

Grapes to Go

Silver Level

September 2006

Theme: Zinfandel

The origins of this tremendously versatile and popular grape are not known for certain, although it is thought to have come from Southern Italy as it is genetically identical to Primitivo. It is the most widely planted red grape in California. Much of it is vinified into white Zinfandel, a blush-colored, slightly sweet wine. Real Zinfandel, the red wine, is the quintessential California wine. It has been used for blending with other grapes, including Cabernet Sauvignon and Petite Sirah. It has been made in a claret style, with berry and cherry flavors, mild tannins and pretty oak shadings. It has been made into a full-bodied, ultraripe, intensely flavored and firmly tannic wine designed to age. And, it has been made into late-harvest and Port-style wines that feature very ripe, raisiny flavors, alcohol above 15 percent, and chewy tannins.

Zinfandel is a challenging grape to grow because its berry size varies significantly within a bunch, which leads to uneven ripening. Because of that, Zinfandel often needs to hang on the vine longer to ripen as many berries as possible. Closer attention to viticulture and an appreciation for older vines, which tend to produce smaller crops of uniformly higher quality, account for better balanced wines.

This month we will sample two of California's finest examples of Zinfandel, as well as some recipes designed specifically for Zinfandel.

The first is the **2002 Limerick Lane Collins Vineyard Zinfandel** from Sonoma County. It is a great Zin, rich and opulent. It floods the mouth with briary blackberry, blueberry, cherry chocolate, and pepper flavors that just take over the palate. Yet, the wine is dry and balanced, with firm, ripe tannins. The *Wine Enthusiast Magazine* rated this wine 92 Points and ranked it #21 of the top 100 wines of 2004. This wine retails for \$29.99 per bottle or \$287.90 per case; and, supplies are extremely limited.

Next, is the **2003 Runquist "Z" Massoni Ranch Zinfandel** from Amador County. It is a fully flavored yet elegantly styled wine with a smooth soft finish. It has a deep ruby color, classic Zinfandel aromas of brairy raspberry and plum fruit with minerals and dust. The oak is restrained, adding a subtle layer of vanilla to the red Zinfandel fruit. The flavors feature sweet raspberries carried on a rich velvety texture. It is full-bodied with good structure. The finish is long and smooth. The combination of fruit, tannin, and low pH indicated that it may be Runquist's longest lived Zinfandel ever. This wine won a Gold Medal at the 2005 International Eastern Wine Competition, and Silver Medals at the 2005 California State Fair, the 2005 Amador County Wine Competition, and the 2005 West Coast Wine Competition. This wine retails for \$26.99 per bottle, or \$259.10 per case.

Food Pairing

Zinfandel is an extremely versatile food wine, pairing nicely with any roasted meat, spicy Asian or Mexican food, hearty pasta dishes, duck, goose, game, pizza, or picnic foods. But, Zinfandel really shines with earthy meals like this Wild Mushroom Bisque and flank steak with Zinfandel Sauce.

Wild Mushroom Bisque

Ingredients

3 cloves	Garlic, minced
2 Tbsp	Olive oil
1 medium	Yellow onion, diced fine
4 pounds	Button mushrooms sliced
2 ounces	Dried Porcini mushrooms, reconstituted
¼ pound	Shitake (or your favorite) mushrooms
1 cup	Sauvignon Blanc
2 quarts	Chicken or vegetable stock
1 quart	Heavy cream
1 stick	Unsalted butter
1 bunch	Fresh Basil

1 bunch	Fresh Tarragon
1 bunch	Fresh Chive
	Kosher salt, to taste
	Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Method

Sauté onions and garlic in olive oil until translucent, taking care not to burn the garlic. Add mushrooms and cook over low heat until the mushroom mixture is almost dry. Add the white wine and cook until the wine is fully evaporated. Add the chicken or vegetable stock and cream and simmer for about 20 minutes. Season the soup with salt and pepper. To finish the soup, add basil, tarragon, chives, and butter, and then puree with a stick blender until smooth. Serve immediately. Pair with any Zinfandel.

Roasted Flank Steak with Zinfandel Sauce

Ingredients

2 pounds	Flank steak, skirt steak, or Sirloin tips
¼ cup	Olive oil
¾ cup	Balsamic vinegar
3 cloves	Garlic, minced
2 Tbsp	Dried Italian herbs
	Kosher salt, to taste
	Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
750 ml	Inexpensive Zinfandel
2 Tbsp	Olive oil
1 medium	Yellow onion, diced fine
2 medium	Shallots
1 clove	Garlic, minced

Method

Marinade

In a small mixing bowl, combine olive oil, balsamic vinegar, three cloves of garlic, Italian herbs, Kosher salt, and pepper. Remove excess

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fat from meat and pierce the meat all over both sides with a fork or knife. Place the meat in a zip top bag and add marinade. Expel the air from the bag, seal, and marinate the steak overnight.

Zinfandel Sauce

Sauté the onion, shallots, and garlic in the olive oil over medium heat in a non-reactive saucepan until translucent, taking care not to burn the garlic. Increase to high heat, add the Zinfandel and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low and simmer until the liquid is reduced by half. Remove from heat and cool.

Remove the meat from the marinade and add the remaining marinade to the Zinfandel sauce mixture and puree with a stick blender. When ready to serve, re-heat the sauce over medium heat, stirring occasionally.

Grill, broil, roast, or pan fry steak over high heat, cooking to medium rare. Cut the meat in thin slices across the grain. Serve with heated sauce.



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