savory herbs are all part of the substantial palate. Sour red raspberry and bits of earth dot the prodigiously long finish.

Peachy Canyon 2016 Willow Vineyard Zinfandel – Paso Robles (\$42)

Red raspberry and white pepper aromas emerge with conviction once this wine is poured. Black cherry, raspberry and hints of red plum drive the palate which shows off an intense purity of fruit. Gentle bits of earth, spice and a tiny speckle of tar are all evident on the finish.

Read more: <http://www.snooth.com/articles/this-is-america-ys-most-versatile-wine-grape/?viewall=1#ixzz5MBn7VXwV>