

# If you drink red wine, you should know Dry Creek Valley



California's Dry Creek Valley is known for producing stunning zinfandels. (Michael Tercha / Chicago Tribune)



**[Michael Austin](#)** The Pour Man

We all know that the wine world has lots of moving parts and plenty of nooks, and subjectivity rolls in and out like fog from the Pacific Ocean. Just as Maine is not the only place for good lobster and Hawaii isn't the only place with good surfing, there are many regions in California that produce great zinfandels.

Dry Creek Valley in northern Sonoma is one of them — the best zin-producing region in the state or even country, many would tell you. But whether you want to drop the "b" word or not, the zinfandel made in Dry Creek stands out. That much is indisputable. The region's warm days and cool nights provide the ideal climate to grow grapes for the typically high-alcohol, robust, ripe and juicy, peppery wine.

Established in 1983, the Dry Creek Valley appellation runs northwest, roughly from Healdsburg up to Lake Sonoma. It is long and thin, 16 by 2 miles, and consists of about 78,000 acres. Close to 9,000 of those acres are planted with vines, at least a quarter of which are zinfandel. Dry Creek Valley is an old winegrowing area, with its first plantings dating to 1870. Many old vines survive, and some can claim ages of 100 years-plus. Today, more than two dozen different grape varieties grow in Dry Creek Valley, but none is more widely planted or universally praised than its zinfandel.

If you are a fan of zinfandel, consider opening a bottle of Dry Creek Valley zin the next time you fire up your grill, or braise short ribs, or roast a duck, or press your fork down through layers of a rich, hearty slice of meaty lasagna. When someone notices your teeth turning purple, just smile.

Below are some bottles from a recent tasting of Dry Creek Valley zinfandels, in ascending order according to price.

**2012 Deux Amis Halling Vineyard Zinfandel.** Made of 100 percent zinfandel, this single vineyard wine was aged in American oak barrels for 20 months, and offers aromas of pepper and spice followed by red fruits and dark chocolate. At 14.6 percent alcohol, it is right in the wheelhouse of zinfandel potency. **\$28**

**2013 Rodney Strong Estate Vineyards Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel.** Another 100 percenter, this time floral and spicy, with dark fruits kissed by cocoa dust. Its soft, full-bodied mouthfeel makes it a joy to drink — and it comes from a winery that is carbon-neutral, solar-powered and certified sustainable, which provides another kind of joy. **\$30**

**2013 Dry Creek Vineyard Old Vine Zinfandel.** This one is a blend of 75 percent zinfandel, 23 percent petite sirah and 2 percent carignane. What unfolds is a complex mixture of blueberry, blackberry, smoke, toast and pepper. When people refer to fruity, peppery zinfandel, this is the kind of wine they're talking about. **\$32**

**2013 Kokomo Winery Pauline's Vineyard Winemaker's Reserve Zinfandel.** Vanilla, bright berry and savory notes emerge from this wine, which is the product of a vineyard farmed by the great-grandson of the man who planted it in the 1800s. The winery made only 463 cases of this wine. **\$34**

**2012 Sbragia Family Vineyards Gino's Zinfandel.** Packing a whopping 15.1 percent alcohol, this blend contains 94 percent zinfandel, plus small amounts of carignane and petite sirah. Raspberry and other red fruits abound, and they're accompanied by an herbal element that leads to a zippy, spicy finish. Fun and easy to drink. **\$34**

**2012 Collier Falls Hillside Estate Zinfandel.** Only 365 cases were made of this 100 percent zinfandel, which spent 20 months in American oak barrels, one-third of them new. Cherry. Raspberry. Minerality. Eucalyptus. Cola. If you like to talk about wine aromas and flavors, you will never be bored with this one in your glass. **\$36**

**2013 Ridge Lytton Springs.** At 74 percent zinfandel, the wine is 1 percent shy of legal "zinfandel" status, but let's not quibble. The elegant blend, from one of the grape's most-renowned winemakers, offers dark fruits, baking spices and a soft mouthfeel — a pleasure to drink no matter what it's called. **\$38**

**2012 Lambert Bridge Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel.** Back to 100 percent zinfandel, this layered wine aged in French oak barrels starts with raspberry and rides a wave of bright acidity through blueberry, cola and vanilla on its way to a long finish. Another smaller-production bottling; get it while it is still available. **\$50**

**2013 Pezzi King Row 14 Reserve Zinfandel.** A big wine in every way, except its availability. Only 250 cases were produced of this 100 percent zinfandel aged 20 months in French oak and clocking in at 15.5 percent alcohol. Full of juicy black fruits, savory notes, black licorice and chocolate, this wine has a lot to say. **\$55**

*If your wine store does not carry these, ask for wines that are similar in style and price.*

*Twitter @pour\_man*

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/dining/drink/sc-wine-zinfandel-dry-creek-food-0610-20160607-column.html>