

The L Word

For great Zin values, there's no place like Lodi.

By Blair Campbell

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It wasn't *Love*, *Lust*, or even just *Looking*, although each of those sentiments was quite at home among the throngs of well-coiffed, red-teethed young Wineaux tipsily tasting Zinfandel after Zinfandel on a recent Saturday. No, the L word we heard invoked more than any other at San Francisco's 17th Annual Zinfandel Advocates & Producers Tasting (ZAP), where upwards of 250 California wineries gathered to pour their berry-bomb best, was *Lodi*. As in: "This is our \$25 reserve, from the Dry Creek Valley. ... And *this* is our bargain wine, from Lodi."

This 60,000-person city in California's Central Valley may not be a place you think about too much, but if you're a Wineau, Lodi is your friend. The farming community has a long history with Zinfandel, and its lack of name recognition and lower real estate prices — and thus winemaking costs — translate to great values for consumers.

One of our favorite bargain Zins from the ZAP tasting was produced by Alameda's own R&B Cellars. The **2005 R&B Cellars Swingsville (\$9.99)**, a blend of 87 percent Lodi-grown Zinfandel and 13 percent Petite Syrah, had a great aroma, a yummy telltale Petite Syrah berry-ness, and a pleasant oakiness. We toasted as well to the **2006 Gnarly Head Zinfandel (\$8.99)**, made with Lodi grapes by a Napa Valley winery known for its old-vine Zins. "Neat earthiness — good for a rich wine," was our Token Winemaker's comment, while I particularly enjoyed the mellow finish.

"Super-ripe, rich, and Lodi-esque," was how our Token Winemaker described the **2006 Ironstone Kautz Family Vineyards Zinfandel (\$7.50)** from — you guessed it — Lodi. He had praise as well for a non-Lodi wine from a surprising source: Cost Plus World Market. The megastore was out marketing its own **Zinfatuation** brand (**\$9.99**), made from Amador County grapes by Trinchero Family Estates. This wine was elegant and dry, with a nice earthiness and rich leather finish.

Another Trinchero Family brand, **Montevina**, was represented at ZAP as well. We recently called Montevina's 2003 Zinfandel super-fruity, food-friendly, and lighter than your average Zin ("Zin's Frontier Roots," 11/14/07), and the **2004** vintage (**\$10**) didn't disappoint, with its smooth, deep texture and flavors.

Finally, the best bargain among all of ZAP's Zinfandels was the nonvintage **Barefoot Cellars**

Zinfandel (\$6.99). Nothing wrong with this wine — the aroma was mild and there wasn't much to the aftertaste, but the taste was all berry delight. And while the Barefoot Zin bears the generic California AVA, meaning that no particular region of the state was the source for 85 percent or more of its grapes, my sources confirm there were more than a few Lodi natives in the mix.