

Orange Coast MAGAZINE

Seek Dry Creek Valley for Your BBQ Zin

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By Valory Reed



Need a hearty red wine to pair with your summer barbecue? The Dry Creek Valley AVA in northern Sonoma County is famous for its old-vine zinfandel, the perfect varietal for those sticky-smoky meats coming off the cue. The area boasts two growing climates, two roads, five stop signs, and is 16 miles long by two miles wide. It's bordered by Lake Sonoma to the north, the confluence of the Russian and Dry Creek rivers to the south, and anchored by the charming town of Healdsburg.



Vines were planted in the mid-1800s, and despite the ruins of phylloxera in the early 1900s, crafty Dry Creek farmers replanted zinfandel on the resistant St. George rootstock. Many of these vines still produce today, making the Dry Creek AVA famous for having one of the densest concentration of old-vine zinfandel in the world. This feisty growing sense kept a few wineries active during the leans of Prohibition, too, including Pedroncelli Winery, which is still alive and well. The area returned to its grape crop focus during the 1950s and 60s. The Dry Creek Valley stretch of land boasts 70 wineries including the likes of Sbragia Family Vineyards, Ridge Lytton Springs, Mauritson, Armida, and Quivira, with zinfandel the top varietal. Wine Spectator calls the 2014 vintage one of the best in years, rating the wines from 92 to 95 points. The magazine describes them as “fresh and fruit forward, but balanced and complex.” The climate and soil are perfect for sauvignon blanc, too, which I love to sip while I hover over the barbecue. Look to Rued Winery, which supplied grapes and made wine for the famous Kenwood label, but has been producing its own small batch of handcrafted wines since 2000.



Committed to the land and each other, the wine-makers of Dry Creek Valley shun the attitude of high-churning commercial production and consider their valley a “multigenerational farming community.” They’ve not only kept it in the family for several generations, but are destined to be 100 percent sustainable by 2019. This heartfelt approach draws me to their wines. It makes me feel like my family is tied to their family as we all connect over great food and wine produced with heart. Simply look for “Dry Creek Valley” on the label as you shop the California zinfandel section of your wine store. Wine Spectator gives the 2012 vintage a rating of 91 points and notes that it’s soft, approachable, and fruit forward. The 2013 vintage sounds like one to cellar, with a 92-point rating and description of “lively, but concentrated wine with good structure built for long-term drinking.” As noted, the excellent 2014 rating shows these wines are only getting better with time.

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