



Zinfandels from California region span flavors, pair with many meals

By Steve Barnes



Sonoma County's Dry Creek Valley, an hour's drive north of San Francisco, is a small farming community that's home to 70 wineries and scores more grape growers, all centered around the charming town of Healdsburg. The growers, vineyards and wineries are dedicated to sustainable practices, with a commitment to 100 percent sustainability by the end of next year.

The most widely grown grape in Dry Creek Valley is zinfandel, with a total of 2,400 acres under cultivation. Some of the vines are from rootstocks planted in the 1890s. The styles of zin produced in Dry Creek Valley — from zippy to dark and decadent and even, as a dessert wine, an off-dry, port-style sipper — are perfect for winter meals.

In general, hearty, spicy meat dishes work well with Dry Creek Valley zins, and it's an excellent complement to many cheeses. A pizza with pancetta and smoked Gouda would be a natural for zinfandel,

as would pork-belly buns with hoisin sauce, lean meats with Southwestern spices/sauces or a black-bean burger.

Here are a trio of Dry Creek Valley zins to try. They're not widely available but are worth tracking down.

Mazzocco Sonoma Briar Zinfandel

Price: \$28

Order it: 800-501-8466

Notes: A fine balance of fruits both dark and red, with a floral scent ghosting around the glass but less so in the mouth. There's a lot of fruit here, but the tannins offset it.

Sbragia Family Vineyards Gino's Zinfandel

Price: \$22.95

Order it: www.bit.ly/2CGaeh0

Notes: Lighter and brighter than some Dry Creek Valley zinfandels as a result of 80 percent zin blended with carignan and petite syrah, this wine honors an ancestor of father-son winemakers Ed and Adam Sbragia.

Amista Illusion Red Dessert Wine

Price: \$28/375ml

Order it: amistavineyards.com

Notes: A blend of half zinfandel and half syrah, this off-dry wine would go well with most desserts, from chocolate truffles to fruit pies. An old Chinese saying holds that we eat first with our eyes, but in this case, with Amista's extravagant aromas, we taste first with the nose. Substitute it for a port or — shh! — lighten it with seltzer as a spritzer. We won't tell if you won't.

<http://www.timesunion.com/upstate/article/California-zinfandels-span-flavors-pair-with-12519155.php#item-85307-tbla-4>