

## the drunken cyclist

I have three passions: wine, bikes, travel, family, and math.

# Taking a Ride in the Dark—Zinfandel

Posted on [November 29, 2013](#)

There are few things I like to do more than ride my bike after nightfall. Perhaps it is not the wisest time to ride, but it certainly is exhilarating since senses are heightened when the survival instincts take over. It also causes me to recall my time spent in Nuits-St.-Georges, in the heart of the Côte de Nuits in Burgundy. I was leading bike tours at the time and we stayed at a castle 3 kilometers out of town. There was no food at the castle (now *that* is not a line I use all that often) so we had to ride into town for dinner. Invariably, this meant riding in the dark on unlit country roads, without lights on the bikes.

Not bright (no pun intended), but great fun.

When riding during the day, I can almost zone out and not really pay attention to much at all and before I know it, I will have ridden 20 miles or more with absolutely no conscious recollection of how exactly I got there.

Riding in the dark is another story altogether.

During the winter in Philly, it is sometime necessary to ride in the dark as the days are short, and there is only so much indoor training I can stomach. Those night rides are done with lights, but the excitement is still there—it is difficult to describe, but you become intensely aware of your surroundings as you feel it necessary to completely focus on what you are doing—when I ride after dark I feel as though I remember every turn and each and every car.

This time of year, I also find myself in a bit of a rut in wine consumption. Over the preceding summer and early fall, we fill up on lighter styled wines: crisp whites, fruity rosés, and my beloved sparkling wines and Pinot Noirs. When the weather turns chillier, though, I get a hankering for wines with a little more gusto—a bit more “oomph” particularly full-bodied Syrahs, big Cabernets, and juicy Zinfandels. The problem is that, outside of a few aged Zins, I do not have an overabundance of these wines—in fact, one might even call it a “dearth.”

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When I received a few Zins as samples over the last few weeks, I decided to group them together and have another Flash Wine Tasting on our block. In all, there were seven Zins to sample, and I invited ten people to help me make my way through the bottles (but somehow 13 people showed up).

The first Zin was from Geysersville, California, up in the Alexander Valley, followed by one from Lodi, four from the Dry Creek Valley, and the last was made from Russian River fruit.



**2012 XYZin Old Vines Zinfandel Alexander Valley:** Retail \$15. This is what I think of when I think California Zin: Big and fruity with a cherry cola nose. Initially, I only got the fruit on the palate, but with the skirt steak, it calmed down quite a bit. A bit of pepper and a rather short finish prevented this from rating a few points higher. **Very Good. 86-88 Points.**

**2010 Z-52 Agnes' Vineyard Old Vine Zinfandel Lodi:** Retail \$16. Home to some of the oldest vines in the state, Zin has been flowing out of Lodi (the self-proclaimed Zinfandel capital of the world) since the late 1800's. This wine was noticeably less fruit-forward than the XYZin, but still plenty of blackberry and plum. With the fruit tampered down a bit, it was easier to pick out a bit of anise as well as a spiciness on the lasting finish. **Very Good. 87-89 Points.**



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### **2011 Quivira Quest Zinfandel Dry**

**Creek Valley:** Retail \$38. The first of the Dry Creek Valley wines was certainly a step up in complexity. The Quest coupled its ample black raspberry with a bit of cherry and just a hint of heat (15% abv). On the palate the wine was an interesting combination: it was both refined and relaxed. Pair it with a sirloin or with a movie on the couch—it would work seamlessly with either. **Outstanding. 90-92 Points.**



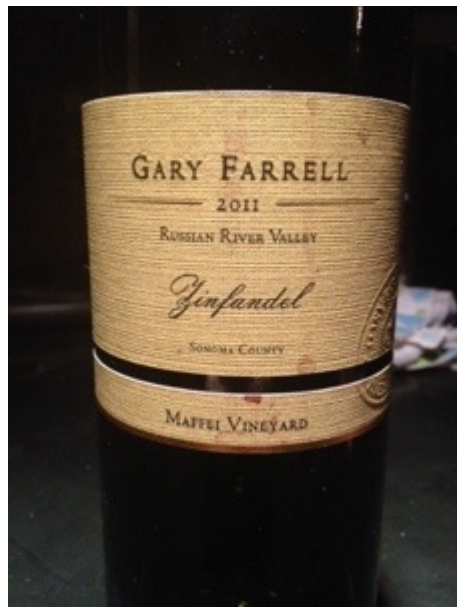
### **2010 Mounts Family Winery Old Vines Zinfandel Estate**

**Grown:** Retail \$30. The second Alexander Valley wine of the night was dark and brooding with vanilla and classic blackberry. On the palate plenty of flavor and a nice backbone of tannin. This struck me immediately as a wine to hold onto if you like old Zins—and boy, I do.... **Outstanding. 91-93 Points.**

### **2009 Martorana Family Winery Zinfandel Dry Creek Valley:**

Retail \$28. 90% Zin, 10% Petite Sirah. From long time grape growers, but relatively new wine makers, the Martorana had the best nose this far: Big fruit, yet also earthy and spicy. Big and rich on the palate this is another wine that could benefit from some time. Great flavors and intrigue but the alcohol, which is modest for a Zin (14%), is a bit too prominent. **Outstanding. 90-92 now. 93+ potentially.**

I have been a fan of Gary Farrell for a while now, but I have been limited almost exclusively to their Pinot (and an occasional Chard), so I was excited to see these Zins show up.



### **The first we tried was the 2011 Gary Farrell Maffei Vineyard Zinfandel Russian River Valley** (Retail \$48). This is a new

bottling for Gary Farrell and I certainly hope it is not the last! The Maffei is dark and viscous., with just a bit of heat. A lot going on with the nose: Cassis, white pepper, earth and dark red berries—it sounds like too much, but just the opposite as they all melded together nicely. On the palate? Now we're talking! Pinot-esque complexity with fruit and refinement, adding in some cherry and vanilla. This is incredible now, but I really think that given the backbone, patience will be greatly rewarded. Very long finish. **Outstanding. 93-95 Points.**

### **The final wine of the night was the 2011 Gary Farrell**

**Bradford Mountain Dry Creek Valley** (Retail \$45). The Bradford was much more refined than the Maffei right now, but I do not think it has as much potential. Don't get me

wrong, this is still a fantastic wine and ready to drink now with

dark berry fruit and pepper on the nose. Refined and elegant on the palate with great concentration of flavors. This is a great Zin now with balance and depth. **Outstanding. 91-93 Points.**

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My first such foray of taking a ride with darker wines, resembled the sensation of riding my bike at night–the senses become much more keenly aware of every nuance, each aroma, but I could be over thinking it–I have a few more dark wines to go through next week to see if I am....

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26 THOUGHTS ON "TAKING A RIDE IN THE DARK–ZINFANDEL"



**ksbeth**

on **November 29, 2013 at 09:09** said:

the night rides must be exhilarating and terrifying at the same time  
– to say your awareness and senses are heightened is probably  
an understatement. thanks for the zin recs, it feels like zin weather  
)

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**the drunken cyclist**on **November 29, 2013 at 17:19** said:

Yeah, riding at night really is a rush....  
Zin weather here as well....

**Food, Photography & France**on **November 29, 2013 at 09:17** said:

Living here in France, I rarely come across Zinfandel. On those few occasions I have not been impressed at all. However, your tasting notes have made me think that I would very much like to try the wines of Gary Farrell. Nice post.

**the drunken cyclist**on **November 29, 2013 at 17:48** said:

Yeah, I am not sure that Zinfandel lends itself to an old world style. The Farrell wines are really nice....

**Tracy Lee Karner**on **November 29, 2013 at 09:54** said:

Bookmarked — Ken is a big fan of good Zins (me not so much, which is to say, I like them, but like them less often). And I'm getting to the age in life when I don't want to wade through a bunch of them just to get to the good stuff.

Unless I'm tasting with a good group. Let me know when a house goes up for sale on your block, since you're into hosting wine-tastings and I'm just not. I'll bring food. Good food. (I can make melt-in-your-mouth cheddar wafers and light-as-light

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gougeres).



**the drunken cyclist**

on **November 29, 2013 at 17:20** said:

Will certainly let you know when a house goes on the market—those wafers must be awesome!



**mrsugarbears**

on **November 29, 2013 at 12:57** said:

Looking forward to adding a few of these zins to my list. 😊  
Super impressed with your night riding—not me...big chicken at night in the city.



**the drunken cyclist**

on **November 29, 2013 at 17:33** said:

Really not a bad one in the bunch! Riding in the city is a blast as well, but at night in the city? That might be a bit much....



**Oenophilical**

on **November 29, 2013 at 12:58** said:

I love a good Zin. Looks like you didn't really have a bad one in the bunch. What a nice evening of wine appreciation it must have been.



**the drunken cyclist**

on **November 29, 2013 at 17:21** said:

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They were all really good—especially those from Dry Creek Valley....

**Eric Tonningsen**

on **November 29, 2013 at 13:33** said:

Thank you, thank you, thank you, Jeff. You have focused on one of my favorites which brings back days of living in Healdsburg. Sorry your inventory was a bit depleted. 😞

**the drunken cyclist**

on **November 29, 2013 at 17:22** said:

Thanks so much Eric! Living in Healdsburg? Why on earth did you leave?

**Eric Tonningsen**

on **November 29, 2013 at 18:40** said:

Corporate Overlords. Relo to Seattle.

**the drunken cyclist**

on **December 1, 2013 at 11:15** said:

Could have certainly been worse (Topeka, Dubuque, Flint)!

**vine2vino**

on **December 1, 2013 at 10:25** said:

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I saw the XYZin in the store not too long ago. I'll have to remember to give that one a try.



**the drunken cyclist**

on **December 1, 2013 at 11:14** said:

I usually shy away from wines with gimmicky names, but this was a pretty good wine with an attractive price....



**chef mimi**

on **December 1, 2013 at 15:44** said:

Seems like the price goes up along with the rating?



**the drunken cyclist**

on **December 2, 2013 at 10:37** said:

I really try and taste the wines without knowing the retail first, but since it is very difficult to taste a lesser wine after a better wine, some ordering is necessary. I have found that there is a fairly strong correlation between price and perceived quality. Not sure if it is self-fulfilling though....



**PinotNinja**

on **December 1, 2013 at 21:41** said:

I LOVE that Quivira Zin.

While I don't ride after dark since Miami drivers are the perfect storm of very old people, very drunk people, and people who learned to drive in another country with very different rules, I still run long after dark most nights and I totally get what you are saying about both the increased level of focus and the sense of

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exhilaration when you arrive back home safe and sound after feeling like you were the only person out there.



**the drunken cyclist**

on **December 2, 2013 at 10:39** said:

It seems as though the wind dies down and there is a lot less noise—it is usually cooler as well, which I have heard has some effect on the skin.



**peakperspective**

on **December 8, 2013 at 14:35** said:

If I had my druthers, my veins would be coursing with zinfandel rather than boring old blood. Many thanks for all the new suggestions. I'll soon be on a happy hunt in pursuit of them!



**the drunken cyclist**

on **December 8, 2013 at 19:45** said:

I am certainly coming around to Zin!



**Theresa**

on **December 12, 2013 at 18:43** said:

There are so many lovely California zins. Zinfandel is one of my favorites and same is true with the neighbors. When we exchange holiday wine with each other it is pretty much zin all around. That way we know everyone will be happy and somebody might get to try something new in the process. Thanks for the leads on a few I hadn't heard of.

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**the drunken cyclist**on **December 13, 2013 at 07:49** said:

Thanks for the comment—I never have been a big Zin fan, but these wines certainly helped in transforming me. I am attracted to wines with depth and character and I used to think that most Zins were just big bruisers. These were certainly big, but not brutish at all. A style I will certainly seek out more.

**ragtimecyclist**on **December 15, 2013 at 15:57** said:

Zinfandel is a wine I've never got round to investigating...it tends to be a bit of an afterthought in the wine shops I frequent here in the north of England. I can feel a new years resolution coming on – to get stuck into a bit of Zin...i'll come back to this post for a bit of guidance.

Riding at night though? I've done my fair share of that. A particularly memorable ride in the dark last winter saw a startled peacock jump out of a hedge and almost take me down...i understand what you mean by the darkness (and the wildlife) sharpening the senses.

**the drunken cyclist**on **December 16, 2013 at 17:26** said:

Zins might be hard to come by up there, but be sure to let me know if you find any! As for the peacock—whoa! That must have scared the crud out of you!

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