

THE GRAPE CHOICE
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WINE OF THE MONTH SELECTIONS
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California Zinfandel

Zinfandel is a variety of red grape planted in over 10 percent of California vineyards. DNA fingerprinting revealed that it is genetically equivalent to the Croatian grape Crljenak Kaštelanski, as well as the Primitivo variety traditionally grown in the "heel" of Italy, where it was introduced in the 18th century. The grape found its way to the United States in the mid-19th century, and became known by variations of the name "Zinfandel", a name of uncertain origin.

The grapes typically produce a robust red wine, although a semi-sweet rosé (blush-style) wine called White Zinfandel has six times the sales of the red wine in the United States. The grape's high sugar content can be fermented into levels of alcohol exceeding 15 percent.

The taste of the red wine depends on the ripeness of the grapes from which it is made. Red berry fruits like raspberry predominate in wines from cooler areas,^[4] whereas blackberry, anise and pepper notes are more common in wines made in warmer areas^[4] and in wines made from the earlier-ripening Primitivo clone.

Archaeological evidence indicates that domestication of *Vitis vinifera* occurred in the Caucasus region around 6000 BCE, and winemaking was discovered shortly after. Cultivation of the vine subsequently spread to the Mediterranean and surrounding regions. Croatia once had several indigenous varieties related to Zinfandel, which formed the basis of its wine industry in the 19th century. This diversity suggests that the grapes existed in Croatia longer than anywhere else. However, these varieties were almost entirely wiped out by the phylloxera epidemic of the late 19th century, reducing Zinfandel to just nine vines of locally-known "Crljenak Kaštelanski" discovered in 2001 on the Dalmatian coast of Croatia.

In 1972, Bob Trinchero of the Sutter Home Winery decided to try draining some juice from the vats in order to impart more tannins and color to his Deaver Vineyard Zinfandel. He vinified this juice as a dry wine, and tried to sell it under the name of Oeil de Perdrix, a French wine made by this saignée method. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms insisted on an English translation, so he added "White Zinfandel" to the name, and sold 220 cases. At the time, demand for white wine exceeded the availability of white wine grapes, encouraging other California producers to make "white" wine from red grapes, with minimal skin contact. However, in 1975, Trinchero's wine experienced a stuck fermentation, a problem in which the yeast dies off before all the sugar is converted to alcohol. He put the wine aside for two weeks, then tasted it and decided to sell this pinker, sugary wine. Just as Mateus Rosé had become a huge success in Europe after World War II, this medium sweet White Zinfandel became immensely popular. White Zinfandel still accounts for 9.9% of U.S. wine sales by volume (6.3% by value), six times the sales of red Zinfandel. Most white Zinfandel is made from grapes grown for that purpose in California's Central Valley.

Wine critics considered white Zinfandel to be insipid and uninteresting in the 1970s and 1980s, although modern white Zinfandels have more fruit and less cloying sweetness. Nevertheless, the success of this blush wine saved many old vines in premium areas, which came into their own at the end of the 20th century as red

Zinfandel wines came back into fashion. Although the two wines taste dramatically different, both are made from the same (red) grapes, processed in a different way.

Zinfandel was long considered "America's vine and wine", but when University of California, Davis (UCD) professor Austin Goheen visited Italy in 1967, he noticed how wine made from Primitivo reminded him of Zinfandel. Others also made the connection about that time. Primitivo was brought to California in 1968, and ampelographers declared it identical to Zinfandel in 1972. The first wine made from these California vines in 1975 also seemed identical to Zinfandel. In 1975, PhD student Wade Wolfe showed that the two varieties had identical isozyme fingerprints.

Dr. Lamberti of Bari had suggested to Goheen in 1976 that Primitivo might be the Croatian variety Plavac Mali. By 1982 Goheen had confirmed that they were similar but not identical, probably by isozyme analysis. Some Croatians, however, became convinced that Plavac Mali was the same as Zinfandel, among them Croatian-born winemaker Mike Grgich. In 1991 Grgich and other producers came together as the Zinfandel Advocates and Producers (ZAP) with the objectives of promoting the varietal and wine, and supporting scientific research on Zinfandel. With this support, UCD professor Carole Meredith went to Croatia and collected over 150 samples of Plavac Mali throughout Dalmatia, in collaboration with the University of Zagreb.

In 1993, Meredith used a DNA fingerprinting technique to confirm that Primitivo and Zinfandel are clones of the same variety. Comparative field trials have found that "Primitivo selections were generally superior to those of Zinfandel, having earlier fruit maturity, similar or higher yield, and similar or lower bunch rot susceptibility." This is consistent with the theory that Primitivo was selected as an early-ripening clone of a Croatian grape.

By 1998, Meredith's team realized that Plavac Mali was *not* Zinfandel but rather that one was the parent of the other. In 2000 they discovered that Primitivo/Zinfandel was one parent of Plavac Mali. The other parent of Plavac Mali was determined by Ivan Pejić and Edi Maletić (University of Zagreb) to be Dobričić, an ancient variety from the Adriatic island of Šolta.

This discovery narrowed down the search to the central Dalmatian coastal strip and its offshore islands. Eventually a matching DNA fingerprint was found among the samples. The match came from a vine sampled in 2001 in the vineyard of Ivica Radunić in Kaštel Novi. This Crljenak Kaštelanski ("Kaštela Red") appears to represent Primitivo/Zinfandel in its original home, although some genetic divergence may have occurred since their separation. Meredith now refers to the variety as "ZPC" - Zinfandel / Primitivo / Crljenak Kaštelanski.

This Croatian vineyard contained just nine Crljenak Kaštelanski vines mixed with thousands of other vines. In 2002, additional vines known locally as Pribidrag were found in the Dalmatian coastal town of Omiš. Both clones are being propagated in California under the aegis of Ridge Vineyards, although virus infections have delayed their release. The first Croatian ZPC wine was made by Edi Maletić in 2005. Meanwhile, plantings of Primitivo have increased in California, where it seems to grow somewhat less vigorously than its sibling. Its wines are reputed to have more blackberry and spice flavors.

Local wine-labeling regulations are slowly catching up with the DNA evidence, a process that has been slowed by trade disputes. The European Union recognized Zinfandel as a synonym for Primitivo in January 1999, meaning that Italian Primitivos can be labelled as Zinfandel in the United States and any other country that recognises EU labelling laws. Italian winemakers have taken advantage of these rules and shipped Primitivo wines to the United States labelled as Zinfandels, with the approval of the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB).

As of December 2007, the TTB lists both Zinfandel and Primitivo as approved grape varieties for American wines, but they are not listed as synonyms. U.S. producers, therefore, must label a wine according to whether it is Zinfandel or Primitivo.

2009
Opolo Vineyards
Summit Creek
Paso Robles

Paso Robles is located approximately halfway between the cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco on what is known as the "Central Coast". Paso Robles' growth as industry—wine—has a long history with the area. Wine grapes were introduced to the Paso Robles soil in 1797 by the Spanish conquistadors and Franciscan missionaries. Spanish explorer Francisco Cortez envisioned an abundant wine-producing operation and encouraged settlers from Mexico and other parts of California to cultivate the land. The first vineyardists in the area were the Padres of the Mission San Miguel, and their old fermentation vats and grapevine artwork can still be seen at the Mission, north of the city of Paso Robles.

They say good fences make good neighbors, but it was a love of wine and winemaking that was the entrée between Opolo owners Rick Quinn and Dave Nichols. Their two families have lived side-by-side in Camarillo since 1996. Quinn and Nichols have been neighbors in two counties since 1997 when Nichols bought vineyard property adjoining Quinn's. Together they now own about 280 acres of vineyards in Paso Robles, about 200 acres on the Eastside and 80 on the Westside. The Westside vineyards are in the Adelaide hills, producing wines such as Pinot Noir and Sangiovese, while the Eastside properties produce varietals such as Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon. The majority of vineyards have been producing fruit since 1998, and a small percentage of it has been finding its way into wine made by Quinn and Nichols ever since.

Opolo's 2009 Summit Creek Zinfandel is a full-bodied red wine showcasing overt raspberry and black cherry fruit aromatics and flavors framed by soft tannins and balanced acidity. Subtle pepper and spice nuances further complement this hand-crafted wine. This Zinfandel is an approachable wine which is ready to drink today, although the dark color and youthful fruitiness of this sturdy wine indicates that it will likely cellar well for a few years.

Our Price \$15.00

2009
Ridge Vineyards
Geyserville

The history of Ridge Vineyards begins in 1885, when Osea Perrone, a doctor who became a prominent member of San Francisco's Italian community, bought 180 acres near the top of Monte Bello Ridge. He terraced the slopes and planted vineyards; using native limestone, he constructed the Monte Bello Winery, producing the first vintage under that name in 1892. This unique cellar, built into the mountainside on three levels, is Ridge's production facility. At 2600', it is surrounded by the "upper vineyard."

In the 1940s, William Short, a theologian, bought the abandoned winery and vineyard just below the Perrone property; he replanted several parcels to cabernet sauvignon in the late 1940s. From these vines — now the "middle vineyard"— new owners Dave Bennion and his three partners, all Stanford Research Institute engineers, made a quarter-barrel of "estate" cabernet. That Monte Bello Cabernet was among California's finest wines of the era. Its quality and distinctive character, and the wines produced from these same vines in 1960 and '61, convinced the partners to re-bond the winery in time for the 1962 vintage.

The first zinfandel was made in 1964, from a small nineteenth-century vineyard farther down the ridge. This was followed in 1966 by the first Geyserville zinfandel. The founding families reclaimed the Monte Bello terraces, increasing vineyard size from fifteen to forty-five acres. Working on weekends, they made wines of regional character and unprecedented intensity. By 1968, production had increased to just under three thousand cases per year, and in 1969, Paul Draper joined the partnership. A Stanford graduate in philosophy—recently

returned from setting up a winery in Chile's coast range—he was a practical winemaker, not an enologist. His knowledge of fine wines and traditional methods complemented the straightforward "hands off" approach pioneered at Ridge. Under his guidance the old Perrone winery (acquired the previous year) was restored, the finest vineyard lands leased or purchased, the consistent quality and international reputation of the wines established. Cabernet and zinfandel account for most of the production; syrah, grenache, carignane, and petite sirah constitute a small percentage. Known primarily for its red wines, Ridge has also made limited amounts of chardonnay since 1962.

The 2009 Geyserville is a gorgeous wine. It shows expressive inner perfume, sweet black cherries, menthol and minerals. This is an understated, exceptionally elegant red endowed with considerable finesse and fabulous overall balance. A round, sensual finish makes it impossible to resist a second taste. In 2009 the blend is 74% Zinfandel, 17% Carignane, 6% Petite Sirah, 2% Alicante Bouschet and 1% Mourvedre. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2029. 94 pts. Antonio Galloni – The Wine Advocate

Our Price \$35.00

Salute!