

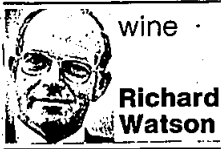
Fetzer and Ridge lead with zinfandel

There are at least 11 different ways in which a zinfandel grape can be finished, each producing, in effect, a distinct kind of wine.

These differences are caused by the intent of the grape grower and the winemaker, whether the wine is stored in wood or steel, where the grapes are grown and how heavily they were cropped, as well as the age of the grape vines.

Following is a get-acquainted list of some of the more notable zinfandel producers in California. No list can be comprehensive or exhaustive. There are more than 100 producers of zinfandel in the state, after all. Here's a shot at the spectrum, however.

Two major wineries that are zinfandel specialists are Fetzer and Ridge. The former regularly issues a light and fruity edition from Lake County and then produces some complex and highly sophisticated wines known by vineyard designation (Loloma, Hietli, Scharffenberger) or location (Sonoma, Mendocino).



wine
Richard Watson

RIDGE HAS FOR more than a decade issued more than a half dozen issues a year from different regions of the state. The general rule in selecting a Ridge zinfandel is that the more it costs, the more intense and complex it will be.

Clearly, Ridge has carved out a most distinctive place for itself in the world of zinfandel.

Another major producer which issues a complex variety of releases each year is the Monterey Peninsula Winery.

This year these releases range from a white through a highly alcoholic, late-harvest monster.

Monterevina, Shenandoah, Baldinelli and Santino all release a variety of excellent issues from the Shenandoah Valley area of the Foothills, while Sutter Home in Napa uses grapes entirely from this region for its zinfandel. These wines from Amador County should be tried for their boldness and assertiveness.

Fresh, light fruit and berries can be tasted in the wines of Sebastiani, Martini and Pedroncelli, following the Italian tradition with this grape to focus on its youth and brightness.

TWO MONSTER, late-harvest wines currently on local shelves are both from Napa, a region not generally as favored for producing prime zinfandel as is the Sonoma Valley.

These are the 1980 Buchler (at 14.3 percent alcohol) and Cakebread Cellars (at 16.3 percent). These are best considered as ports and should be drunk only after much aging and on very cold evenings by the fire. These are not food wines.

My preference is for zinfandels that are complex in style, treating them very much like a cabernet sauvignon. The following winemakers usually make interesting, fully flavored, somewhat taut wines that also have abundant quantities of fruit:

Mastanovino (a great winery in San Luis Obispo), Lytton Springs, HMFR, Preston, Calera, Cassayre-Fornell, Clos du Val and Chateau Montelena.

Not available in Michigan but worth having travelers in California bring back to you are the great issues from Storybook Mountain (Sonoma) and from Green and Red in the Napa Mountains.

Finally, for everyday jug zinfandel, the solution is easy: the August Sebastiani County Zinfandel in 1.5-liter bottles. Enjoy!

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