

Red zinfandel back in favor

It seems as though this is as good a time as any to announce a resurrection. It is actually a bit overdone.

In the early days of the California wine explosion in the 1970s, one of the important wines was Zinfandel. Grown only in California, except for some minor efforts in Oregon, its origins are obscure. But it has been an amazingly adaptable grape, producing wines that reflect their viticultural origins more than most.

Grown in mountains under conditions of high stress, it can be intense, complex and deliciously fruity. Grown in a hot valley it produces huge amounts of vin ordinaire. It can be fresh, deep, bright, tannic, full-bodied, simple and clean, depending on the farmers who grow it and, to a lesser extent, the nature of its vinification.

In the late '70s and early '80s, California wine growers, in an effort to establish a California style, went bit bonkers with this and a few other grapes. But especially Zinfandel, it is adaptable. They produced many huge, tannic monsters, full of alcohol and concentrated flavors. It became fashionable to make it something other than a civilized wine for the table. It became a conversation piece.

FINALLY THE PUBLIC rebelled in the only way it has. It stopped buying it.

Desperate, the winemakers turned their Zinfandel grapes into a new commodity, the White Zinfandel. And they made a lot of money doing so. The popularity of that wine is now legendary, of course. Its consumption kept a great many Zinfandel plants in the soil that otherwise would have been budded over to other varieties.

Now true, red (as it must be qualified) Zinfandel seems to be returning to our favor. Reviews of recent vintages have been good, sales are up and the wines can be used to accompany food: full of grace, charm and the distinctive fruit of berries and currants. Some are more complex than others, some cost as much as fine Cabernet Sauvignon or Pinot Noir, some will benefit from aging and others should be drunk now.

Those from Sonoma are, with some notable exceptions, the superior lot. In part, they are from vineyards that were not around when the earlier monsters were made. Excellent examples from the Valley of the Moon include Richardson, Lytton Springs, Gundlach-Bundschu, Ravenswood, Haywood, Preston, Mark West, Nalle and Hacienda.

Four of these are from around the city of Sonoma and are neighbors Richardson, Gundlach-Bundschu, Haywood and Ravenswood. The first two have won major awards of late, both producing wines of depth and substance. The Haywood tends to show more class and finesse.

FROM THE DRY CREEK area of Sonoma more to the northwest the most notable Zinfandel releases have come from Nalle. A small producer (actually made at Quivers by the winemaker there, Doug Nalle), we are fortunate to have their 1986 edition available here. Rich in fruit and with good acid structure this one is a treasure, well worth its \$9 price tag.

Napa produces a fair share of fine Zinfandels as well, though it is not really prime country for the grape. From the low foothills at the northern end of the valley, Storybook Mountain has produced an excellent selection of select Zinfandels (and that is all it produces) for nearly a decade now. Owner Jerry Sepe began in the lean years, held out well and will now benefit from the

Tour schedules are announced

A new program of summer tours is being offered at Meadow Brook Hall, the auto baron home at Oakland University in Rochester Hills. The tours continue through Sept. 5. To enrich the experience of visiting the historic 100-room mansion built by the widow of John Dodge, docents (trained guides) are provided for all tours Monday through Saturday.

Docents outline the history of the home and its occupants, give descriptions of each room and its furnishings, and answer questions guests may have throughout the tour.

Formerly, docents were available only by advance reservation for groups of 20 or more. No reservations are needed for the new summer tours, and there is no increase in admission for this service. Sunday tours are informal, without docents.

Operated as a cultural program of Oakland University, Meadow Brook Hall is sustained and preserved through proceeds from tours, conferences and seminars, special events as well as individual and corporate contributions. No public funds are allotted for the hall's support. Visitors also may take advantage of two other features of the summer tour program — Knole Cottage and the Summer Tea Room.

KNOLE COTTAGE is a six-room "playhouse" (more accurately, a small mansion) which is open to the public during Meadow Brook Hall tour hours, weather permitting.

Built for the little Dodge heiress to help her learn housekeeping skills, the playhouse contains the same fine quality workmanship and furnishings found in Meadow Brook Hall.

All fixtures and equipment are in working order throughout the two bedrooms, bathroom, living room, dining room and kitchen, which was the first all-electric kitchen in Michigan.

All other days the hall opens at 10 a.m. and closes at 5 p.m. Last tour will be 3:45 p.m. all days.

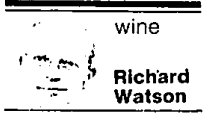
The tearoom is open for full lunches and light refreshments Monday through Friday, 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Settings vary from the exquisitely formal Christopher Wren Dining Room to the more casual Wilson Room or the relaxed atmosphere of

the Garden Court Room.

On Sundays, an elaborate buffet dinner is available in the Christopher Wren Room. No reservations are taken.

Tour admission is \$4 general admission, \$3 for senior citizens over 64 and \$2 for children under 13. Parking is free, and there is no charge to tour the landscaped grounds and gardens.

The hall is on the east campus of Oakland University, with entrance on Adams Road south of Walton Boulevard. For further information, call 370-3140.



wine

Richard Watson

grape's growing popularity. There are Grigich Hills and La Jota (though at \$14 and \$18 the bottle they are well beyond what most people expect to pay for a Zinfandel). Buehler (still producing wines on the hefty side), Burgess and Sky.

Below Napa, Ridge Vineyards in Santa Clara has long been a Zinfandel master, producing several issues, each vintage from different growing regions throughout the state. Finally, some of the newer issues from the Amador area in the foothills of the Sierra-Nevadas to the east are showing real promise now that they have ceased making monsters: Santino, Amador Foothill and Shenandoah. A true treasure of choices with which to welcome back this noble grape. Most are priced in the \$7-10 range and will equally complement one's cellar as well as one's table in its time.

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