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## WINE OF THE MONTH!



### JRE Zinfandel Sonoma County 2007 - \$14.99 cash

Aged 14 months in a mix of French and American Oak barrels, this wine stains the glass with its deep purple color. Dry, full bodied with balanced acidity highlighting the chunky black raspberry, blueberry, and red cherry flavors. Cedar, tobacco, and savory spice & bacon fat with a very long finish wrap up this delicious wine.

### If you enjoyed this selection try some other tasty Zinfandels!

JRE Zinfandel Paso Robles 2006 - \$18.99 cash

Talty Estate Zinfandel 2005 - \$32.99 cash

Bramblewood Old Vine Zinfandel 2006 - \$14.99 cash

Canyons Oaks Zinfandel 2006 - \$4.99 cash

## Thinking About Zinfandel

by Charles M. Bear Dalton

Zinfandel is not hot and that is a bit of a shame. It's not that Zinfandel is cold; rather, Zin is a bit lukewarm. Zin fans and Zap (Zinfandel Advocates and Producers) members are still buying and drinking great Zinfandel but there hasn't been much positive buzz in the press and blogs or with in the uber-geek community about Zin of late. While there has been a bit of negative buzz that has come as part of the current backlash movement against high alcohol table wines, in this regard, Zin is lumped in with high alcohol Shiraz and the new wave of high ripeness Cabernets.

Be that as it may, why is it a shame that Zin is "not hot"? Because there are a lot of exciting things happening with Zin. The traditional stuff is as good as or better than ever and the somewhat disparate Zin-blend category is expanding and is quite interesting. Of course all the traditional wines really are Zin-blends when you get right down to it. Nevertheless, we can think about Zinfandel in four categories: Traditional Zins and Blends, Zin-Cab Blends, the new "Rhone-Fandel" blends, and the Coro Mendocino wines. There is a lot going on here.

### Traditional Zins and Blends

When you call a wine by the name of a primary varietal, you think that the key flavors will come from that variety and that the vast majority - if not all - of the grapes will be that named variety. In the case of Zinfandel, the high quality 100% varietal Zinfandel is quite rare. Winemaker Ted Seghesio once told me that you can't make great Zinfandel with out at least some Petite Sirah. My Zinfandel tasting (and drinking) experience convinces me he is right. I can think of only a single handful of great Zins in my experience that didn't have at least 3% (and often a lot more) Petite Sirah in the blend. The thinking is that Zinfandel has a bit of hole in the palate and that Petite Sirah fills that hole like a sausage in a Kolache. And Petite Sirah is not Zinfandel's only blending partners. The old mixed black vineyards that are the source of most of our really old vine Zinfandel these days were originally planted to a mix of Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Carignane, Mataro (Mourvedre), Barbera, Alicante Bouschet, Grenache, Dolcetto, and more. Any of these is likely to still exist in at least limited quantities in most of the pre-prohibition vineyards. These vineyards have gradually moved toward higher percentages of Zinfandel and dead vines no mater the variety have generally been replaced only with Zinfandel.

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Inside This Issue: Collin's Column, Beer Buzz, Deli Specials, Delicious Mischief, The 12, Wine and Cheese of the Week & more!

*Thinking About Zinfandel from page 1*

Great lower priced (under \$20) “varietal” Zins can be found from Dry Creek Vineyards, JRE, Murphy Goode (Liar’s Dice), Alexander Valley Vineyards (Sin Zin), Ravenswood (especially the Sonoma County), and Seghesio (Sonoma County). Fancier traditional wines can range from just over \$20.00 per bottle to as much as \$70. Some of my favorites include the Ridge and Ravenswood single vineyard wines. Ridge is best known for its Lytton Springs and Geyserville bottlings but don’t ignore the less readily available Ridge Pagani Ranch, East Bench, and Ponzo Vineyard bottlings. From Ravenswood, look for the Old Hill, Big River, Teldeschi, and Barricia bottlings. Ravenswood used to bottle a Monte Rosso Vineyard Zinfandel but they lost access when Gallo purchased Louis Martini which owned the Monte Rosso Vineyard. Now that Gallo owns Monte Rosso, the two best sources for Monte Rosso Zinfandel are Louis Martini Gnarly Zinfandel and Rancho Zabaco “Toreador” Zinfandel. Although both labels are owned by Gallo, the wines are different. I personally think the Rancho Zabaco “Toreador” bottling is about as good as traditional Zinfandel gets – and that is really excellent.

**Zinfandel Cabernet Blends**

Zinfandel blended with Cabernet Sauvignon has a history in California that long pre-dates prohibition and yet ... At this point in time, the only winery actively marketing a high quality Zinfandel-Cabernet Sauvignon blend is Paraduxx. Paraduxx has spun off from Duckhorn in the same way Conundrum was spun off by Caymus. (Paraduxx, as most of you already know, is a pun on “paradox” and “pair-of-ducks” which makes sense since there are always a pair of ducks on the ever-changing duck stamp-like label) Marketing aside, the blend of 64% Zinfandel, 27% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Merlot, and 2% Cabernet Franc aged 18 months in 50% American and 50% French oak barrels (50% new) offers a zinfandel structure that utilizes ripe Napa valley floor Cabernet Sauvignon to add richness, mouth feel, and complexity as well as changing the balance from “red-and-black-fruit” (typical of Zin) to “black-and-red-fruit”. This is lovely wine that, while food friendly on its own, may be just the wine for after dinner conversation when you have had a Ridge Geyserville with Lasagna or a Ravenswood “Old Hill” with braised short ribs for dinner. While there is a history of this sort of wine, it really needs at least a couple more practitioners/advocates to legitimize the style. Still, Paraduxx ably shows the potential of Zinfandel Cabernet Blends. If Tuscany’s Tignanello can do it (blend Cabernet and Sangiovese), why shouldn’t a Napa valley icon (Duckhorn) blend Cabernet and Zinfandel?

**Rhone-Fandel**

Although we now have a cool name for it, the idea of blending Zinfandel with Rhone varieties is not new. In fact, the Ridge Geyserville mentioned a couple of paragraphs above could, by virtue of the 2007 blend, be a “Rhone-Fandel”. Even though Petite Sirah is not a classic “Rhone” variety, it is grown (as Durif) in the area. More classic is the Linne Calodo “Leon’s” blend which offers 74% Zinfandel blended with 12% Mourvedre, 8% Alicante, and 6% Syrah. This sort of blend is of increasing interest to Paso Robles producers looking for a signature for the area. In my class on Zinfandel last week, we tasted Linne Calodo’s no longer made Leon’s; a blend of (74% Zinfandel, 12% Mourvedre, 8% Alicante, and 6% Syrah) and wow, the wine was delicious and focused and developing nicely. At 15.9%, it was our highest alcohol wine of the day but it was still balanced more for dinner than for after dinner. Delicious and exciting and representative of a new group of blends emerging from Paso Robles – What’s not to like?

**Coro Mendocino**

Coro Mendocino is an effort by a group of Mendocino County producers to codify, replicate, and promote (in Mendocino County) the old “Dago Red” field blends typified by the old mixed black vineyards such as the original blocks that yield Ridge Geyserville.

From the Coro Mendocino web site, here are their rules:

‘Coro Mendocino’ shall be produced only with Mendocino County fruit and totally produced at a bonded Mendocino County winery. “Vinted” and/or “Cellared” by will be permitted to facilitate acquisition of beneficial blend components by all participants from Mendocino producers. Each participating winery will produce their own blend within protocol parameters, meet submission timetables, submit to blind tasting panel for pass/fail, wines to be packaged in uniform bottle and packaging with individual branding subjugate to Coro Mendocino.

**Varietal Makeup:**

Zinfandel to compose a minimum of 40% and a maximum of 70% of each Coro blend. Zinfandel shall comprise dominant percentage of each Coro blend.

2nd Tier Varietals: Percentage of any ONE not to exceed Zinfandel as majority component and max of 5% out of vintage. Syrah, Petite Sirah, Carignane, Sangiovese, Grenache, Dolcetto, Charbono, Barbera, Primitivo. Free Play: Up to 10% of total blend from any single or combination of vinifera source.

In one sense, it bothers me that this has to be codified but mainly I am delighted that there is a group that wants to see this sort of Italian heritage blend preserved. The wines each winery makes and bottles in the Coro Mendocino packaging have been exciting, idiosyncratic food friendly blends that satisfy the palate and the brain.

In a Zinfandel class I taught last week, we tasted through a range of wine representing all these trends. Of the 11 wines we tasted, only two were at all disappointing. One was a flawed bottle and the other was a wine I included to make a point but it was not a wine that is always to my taste. The other nine were:

**Bogle “Phantom”, California, 2006 (14.8% Alcohol)**

A blend of 49% Petite Sirah, 49% Zinfandel, and 2% Mourvedre sourced from Clarksburg, Lodi, and Amador respectively. The result is rustic but fresh with lots of black and a bit of red fruit with accents of black pepper and earth. Very Satisfying.

**Seghesio Zinfandel, Sonoma County, 2008 (15.5% Alcohol)**

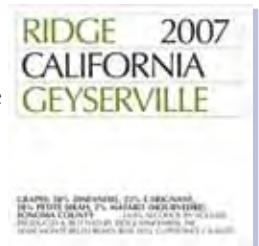
A blend of 89% Zinfandel, 8% Petite Sirah, and 3% Syrah made 25% with hand punch-downs in small open-top fermenters, 25% with pump-overs in closed-top stainless steel with delestage, and 50% rotary-tank fermentation. It is aged for 10 months in 75% American (20% new) and 25% French oak barrels. Seghesio is my reference standard for strongly varietal Zinfandel.

**Neyers “Pato Vineyard” Zinfandel, Contra Costa County, 2006 (15.1% Alcohol)**

This is mostly Zinfandel with “a small percentage of ‘field blended’ Mourvedre and Petite Sirah here, each contributing additional elements” all grown in a 110 year old vineyard planted in deep sand in Contra Costa County. This has the classic Zin mix of red and black fruit along with that peculiar focus and precision found in wines grown in deep sand. Delicious and quite fascinating.

**Ridge Vineyards “Geyserville”, Alexander Valley, 2007 (14.4% Alcohol)**

A blend of 58% Zinfandel, 22% Carignane, 18% Petite Sirah, and 2% Mataro grown in the same vineyard but picked and vinified separately in 50 small lots, 39 of which made it into the final blend. This, along with the Ridge Lytton, has to be considered the classic reference point for Zinfandel in California and, even though it is one county to the south, the spiritual godfather of Coro Mendocino. The wine is balanced with at the same time precision of flavor and fine integration. It all fits together perfectly.



*continues on page 4*

Thinking About Zinfandel from page 3



**Graziano Coro Mendocino, 2004 (14.5% Alcohol)**  
 A blend of 57% Zinfandel, 13% Petite Sirah, 13% Barbera, 6% Sangiovese, 6% Carignane, and 5% Dolcetto fermented in open-tops with both punchdowns and

pumpovers and aged 18 months in French oak barrels (40% new). While the oak aging may not fit the "Dago Red" profile, the rest of it does and the wine is spectacular. This was the end of the 2004. The even better 2005 will be along next month.

**Louis Martini "Gnarly - Monte Rosso" Zinfandel, Sonoma Valley, 2006 (15% Alcohol)**

A blend of 98% Zinfandel and 2% Petite Sirah from the over 100 year old Monte Rosso vineyard fermented with 90% whole berries after a 5-day cold soak and aged in 89% French and 11% American oak barrels, this is a great classic, mostly varietal Zinfandel from one of the world's best Zinfandel Vineyards. It offers great fruit, fine focus, and a lovely texture and feel. Delicious.



**Paraduxx, Napa Valley, 2006 (14.5% Alcohol)**  
 A blend of 64% Zinfandel, 27% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Merlot, and 2% Cabernet Franc aged 18 months in 50% American oak and 50% French oak barrels (50% new), this Paraduxx was rich and satisfying with the structure of Zinfandel married to the extra dimension of the Cabernet and other Bordeaux varieties. Somehow both classic and original. Why aren't more producers approximating this blend?

**Linne Calado "Leona's", Paso Robles, 2006 (15.9% Alcohol)**

A blend 74% Zinfandel, 12% Mourvedre, 8% Alicante, and 6% Syrah from a vineyard planted in 1973 on the Westside of Paso Robles. The Zinfandel vines are dry-farmed, head-pruned and interplanted with the Alicante. Leona's was only made in 2004, 2005 and 2006. The vineyard was owned and farmed by a woman in her 70's named Leona Mastan who eventually retired from farming and sold the property. Made using punch-downs in open-tops, the wine shows exceptional focus and purity and is utterly delicious.

**Rancho Zabaco "Toreador - Monte Rosso" Zinfandel, Sonoma Valley, 2005 (15.5% Alc.)**

98% Zinfandel, 2% Petite Sirah Sirah from the over 100 year old Monte Rosso vineyard fermented with 70% whole berries after a 2-day cold soak. Aged in new French and American oak barrels for about seven-and-a-half months in 79% new French and 19% new American with 2% used French oak barrels. This outstanding classic Zinfandel offers purity and elegance along with depth and power. Beautifully balanced and focused, it is a great expression of red and black Zinfandel fruit and a classic place. Constantly evolving as you sip it, it thrills in the mouth.

All these wines are excellent examples of what Zinfandel can and should be in its many expressions. And there is a whole world of others out there that are equally worth trying. Go on - Zin a little. 🌿

## SPEC'S Events & Classes

SAVE THE DATE

November 17 - Pinot Places:  
 New Zealand and Australia

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