



The Daily Meal®

All Things Food & Drink

Dry Creek Valley: Nirvana for Zinfandel Lovers

By Gabe Sasso



This grape is the 'king of the manor' in northern Sonoma

Located in the northern part of Sonoma County, [Dry Creek Valley](#) is a diverse region known for a multitude of things. Nearly every winery — large and small (and smaller) — is family-owned. The town of [Healdsburg](#) is one of the great American downtowns, with a myriad of restaurants, all manner of shops, and tasting rooms. It's as warm and welcoming as any wine region out there. When it comes to grapes, there's variety to be had: Sauvignon blanc flourishes, [hillside cabernet sauvignon](#) is a hidden treasure, and Rhône varieties have a home, too. But the “king of the manor” in terms of quality in quantity and reputation is [zinfandel](#).

A lot of the earliest grapes were planted by immigrants, many of them Italian. They loved the hearty nature of zinfandel and thus planted it all over the place, often as a field blend with small amounts of petite sirah, carignan, and mixed blacks (an old term for mixed planting vineyards). Some of those early plantings still exist and are highly sought-after grapes. Those old vines produce fruit with a concentration and natural intensity a younger vine can't replicate, and they often end up bottled as single-vineyard wines.

The best examples of zinfandel from Dry Creek Valley epitomize the very best of what has become known as “America's Heritage Grape.” Best-in-class examples of zin feature lots of fruit and spice, but they also showcase a good body, nice structure, mouthwatering acid, and a memorable finish. At the core of most Dry Creek Valley zinfandels are proportionate wines that marry well with food. Great zinfandel is the ultimate wine to pair with burgers, ribs and anything else you pull off your grill or out of your smoker. But they're also incredibly well-suited to drink with pizza, or a Sunday dinner slathered in red sauce. There's more than one reason so many Italian immigrants favored zinfandel: They wanted something delicious to match with their meals, too.

The wine that is the subject of this review was provided at no cost to the writer.

Pedroncelli “Mother Clone” Zinfandel 2016 (\$19). One vintage after another, Pedroncelli’s flagship wine is the single-best deal out there when it comes to genuine zinfandel. It’s a classic example of Dry Creek Valley zin with dark fruits and savory herbs on the nose. Red and black raspberry fill the palate along with bits of black pepper. The above-average finish shows off earth, bits of sweet dark chocolate and wisps of crushed black cherry. “Mother Clone” is full-flavored, proportionate and incredibly food-friendly. I like this wine with so many foods, but it might be my favorite wine with a great pizza.

Rued Estate Zinfandel 2014 (\$29). Red plum and raspberry scents dominate the enticing aromatics. Strawberry and black raspberry jam fill the palate along with an underpinning of vanilla bean. Savory herbs, subtle earth and gentle spices are evident on the lush finish. If you’re looking for a great partner for al pastor tacos, look no further than this beauty.

Puccioni Vineyards Old Vine Zinfandel 2015 (\$32). Puccioni Vineyards, headed by Glenn Proctor, may just be the ultimate boutique winery in Dry Creek Valley. Glenn’s great-grandfather first planted vines on their ranch over 100 years ago. Some of those are still producing fruit and they’ve been supplemented by newer plantings. In addition to zinfandel they also produce petite sirah. All together, Puccioni produces less than 400 cases of wine. The nose of this zinfandel is laced with black cherry and hints of red plum. A core of deep, dark berry fruit flavors, spice and cocoa is evident on the juicy palate. Earth, raspberry, spice, and hints of black tea are all apparent on the long finish. Puccioni Vineyards is still under the radar; get on their mailing list while you can.

Sbragia “Gino’s Vineyard” Zinfandel 2014 (\$34). Winemaker Ed Sbragia honors his grandfather with this wine by producing a zinfandel that nods to the field blends Grandpa Gino made. Strawberry, red plum and white pepper light up the nose. The core of the palate is dominated by red berry fruit with hints of savory herbs present as well. Wisps of sour cherry and a dusting of cocoa are present on the pleasing finish. Whether you’re eating a BLT, grilled cheese sandwich, gyro, or mushroom risotto, Gino’s zin will work with it.

Collier Falls Hillside Estate Zinfandel 2013 (\$36). In addition to zinfandel, Barry Collier’s portfolio includes cabernet, syrah, and zinfandel’s Italian “cousin,” primitivo. Raspberry, strawberry and spice aromas leap from the big nose. The palate is layered with a host of berry jam flavors, spice and bits of chocolate sauce. Toasty oak, vanilla and continued red-leaning fruits fill out the finish. This is a hearty zinfandel that will pair well with big, bold flavors.

Seghesio “Cortina” Zinfandel 2015 (\$40). Most of the fruit for this zinfandel comes from a site planted in 1972. Black cherry and spice emerge from the nose. The palate is loaded with blackberry, bits of fresh fig and a complement of spices. Savory herbs and a continued intermingling of red and black fruits are all evident on the solid, gripping finish. Firm acid keeps things lively and fresh.

Comstock Zinfandel 2013 (\$42). Black plum and black raspberry aromas drive the deep and somewhat brooding nose. Boysenberry, blackberry and a complement of spices are evident on the deep and rich palate. Hints of creme brulee lead the finish which also shows off chicory and Montmorency cherry. Exploring the zinfandels of Dry Creek Valley is not only good for your sense of adventure, but can be great for your health, too. Here are [20 reasons why you should drink a glass of wine each day](https://www.thedaily meal.com/drink/dry-creek-valley-zinfandel).

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