

2003 Zinfandel

Old Vine

Buchignani/Garcia Vineyard

Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma

Vineyard and Vintage: Dry Creek Valley, in Sonoma County, is the premier appellation in the world for Zinfandel. The Buchignani family pioneered grape farming in the Dry Creek Valley, planting vineyards before the turn of the 20th century. Susie Buchignani married JoJo Garcia and the Buchignani Vineyard became the Buchignani/Garcia Vineyard. JoJo is the best dry farmer I know. Dry farming means that only the winter rains water the vines, remaining dry throughout the 4 to 5 month California summer and fall dry season. This is very specialized farming that requires tireless effort and a great deal of experience to produce optimal fruit and long living vines. The vines in the Deerfield section are between 70 and 115 years old. These gnarled old vines produce sparse bunches of incredibly flavorful fruit. Unlike most other varietals, old Zins ripen unevenly, challenging the talents of the grower and winemaker and adding character to the wine. We've been making Zin from this vineyard for almost 30 years and we're still learning.

The 2003 was a stellar vintage with the exception of a late spring rain that caused some fruit set problems in vineyards that were in bloom during the rain. This was one of those vineyards. We were expecting 8 tons and got 4.4 tons. While we were disappointed with the yield, we were excited about the quality. All the wines made from the 2003 harvest are stellar.

The Wine: Hand picked and sorted, the grapes were destemmed leaving 70% whole berries. During fermentation the whole berries retain the fruit essences and high glycerin levels that mask the high alcohol, like vermouth in a martini. Fermented in open-top tanks, the temperature was allowed to peak at 94°F to extract maximum color, tannin and glycerin. This is a difficult wine to make. The high sugars, low nutrient levels and high end point alcohol are all hard on the yeast, which we have to feed regularly, baby and nurse along to complete the fermentation. We are always testing the limits and in fact couldn't get the 2002 vintage to ferment out and decided to make it into "Port", which is still in the barrel for five years aging.

Tasting Notes: I keep saying this, but this one is the best yet. The nose is fruity with nuances of blackberries, ripe cherries, blueberries, chocolate, tobacco, licorice and oak. The oak is balanced toward American heavy toast. The berry flavors are beautifully integrated with the oak and tannins, resulting in a rich explosion of fruit in the middle of the palate. The high alcohol drives the flavor without being hot. There is a touch of sweetness, which helps establish the forward fruit and contributes to the balance. Everything about this wine is intense. The finish is exceptionally long and lingering.

Harvest & Winemaking Data:

Winemakers:	Robert Rex, Michael Browne
Harvested:	By hand, September 8, 2003, hand sorted and destemmed but not crushed
Brix at Harvest:	26°, after soak: 27.5°
Acid at Harvest:	4.6 g/L as Tartaric, 2 g/L added
pH:	3.62, corrected to 3.40 by the acid addition
Yeast:	L2226
Fermentation:	12 days open-top fermenters, punched 3 times per day
Max. Fermentation Temp:	94°F
Malo/Lactic Conversion:	100% in barrel
Aging:	23 months in 40% French Oak, 60% American Oak, 40% new
Fining:	none
Filtration:	Cross flow at bottling
SO ₂ at Bottling:	22 ppm free, SO ₂ at release 5 ppm
Bottled:	358 cases – September 9, 2005
Alcohol:	16.5% (the bottle says 16%)
Residual sugar:	0.15%
Awards & Reviews:	We didn't make enough to bother.
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