

BLIND**TASTING***with Deborah Parker Wong*

Eclectic, Electric

Lodi Zinfandel

Lodi has long been synonymous with Zinfandel. The region which is defined by seven sub-regions produces 40 percent of the state's crop and much of that from old and downright ancient vines that have survived due largely to sandy, Phylloxera-free soils and the popularity of white Zinfandel. As a mono-varietal red, Zinfandel's exuberant character has made it a favorite among consumers and fueled Lodi's focus on the production of world-class wines.

As early as 2003, when there were 50 wineries in the AVA, the Lodi Winegrape Commission began evaluating wines submitted by producers as part of a selected case known as the **12 Zins of Lodi**. A decade later and with over 80 bonded to its credit, Lodi Zinfandels are being made in a broader range of weights and styles which makes the prospect of a representative case even more intriguing.

This year's 12 Zins of Lodi were selected by a panel of eight judges (see www.lodiwine.com for details) who were invited to blind-taste and score 57 wines from vintages 2009 through 2012 using a ten-point scale. Almost half of the 57 wines submitted are designated "old vine," and the attributes of those vineyards, some in excess of the hundred year mark, were evident. Retail prices of the wines ranged from \$7 to \$60, with the average price coming in at just over \$20.

According to winemaker Stuart Spencer, Program Director for the Commission, cooler vintage conditions in 2010 and 2011 resulted in considerably lower yields and, in some cases, higher alcohols. As a result, the wines were brighter and leaner-bodied with distinct floral, complex spice or oak-dominant aromas, with Zinfandel's characteristic dark, often jammy fruit taking a back seat to fresher red and blue fruit. The cooler vintages dominate this year's selection with five of the chosen wines from the 2010 vintage, four from 2011 and three from 2012 listed in the order tasted.

Wine styles in Lodi are continuing to evolve. This month, a group of six Lodi winemakers—Layne Montgomery (m2Wines), Stuart Spencer (St. Amant Winery), Ryan Sherman (Fields Family Wines), Michael McCay (McCay Cellars), Tim Holdener (Macchia Wines) and Chad Joseph (winemaker for Maley Brothers and other Lodi wineries)—will debut their Lodi Natives, 2012 single-vineyard wines made using hands-off techniques, native yeast fermentation and minimal or no-new-oak regimes. The combination of old vines and low-impact winemaking promises to reveal everything these sites have to offer. ■■

LoCA

THE WINES OF LODI, CA

The 2014 12 Zins of Lodi

Michael David Winery 7 Deadly Zins
2011 (\$16)

LangeTwins Centennial 2010 (\$60)

Jessie Grove Westwind 2011 (\$32)

JC van Staden 2012 (\$21)

Heritage Oak Winery Zinhead 2011 (\$25)

Harney Lane 2011 (\$22)

Michael David Earthquake 2010 (\$26)

Upstream Wines at Watts Winery
Upstream 2012 (\$25)

Tierra Divina Vineyard ZaZin 2010 (\$15)

Macchia Mischievous 2012 (\$22)

Ehrenberg Cellars 2010 (\$18)

McCay Cellars Trulux 2010 (\$32)



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The 2014 edition of 12 Zins of Lodi.