



Wine Club Tasting Notes

August 2007

2006 Cline “Ancient Vine” Zinfandel California

A lot of California Zins like to use the term “Old Vine” on the labels of their Zinfandels and it’s a big, fat lie. That is if you consider 10 year old vines ‘old.’ I don’t. On the other hand, there are those wines that actually have the vines to back their claim of ‘old.’ Cline is one of those wineries. Here’s the scoop: In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Sonoma County was indeed a bucolic farming community. The land was settled by Portuguese and Italian immigrants, two cultures that consider wine to be an everyday, every meal, obligatory condiment. (Yes, condiment.) Needless to say, plenty of these immigrants brought grapevine cuttings with them to the New World, and it is widely believed that the Italians are responsible for planting the original Zinfandel grapes in California. As a result, Zinfandel is now known as THE red wine grape of California. While phylloxera (a nasty little vine louse) wreaked havoc on vineyards in California, there were certain spots that remained untouched. Cline controls roughly 300 acres of 80- to 100-year-old Zinfandel vines in California.

When you have young vines on your hands, they are very much like dogs – you have to train them from the start to get them to do what you want them to do. This involves a lot of trellising, canopy control, pruning and going through the vineyards to remove excess fruit so the clusters that are left are more concentrated. Here’s the neat thing about *really* old vines – they do a lot of the work themselves. They drop their own excess fruit, often don’t have much of a canopy and, much like a well-trained older dog, the winemakers can basically let the vines “do their own thing” without having to worry about them too much. What happens is that these older vines only produce a small amount of fruit and it is über-concentrated. I guess what I’m trying so ineloquently to say to you is that this Zin is a really great older dog...

The rough part of this job is that I have to taste every wine that comes through the door. Believe it or not, I enjoy this part of my job, even if my liver and kidneys don’t. As I write these notes, I am (thoroughly) enjoying this particular Zinfandel. In this day and age of overly-extracted, extreme-alcohol level wines, with Zins and Shirazes generally being the ones this abuse is inflicted upon, it’s awfully nice to find a well-balanced Zinfandel with an appropriate alcohol level.

The nose is all briary raspberry/blackberry fruit and spice, and the rich palate offers caramel, coffee, and a hint of chocolate balanced by more wild briar fruit with an enticingly spicy finish. Man, this wine is good stuff. No foody suggestions for this one – just sit back, relax and enjoy!