

# Forbes

## Wednesday Night Wine: Underrated, Great Value Zinfandel

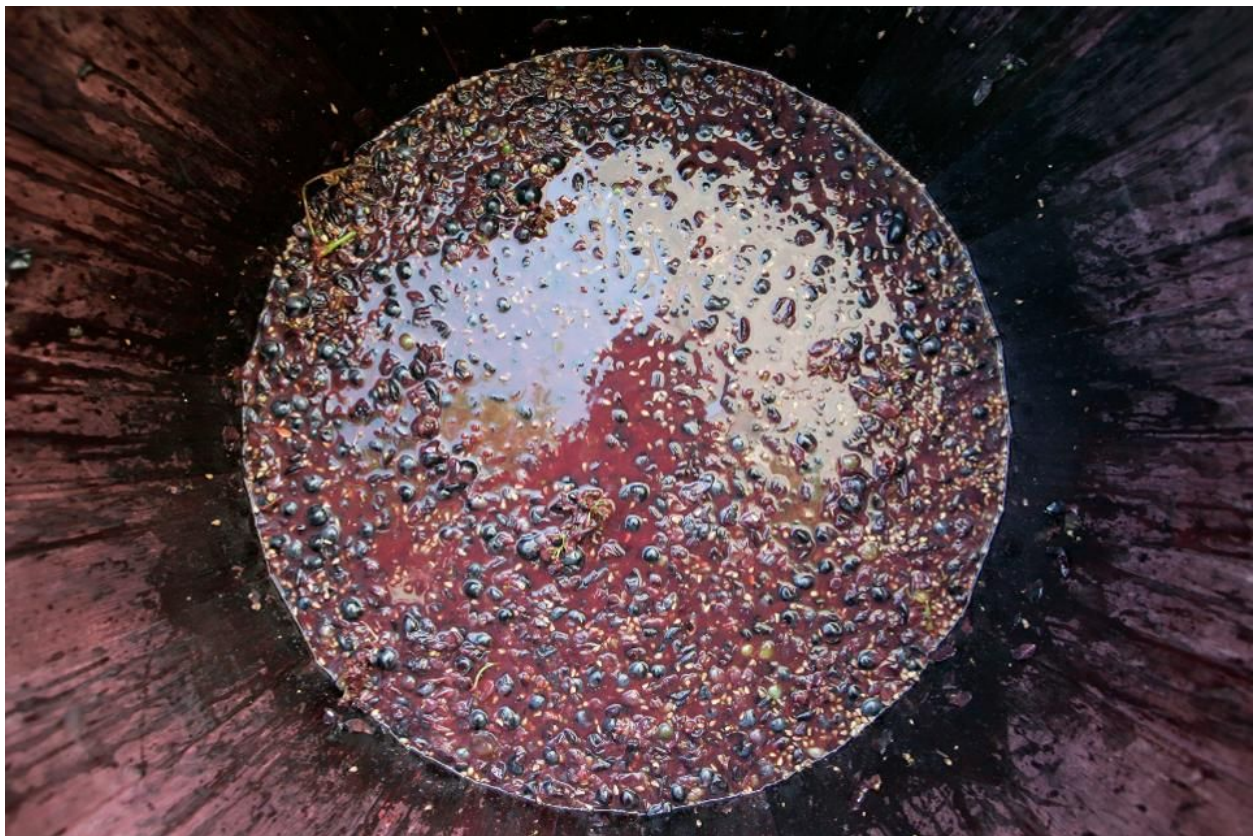
By Cathy Huyghe

"Highly underrated."

That was one of the first responses I received when I emailed invitations to attend a consumer tasting of zinfandel wines from California. By the end of the tasting, the consensus was that the wines are not only underrated, they're also great values, particularly from lesser-known regions of the state .

For my part, I was interested in the history of the grape in California and the link between the Gold Rush of the 1850s and the earliest plantings of zinfandel -- which happened in some cases in close proximity to each other. I was interested in zin as a piece of the U.S.' viticultural heritage, and in growers' and winemakers' commitment to preserving it.

Zinfandel is all of those things and it was helpful to "flesh out" the context as we tasted through the two flights of wines. But the conversation, particularly for this group of enthusiastic everyday wine consumers, kept returning to the surprises of the tasting which were, consistently, those wines that tasters identified as their favorites even before knowing the cost. The lower-than-expected price tag naturally increased the appeal even more.



A barrel of Zinfandel grapes waiting to be stomped is shown at the Grgich Hills winery in Rutherford, Calif., Monday, Sept. 15, 2008. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

In the listing below you'll find the group's four favorite wines of the tasting, our last Wednesday Night Wine post of the year. Let me be clear that this was not a comprehensive tasting of every zinfandel that is produced in California, and we did not at this sitting taste some of the brands that this group easily recognized as zin producers, such as Ridge, Dry Creek Vineyard, or Martinelli. The idea was to taste different (in many cases lesser-known) wines from diverse geographies.

The first flight consisted of wines from a wide variety of origins, from the Alexander Valley to Lodi to Paso Robles to Amador County in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, home to that synergy of gold and wine more than 150 years ago. In the second flight we narrowed the focus to Napa and Sonoma, which was represented most prominently by the Dry Creek Valley region of Sonoma. One taster commented that, overall, the first flight (of diverse origins) impressed her as more Old World in style, while the second flight (from Napa and Sonoma) showed more bold fruit of the New World. That impression is reflected in the group tasting notes, as is the importance of context for drinking the wines, whether at the dinner table or feet-up-by-the-fireplace.

2015 Estate Grown Zinfandel, Fritz (Sonoma County, Dry Creek Valley), \$20

The nose of this wine also stood out from the start because of how boldly different it was from the others in the tasting: straight away we noted pomegranate, plum, lemon zest and orange peel, and later we came back to deeper, more woody aromas. For me this was the the stand-out wine of the tasting, partly for its nose and partly because I've recently tasted several vintages from this producer that were each unique and unexpected, and notably personality-driven.

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