

MELISSA VOGT FOOD & DRINK CORRESPONDENT

Dry Creek Valley Struts its Stuff During Passport Weekend

By Melissa Vogt, April 28, 2016

Posted on Melissa Vogt Food & Drink Correspondent

Passport to Dry Creek Valley 2016

Every year in the spring, the Winegrowers of Dry Creek Valley invite wine lovers into their tasting rooms and vineyards for the open-house style weekend called Passport to Dry Creek Valley. Visitors from out of town, as well as wine-loving locals, appreciate the exclusive access to more than 45 wineries in one weekend. Pairing up with local chefs and caterers, each winery pours their wines alongside tasty culinary creations; at some wineries, there's live music and games in which to partake, and most certainly at every location there are incredible views of this renowned appellation.



DaVero Farms & Winery

This year, I started my one-day exploration of Dry Creek Valley at DaVero Farms & Winery. I had visited DaVero last year during Passport to DCV and was eager to taste their new releases. A fully operational farm, olive oil-producer and winery, this Italian heritage estate does it all. In addition to their olive grove and farm full of bountiful produce, they also raise chickens, pigs and sheep. For their wines, they focus on strictly Italian varietals made in an Old World style—fermentation with strictly native yeasts and barrel aging in neutral oak. These wines are clean and enjoyable expressions of some of my favorite Italian varietals.

I was particularly impressed, perhaps too because of how well it paired with the day's sunshine, with the 2015 Sangiovese Rosato.

Full of strawberries and cream on the nose, this dry Rosé is all too enticing; starting off round and creamy, with gentle barrel spice, the palate shows excellent contrast with its crisp-textured finish. This refreshing, dry pink is abundant with juicy strawberry fruit, and well-balanced with spices and acidity that juxtapose its plump mouthfeel. I'll certainly be back to enjoy more of this in the coming spring and summer months... as I can hardly think of a wine so aptly suited for relaxing, warm afternoons. This delightful wine was paired with a three-grain salad with fresh microgreens from their farm and it was absolutely delicious. The salad's earthy and tangy flavors provided for a light and refreshing accompaniment to the wine.

Another enjoyable wine from DaVero was their 2014 Ponzo Vineyards Primitivo. Classic Primitivo aromas of dominant black cherry and pepper-infused fruit leap from the glass. On the palate, this full-bodied, round and sultry wine shows spiced black raspberry, black cherry and a lot of pleasant black pepper.



Ridge Vineyards

In Dry Creek Valley, the views almost couldn't be any more iconic than at [Ridge Vineyards](#). Gnarly, 115-year-old Zinfandel vines are head-trained in that wild, picturesque fashion that makes this appellation so visually stunning. The estate Lytton Springs Vineyard boasts soft, rolling hills painted against a warm blue sky; the sun beats down at just the right temperature on the contorted old vines and during Passport to DCV, you take your time at this estate to simply to take it all in. Seeing the beauty of these old vines, while sipping on some of the region's most classic expressions of Zinfandel, really speaks to why Dry Creek Valley has become synonymous with high-quality Zinfandel.



Of course, the 2013 Lytton Springs was showing in rare form; in this vintage, this estate wine is an assemblage of 74% Zinfandel, 16% Petite Sirah, 8% Carignane and 2% Mataro (Mourvèdre). Always showing impeccable balance and elegance, the 2013 expression is no exception. Seductive aromas of spiced raspberry, black cherry and a touch of meatiness lift in elegant fashion from the glass. Balanced and restrained on the palate, the fruit is anything but overripe. Spiced plums are enveloped in gentle tannins, with a hint of integrated barrel spice. This is top-notch Zinfandel clearly harvested at just the right time in grape development.

From the 2014 vintage, the Dry Creek Valley East Bench Zinfandel shows a bit more barrel influence on the nose with its soft aromas of vanilla mixed with red berry fruit. The palate possesses nicely gripping tannins with restrained red fruit of dried cherry and strawberry. A hint of clove balances those fruit characteristics. This is a wine with poise and class, a seamless beauty that is easy to drink now, but will also age.

A special thank you to Ted, who was lucky enough to begin at Ridge Vineyards as a harvest intern and work his way into the tasting room, for the delightful splash of 2012 Monte Bello. It was an absolute pleasure to taste—a wine so good that I had to stop, put down my pen and simply sip while taking in those iconic views.

As for the cuisine, the tasty bite of sausage in yellow polenta—from chef Jesse McQuarrie of [Feast Catering](#)—was an excellent match for the balanced and restrained style of Ridge Vineyards Zinfandel. This pairing was so tasty that I hope to recreate it at home.

Mauritson Wines

At [Mauritson Wines](#), always a favorite stop of mine when I am in Dry Creek Valley, the ever-famous duo of Winemaker Clay Mauritson and [Chef Charlie Palmer](#) certainly lived up to expectations. It is always a pleasure to chat with Clay, as he is one of the most friendly, approachable and down-to-earth winemakers in Sonoma County. And you can bet he is always in the tasting room during Passport to Dry Creek Valley, kindly



conversing with lovers of his wine and happily sharing stories about his family's history in the region.

The Mauritson family history dates back to 1868, making more than 140 years of grape-growing experience in the Dry Creek Valley and Rockpile appellations. Today, Clay remains committed to not only growing high quality grapes from these appellations, but also to producing the wines. Since 1998, Clay has been crafting the Mauritson collection of wines, while continuing the family's time-honored tradition of growing high-quality grapes. I have been a fan of these wines for a long time and I am always excited to taste the new vintages.



Offering a change of pace from the region's famed Zinfandel, the 2014 Charlie Clay Pinot Noir—which is a Russian River Valley collaboration between winemaker and chef—showed beautifully and paired perfectly with the pulled pork sandwich. The 2014 Charlie Clay is a balanced, red-fruited Pinot Noir with a silky mouthfeel and complex flavors of fruit, spice and forest floor.

Those earthier forest floor notes paired exceptionally well with the smoky flavor of the pulled pork, really enhancing the wine's spice characteristics.

As for the Zinfandels, the 2013 Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel is a classic expression of its appellation—showing spiced red fruit and a gentle barrel touch with vanilla on the rather luscious nose. Mirroring that on the palate, spiced red fruit is front and center with additional flavors of raspberry and cherry; there is a gentle stroke of vanilla underneath the fruit in its balanced and elegant style. The tannins are soft and approachable, and there is a pleasant, drying, cocoa-tinged note that lingers a while on the finish. I loved this Zinfandel alongside the Painted Hills shaved beef with parmesan crostini; it gave the wine a bit more robust weight and meatiness, and the arugula increased the spice in the wine, making it a complex pairing in terms of both texture and flavor.

More Passport to DCV Favorites

It's hard to pick favorites, but there are always a handful of other memorable wines that are absolutely worth mentioning. This year, I fondly remember Amista Winery's estate-grown Morningsong Vineyards Syrah. Full of rich flavor and spice, it was delicious with Franchetti's wood-fired pizza. I also really enjoyed Kokomo Winery's Pauline's Vineyard Merlot—it was luscious, full of fruit and cocoa, and kissed perfectly by vanilla barrel-aging notes. I have learned over the years that Pauline's Vineyard is a real treasure trove in Dry Creek Valley. I've tasted Kokomo's Zinfandel from this same vineyard many times and the last several vintages have been fabulous. This Merlot was equally as enjoyable. Don't pass up a chance to taste any of their Pauline's Vineyard wines. Last but certainly not least, the Primitivo from Collier Falls always puts a smile on my face, and the 2012 vintage was showing in perfect form. An expression of this lovely growing season, this Primitivo boasts dark fruit with notes of clove in its full-bodied, layered style.



<http://www.mvfooddrink.com/blog/dry-creek-valley-struts-its-stuff-during-passport-weekend>