

Northern Cali Wine Event Blends The Best in Food and Drink

By Valerie Jarvie

Gas up the jet or book Virgin America tickets: It's time to head to Northern California for the 28th annual Passport to Dry Creek Valley, a festive weekend showcasing food and wines of the region hosted by the Winegrowers of Dry Creek Valley. Set northwest of the city of Healdsburg, 70 miles north of San Francisco and 20 miles from the Pacific Ocean, the Dry Creek Valley AVA is famed for world-class wines.



Its annual spring wine event is a standard bearer. “While there are many wine festivals around, few offer the access to winemakers and intimate tastings that Passport to Dry Creek Valley in northern Sonoma County, Calif., boasts,” noted Jeanne O’Brien Coffey in Forbes.

From April 28-30, more than 45 wineries and a slew of top Sonoma County chefs (including Michelin star-awarded Charlie Palmer) will treat Passport to Dry Creek Valley attendees to fine wines from the region paired with stellar fare, entertainment and activities reflecting unique themes (such as a Roaring '20s speakeasy, the 1960s Las Vegas Rat Pack scene and an artisanal farmers market) and music genres (jazz, bluegrass, rock ‘n’ roll, funk) at the wineries.

Passport to Dry Creek Valley ticket packages beginning at \$135 include Saturday and Sunday passes to all of the wineries, (\$80 for Sunday only) with options to add on lunches, dinners and special tours. There's a steeply discounted rate, too, for designated drivers to enjoy the food and activities sans alcohol. The Winegrowers of Dry Creek Valley sent wines from Wilson, Pedroncelli and Peterson wineries reflective of what's in store for festival-goers.

The area is best known for Zinfandel (which pairs so well with Texas barbecue — reason enough to plan to bring a case or two back on the plane.) Wilson Winery's shared take on the grape is aptly named "Buzz Zinfandel," reflective of the varietal's relatively high alcohol strength compared to other reds (in this case, 16.2%) and the depth of its reverberating flavors, a blend of blackberry, black pepper, coffee, cocoa, tobacco, oak and spicy tannins with a long finish in the 2014 vintage I tasted. Passport to Dry Creek Valley activities at Wilson's venue include a Big Fat Greek Club-themed reception Friday evening, April 28, featuring gold medal-winning wines, Mediterranean appetizers, dancing to DJ Ryan spinning authentic Greek music and rock 'n' roll, and an ancient Greece costume contest.

Sauvignon Blanc is another hallmark varietal of the area and Pedroncelli Winery represents it well with the Meyer lemon, peach and apple flavors and refreshing crisp acidity of Pedroncelli East Side Vineyards Sauvignon Blanc 2016. Founded in 1927 by one of oldest wine-making families in California, the Geyserville-based winemakers are now celebrating 90 years in Dry Creek Valley and will offer bites from family recipes made by chef Brian Anderson of Bistro 29.9 to pair with the Pedroncelli Sauvignon Blanc, Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon and Port wines. (Home cooks: Check out their website for a generous collection of recipes with wine pairings!)



Peterson Winery showcases the wide range of microclimates in Dry Creek Valley in an array of varietals and blends mindfully crafted with traditional, low-tech techniques. Their Carignane Bradford Mountain Estate 2012 is an example, made with Carignane (a grape that's prevalent in Southern France that lends itself to making well balanced wine that pairs amenably with foods such as quail, beef brisket, lamb, and Gouda and Parmesan cheeses). Black cherry, blackberry, red fruit, clove, cedar, and smoky flavors shine in Peterson's version, a blend. A diverse collection of such wines will be shared at Peterson with regional bites from the areas of the world where the grapes originated prepared by local favorite Spinster Sisters of Santa Rosa (I love 'em already, on just the basis of the name!).

A complete schedule (with specifics about events at each winery,) info on lodging options and ticket access are available here. There's good reason 5,000 guests show up for this merry event annually, many of whom are return visitors.

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