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Five Producers to Watch in Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley

WINE



Dry Creek Valley - a small American Viticultural Area in California's Sonoma winemaking region - is sometimes referred to as "the Zin Zone." This moniker is a reference to the red wines produced from what is arguably the best grape, Zinfandel. A far cry from the simple, refreshing, and sweet "blush" style rose wines that make up the popular White Zinfandel market, Dry Creek Valley has carved out a reputation for producing bold, complex, and potentially long-lived red Zinfandel wines capable of turning the heads of collectors and critics alike. Following are five Dry Creek Valley producers on whom that discerning wine buffs will want to keep tabs.

Amista

Amista is a bit of an anomaly in Dry Creek Valley; instead of focusing on Zinfandel, its former corporate executive owners and young winemaker specialize in vibrant white wines made from Chardonnay, and savory, perfumed red wines made from Syrah, Grenache, and Mourvedre. But the most fun from Amista can probably be had in an unlikely style for the region: they also make vibrant, capable, and delicious sparkling wines.

Mauritson

The Mauritson family has farmed in the Dry Creek area since 1886 when they established sheep ranches in the area (followed by stints tending pear orchards, apples, and prunes). Their efforts turned to vineyards in the 1970s, and they produce some of the most exciting, powerful, and complex Zinfandels in Dry Creek. In the 1990s they helped to establish the Rockpile American Viticultural Area, which includes steep vineyards planted at elevations ranging from 800 to 1200 feet. Rockpile is now producing some of the most promising and intellectually stimulating Zinfandel wines in Sonoma, as evidenced in Mauritson's Rockpile line of releases, and the area also shows promise for red wines made from Cabernet Sauvignon and Italian Zinfandel clone Primitivo.

Pedroncelli

Saying that Pedroncelli is family outfit is a serious understatement. The Pedroncellis have been in the area for over eighty years and as of 2014 produce about 65,000 cases of wine. Their former family home now functions as winery headquarters, and their employee roster boasts three generations of family workers and seven Pedroncelli family members. Pedroncelli's Zinfandel vine clones date back to the early 1900s, and they offer one of the most exciting and refreshing dry Zinfandel rose wines available in Dry Creek Valley.

Quivira

Founded by a former drug company executive and recreational fisherman, Quivira is a Dry Creek Valley producer that is well regarded by sommeliers for producing food-friendly, restrained wines. In an effort to focus on sustainable practices, Quivira moved to biodynamic farming in 2005 and rely on solar power for some of their operations. They primarily plant and produce Zinfandel and Sauvignon Blanc, but also focus efforts on a small production of excellent wines from grape varieties originating in France's Rhone valley (including the white grape Roussanne and red grapes Grenache and Mourvedre). Fans of powerful but elegant wines will appreciate the delicate touch that Quivira brings to its Zinfandel releases, which are laden with aromas of red fruits, dried herbs, tobacco, and spices.

Ridge Lytton Springs

Zinfandel lovers hardly need an introduction to Ridge, a pioneering producer whose red wines are well known for their complexity and potential longevity. While on the hunt for Cabernet Sauvignon vineyards decades ago, Ridge happened upon "field blend" plantings of primarily Zinfandel vines in Dry Creek Valley, and made the wise decision to purchase them. They have been making critically-acclaimed Zinfandel wines ever since, opting to pick and ferment the grapes from their plantings together in a more traditional approach to winemaking (rather than treating the vineyard lots separately), citing the results as adding additional complexity. Their Zinfandel releases from their oldest vines have become standard-bearers for the region, and young plantings of Primitivo are yielding promising results as well.

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