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Adding a Little 'Zip' to ZAP: Improved venue breathes new life into annual zin event

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Adding a Little 'Zip' to ZAP: Improved venue breathes new life into annual zin event

Post by [Chuck Hayward](#) | February 2nd, 2012

The last weekend of January always manages to banish the mid-winter blues with its promise of three highly anticipated annual events: the impending Super Bowl, the release of Silver Oak's Napa cabernet, and the annual ZAP tasting in San Francisco. No matter what one thinks of the grape, the red wine confab is truly one of the great wine events held in the United States. Populist in approach with its sprinkling of thought-provoking seminars to placate budding wine geeks, the annual tribute to California's heritage grape attracts a happy crowd of consumers and industry folks alike, and not surprisingly, very few sommeliers.



The Bucklin Winery Trio

As much as ZAP has been a model of consistency from year to year, 2012 brought about a big change as its venue transitioned from the familiar confines of Fort Mason to the far more spacious San Francisco Concourse in San Francisco's South of Market district. The event certainly benefited from the change, as the new digs seemed to infuse everyone with renewed energy. Incredibly, all the wineries were housed under one roof and with plenty of room to spare. The carpeted floors helped to keep the noise down, especially the

cheers that inevitably follow the occasional broken glass. Most importantly, there was plenty of room to maneuver about and tables were noticeably less cramped.

The ZAP tasting also serves as an important window to the upcoming vintage. Zinfandels tend to be among the first serious reds to enter the market from a given vintage. I have found that tasting them can be a rather accurate predictor of what can be expected when the cabernets from Napa and Sonoma are finally released. Given what was presented on the day, 2010 looks to be a problematic year and consumers would be wise to proceed with caution when those wines finally hit the shelves.

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The 2010 harvest in the North Coast counties was marked by cool temperatures, part of a trend that began in 2009 and continued with last year's crop. The danger with a longer growing season is the increased chance of rain which can damage any remaining fruit on the vine. That rain arrived on the third week of October and winemakers noted a difference in the quality of wines harvested on either side of the storm. Those that panicked and picked before the rains often saw unripe qualities in their fruit.



The Traditional Butlers and Bread at ZAP

And to be honest, I found the 2010 zinfandels to be a bit all over the map, with some very good wines poured alongside some difficult examples. While many wines were not yet bottled, it is already clear that the success of this zinfandel harvest will depend upon how well its winemakers handled the acidity that was so apparent in the wines I tried.



Paul Sobon of Sobon Estate

The best examples were vibrant and fresh, with bright, high-toned fruit flavors alongside noticeable acidity that wound up the finishes. For those who prefer a more focused and elegantly styled zinfandel, the best 2010s will fit the bill. My favorites, including [Mauritson](#), [Bedrock](#), and [Hartford](#), were medium-bodied, balanced wines whose acidity and fruit were woven together precisely. There were many others, however, whose acid levels were too high leaving a persistent, shrill impression. Those wines were a bit lean and unbalanced as they lacked the deeper, lush flavors preferred by many zin enthusiasts. It will be important to select wisely when the 2010s land on the shelves, as even some acclaimed zin specialists missed the mark.

For those wineries who chose not to pour their 2010s, the tasting provided an opportunity to revisit wines from the previous year. Going through the 2009s served as a reminder of how excellent zinfandels can be. Having the opportunity to retaste [Gamba's three bottlings](#) (one of my top picks at last year's ZAP) confirmed its brilliance for those who like rich zins. [Sobon's "Fiddletown"](#) and [Bucklin's "Bambino"](#) zins also impressed, but the showstopper came from the [Valdez Family Winery's](#) bottling from the famed St. Peters' Church Vineyard, whose century old vines are considered among the best in Sonoma. This powerful yet balanced zin is what it's all about, with its layers of flavors that cascade across the palate for what feels like an eternity. It is thanks to wines like this that 2009 will be remembered and the harvest's best examples should be snapped up while they are still available.

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ONE RESPONSE TO "ADDING A LITTLE 'ZIP' TO ZAP: IMPROVED VENUE BREATHES NEW LIFE INTO ANNUAL ZIN EVENT"

1. Clay Mauritson Says:



February 8, 2012 at 12:25 pm

Thank you very much for the great reviews of our 2010 Zinfandels. No doubt, 2010 was one of the more challenging harvests I have been a part of, but as ZAP proved, there are some beautiful wines from this vintage. I look forward to trying the 2010 Bedrock and Hartford wines!

Cheers,

Clay Mauritson

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