

## THE WINE GUY

# zinfandels that deliver excellent quality at fair prices deserve recognition



**RICH MAURO**  
Gazette wine columnist

was putting the finishes on my last column. I realized how well the zinfandel performed in comparison with other red-grape varieties. I decided the wine deserved a column of its own.

At the beginning of the year, I have tasted more than 40 zinfandel wines from the 2003 vintage, at various prices — and I've been able to find a high percentage of wines meriting recommendation.

As a bonus, zinfandel continues to be one of the best values in wine, considering the overall quality available. Most cost

less than \$30, even many of the best. My top picks of zins and zinfandel blends:

- 2003 Amici Napa Valley Panek Vineyard (\$30). Jeff Hansen, winemaker at this 15-year-old winery, keeps the focus on quality: He produced only about 550 cases of this zinfandel.

- 2004 Beringer Founders' Estate California Old Vine (\$11). This large California winery makes dozens of wines in

various price ranges, including some of the best and most expensive in the state, but you will be quite satisfied with this affordable zinfandel.

- 2003 Bucklin Sonoma Valley Old Hill Ranch (\$30). This family-owned winery recently started producing its own wine from this vineyard, although it has sold the grapes to Ravenswood since 1984. The family claims Old Hill (a field blend of 24 varieties, dominated by zin-

dels) is a leader in responsible stewardship, having farmed their 90 acres sustainably for 23 years. They'll soon be certified biodynamic.

fandel) may be Sonoma's oldest vineyard, having been planted in 1852. It is certified organic.

- 2004 Cellar No. 8 (\$10). A very good value from a label created by the folks at Beringer to honor the Italian wine-making heritage in the town of Asti in northern Sonoma.

- 2004 Dashe Cellars Dry Creek Valley (\$22). The husband-and-wife team of Michael and Anne Dashe have been making wines for 10 years, primarily from older hillside vineyards in Sonoma County. The single vineyard wines (\$28) — Louvau Vineyard, Todd Brothers Ranch and Big River Ranch — also are worth seeking out.

- 2003 Hanna Proprietor Grown Alexander Valley (\$20). The Hanna family established this winery in 1985, and it is now run by a second generation. While the Alexander Valley is famously cabernet-friendly, they produce this zinfandel from a vineyard right next to the winery.

- 2004 Kuleto Estate Napa Valley (\$35). Owned by well-known restaurant designer Pat Kuleto, this mountain vineyard overlooking the Napa Valley also produces fine cabernet sauvignon, sangiovese and syrah. This wine is livened up with 10 percent sangiovese.

- 2003 Paraduxx Napa Valley (\$45). This is a one-winery created by Duckhorn Vineyards. It is an intriguing Super Tuscan-style blend of mostly zinfandel and cabernet sauvignon, combining the exuberance of zinfandel with the structure of cab to yield a flavorful complex and balanced wine.

- 2004 Quivira Dry Creek Valley Anderson Ranch (\$20). Quivira is Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley is a leader in responsible stewardship, having farmed their 90 acres sustainably for 23 years. They'll soon be certified biodynamic.

- 2004 Rosenblum Maggie's Reserve Sonoma Valley (\$45). It is virtually impossible to review California zinfandel without including the wines of Ken Rosenblum. A veterinarian by trade, Rosenblum started the winery in 1978 and now produces about 40 wines. But he is best-known for his vineyard-designated zinfandels (at about \$15 and counting). I also recommend the 2004 Dry Creek Valley Rockpile Road Vineyard (\$35) and 2004 Alexander Valley Harris Kratka Vineyard (\$35).

Reach Rich Mauro at 636-0194 or write to him at The Gazette, P.O. Box 1779, Colorado Springs 80901