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Dining

Review: Best Zinfandels Under \$20

Article by M. Williams & OvaHere Staff

February 1, 2006 -

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When Zinfandel is brought up amongst some, the first thought is, "you mean **that pink wine that my grandmother drinks with 7-up?**" And with the sensitivity embodied by those of us on the OvaHere.com Staff, we usually reply, "Please vacate my personal space, you disgust me, please move yourself and your small mind back to Tampa or Topeka." This point is used to illustrate the ferocity with which some love Zinfandel (no need to say "red zinfandel"), and none embody this more than the good people at ZAP ([Zinfandel Advocates & Producers](#)). Every year they throw a [4-day Zinfest at Fort Mason](#) dedicated to the intense wine grape.



According to [wikipedia](#), "Zinfandel, also known as Zin, is a red-skinned wine grape popular in California for its intense fruitiness and lush texture." -- "Vintners have grown Zinfandel in California in quantity for over one hundred years. Many of the oldest wineries in the state grow Zinfandel and the vines are now treated almost like historic landmarks. At the start of prohibition Zinfandel was California's most popular and successful variety. During prohibition, limited home winemaking and the production of sacramental wine was allowed, and Zinfandel remained popular with Northern California's home wine makers." With over 10,000 dedicated fans of Zin in attendance this year, the popularity is as intense as the flavor.

The staff of OvaHere.com's palettes may be a bit immature from all of the poop jokes, but after 3 years of visiting the ZAP Zinfandel-fest, we are getting the hang of the verbiage at the very least. We have learned that just saying, "**Mmmm, seems oak-y**" is not fooling anyone. The Zinfandel adjective of this year was overwhelmingly, "**peppery**". Not only was it mentioned in 3 out of 4 promotional

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materials, but the reps really seemed to embrace it as well. In all honesty, the good people at ZAP have gathered the largest and most comprehensive festival dedicated to a single varietal -- meaning that there are over 600 wines to choose from. We attempted to disseminate the **best and brightest of the 600 while excluding all wines we couldn't afford (i.e. over \$20).**

We will state the obvious -- **ALL WINES MENTIONED BELOW ARE ZINFANDEL**

1. **Michael-David Winery 2004 The 7 Deadly Zins**, Lodi, **\$17**, Cost Plus/Costco/Bev Mo. Not only does it have a great name, but the robust flavors and silky after-taste made it the favorite of OvaHere.com staff. M. Williams says, "It's silky, jammy, and sweet, just like your kisses... bayyyyyyy-beeeeeeee!" That may or may not be sexual harassment, but the sentiment was shared by all.
www.lodivineyards.com
2. **Montevina Winery 2004 Wild Bunch**, Plymouth, **\$10**, Marina Grocers/ONLINE. The wild is a combo. of Zin, Barbera, and Syrah, and was given the 2nd highest rating of the OvaHere.com Staff. P. Stone says, "This wine reminds me of that summer I spent in Cinque Terre seducing red wines and women." Whatever that means, we heartily agreed that it was a flavorful selection.
www.montevina.com
3. **Napa Wine Company 2003 Pelissa Vineyard**, Oakville, **\$20**, ONLINE ONLY. The largest Organic grape-grower in Napa County also provides wine making equipment and facilities for many others. This robust Zin has a silky texture and strong cherry flavor, and their tasting room in Oakville is privy to many diverse selections because of their wine-making for other vineyards. www.napawineco.com
4. **Viano 2001 Private Stock**, Contra Costa County, **\$6**, Cost Plus/Andronico's/[Vino](http://www.vino.com). A ringing endorsement from a rival winemaker...The rep from **Talty** (also the maker of a some great wines) told us to check out the Viano Zin, saying it was, "**One of the best wines here, and it's \$5 (actually \$6) bucks!**" My response, "is it oak-y?" Really hard to find a better bargain out there. // Viano (925) 228-6465
5. **Solaris 2003 Napa Valley**, Napa Valley, **\$14**, Cost-Plus. Given 88 pts from Wine Spectator, and "according to the guy putting on my Solaris tattoo, this wine is, 'peppery, with plum flavors, and hints of fresh herbs'" (M. Williams) We had to agree, plus as novice wine connoisseurs the logo design does mean something. www.solariswinery.com
6. **Zig Zag Zin (formerly Parducci) 2003**, Mendocino Co., **\$17**, ONLINE ONLY. The name is a not-so-subtle reminder of the other popular Mendocino Co. agricultural product, but this wine may soon surpass that. Part of the growing [Mendocino Wine Country](http://www.mendocinowinecountry.com), and featuring some of the friendliest staff at the Fest. If you're looking for a mellow alternative to the Wine tours of Napa and Sonoma, check them out. www.mendocinowineco.com -- www.mendowinetours.com/ (for maps and wine tour info)
7. **R&B Cellars 2003**, Swingsville, **\$10**, Marina Grocers/ONLINE. Affordable, Local (winery is located in Alameda), and a nice subtle flavor that goes with almost any meal (from barbeque to lemon meringue pie), the name denotes a bluesy wine, and it has legs. www.rbcellars.com
8. **Barefoot 2004 Reserve**, Dry Creek Valley, **\$16**, ONLINE. Most reserves denote the high quality, low yield, and according to the Barefoot Temp Tattoo artist on-site, "this comes from one of the oldest Zin-producing wineries around" Not sure if that's a good thing or a bad thing, but this vino was especially tasty. You can find the **\$6 Barefoot California Zin** at **Trader Joe's** and many large wine outlets. www.barefootwine.com
9. **St. Amant 2004 Old Vine Mohr Fry Ranch**, Lodi, **\$15**, [Nugget \(Davis\)](http://www.nugget.com)/ONLINE. This is a sweet, **almost port-like Zin**, very unique flavor, higher alcohol content. A self-proclaimed, "chewy wine", but worth trying nonetheless and even **worth the trip off the freeway on the way to Tahoe!**

www.stamantwinery.com

10. **Don Sebastiani & Sons 2003 Screw Kappa Napa**, California, **\$14**, Bev Mo/Costco/Trader Joe's. Despite the kitschy name, this wine is pretty refined, and the fact that they utilize the screw cap shows that they are interested in innovation. www.donandsons.com

** Honorable Mention (above our \$20 Price range, but merits mention):

Brown Estate Vineyards 2003 Napa Valley, \$36. This wine was a fan favorite amongst many of the random strangers we polled. They raved of the "**peppery-ness**" and "**robust-ibility**", and we have to admit that it was very tasty. This is a special occasion wine. www.brownestate.com

GO TO: www.zinfandel.org to find out about joining ZAP

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