

BLIND TASTING 2012 ZINFANDEL

Checking out the vintage with wines from Carlisle and Bedrock

July 23, 2014 By **Gregory Dal Piaz**

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As you may know, Zinfandel is my favorite American grape variety. The wines produced tend to span a wide range of fascinating styles and can reveal fabulous terroir. I belong to a grand total of three winery lists, two of which are primarily for Zinfandel. From two of the the greatest producers of not only Zinfandel, but the great field blends that are such an integral part of the history of viticulture in California. They are of course Carlisle and Bedrock.

I met recently with one of my regular tasting groups to sample some of the current releases from both, sort of hoping to compare apples to apples and oranges to oranges by blind tasting pairs of comparable wines from each. Eight wines were chosen and the results were, shall we say both challenging and surprising? As a group this was a uniformly high quality and distinctive set of wines. A really elegant portfolio of Zinfandel if there ever was one, due both to the respective house styles as well as the vintage itself which was close to perfect with high quality and high yields. Those high yields helped keep the fruit ripe but very well balanced and harmonious. It's looking to be a fabulous vintage and these Zins are just the first examples that I've had to really examine it in detail.

We tasted the wines blind, and then we each ranked them and scored them by rankings. One fascinating quirk of this system, at least on this go round, was that the group's first place wine did not receive any first place votes and conversely the last place wine was not awarded any last place votes. I think this helps to illustrate how tightly grouped these wines were in a qualitative sense, and in the end how difficult it is to draw clear conclusions from our results.

It was also somewhat challenging to tell the Bedrock wines from the Carlisle wines, which frankly was a little embarrassing for me, but the quality of neither was ever in doubt so there is that consolation. We may occasionally look like fools, but we do drink well along the way!

For me at least, and I believe for the group as well, the immediacy of the broader appellation wines was obvious, and responsible for the great showing, in my opinion, for the 2012 Carlisle Zinfandel Sonoma County. A terrific introduction to the Carlisle style and just flat out delicious today. It was my 1st place wine.

This might surprise many, seeing as this is what one might be tempted to call an introductory level wine, but that is exactly why it showed so well. It's ready. Ready to introduce one to the house style and the vintage.. The single vineyard wines on the other hand were less ready. Probably with more complexity and depth, but requiring a year or three to really show at their best.

With that in mind I present the list in order of my preference followed by my tasting notes in the order of tasting. By another quirk of fortune on this quirky night, the wines, placed randomly in lettered bags, managed to order themselves into a logical tasting progression. Truly bizarre!



DAILY WIN

Wine Wisdom

Sonoma Cou
awards than
California.

COMMUNIT

Mirassou Pinot N
(2012)

Domaine Gayda |
Freestyle Rouge

Domaine Gayda |
Moscou Vin de P

Lot 119 Alexandre
Meritage (2005)

Delatour Cabern
Premier (2012)

Chemin de Mosc

The Ultimate Sur
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Syrah Offline 7/1
County - OP Upc

Whatcha drinkin

help

2012 Carlisle Zinfandel Sonoma County
 2012 Bedrock Zinfandel Kirschenmann Vineyard
 2012 Bedrock Bedrock Heritage
 2012 Carlisle Zinfandel Sodini Vineyard
 2012 Carlisle Zinfandel Montafi Vineyard
 2012 Bedrock Zinfandel Sodini Vineyard
 2012 Bedrock Zinfandel Sonoma Valley
 2012 Carlisle Zinfandel Kirschenmann Vineyard
2012 Carlisle Zinfandel Kirschenmann Vineyard

My 8th place wine and the group's tied for 5th

Creamy oak and cedary fruit greets the nose followed by a fairly complex and elegant array of wild red berry and red currant fruit and a hint of beefiness. Light, with a gentle roundness on the palate, this is fairly elegant with lots of raspberry fruit supported by stiff little tannins and great acids that lend a citrusy tangelo note to the fine finish. Has the feel of an old vine wine. Could use a year to better knit together and shows a whisper of heat on the finish. 89pts

2012 Bedrock Zinfandel Kirschenmann Vineyard

My 2nd place wine and the group's 1st

There's some gentle cocoa and mocha on the nose but this is dominated by sweet raspberry and boysenberry fruit that is very fresh with lightly floral and smoky top notes. Medium light on the palate and with a touch of aggressive tannins early on the palate followed by pure, light and transparent red berry, raspberry and red currant fruit. The finish is just a touch short but this is really so pure and light that I can forgive that minor detail. 93pts

2012 Carlisle Zinfandel Sonoma County

My 1st place wine, the group's 4th

A bit creamy on the nose but very deep and perfumy with hints of toasty spice, briar, and orange oil supporting sweet, slightly plummy and leathery fruit. Supple, with a nice blend of power and freshness, this is bright and zesty on the palate, full of black raspberry fruit and gorgeously detailed leather, plum skin, wood spice and creamy coffee notes that stick to the palate and linger on the long finish. Absolutely ready to go and delicious. 93pts

2012 Bedrock Zinfandel Sonoma Valley

My 7th place wines and the group's tied for 2nd

Fresh and spicy on the nose with hints of orange peel and sweet carob but not a lot of fruit and rather simple. Easy drinking in a round, supple style, this is rather full on the palate with plenty of very ripe cherry fruit. There's nice depth and concentration to the fruit, and some engaging tannin on the finish, but this feels a bit simple and weighty to me. 89pts

2012 Carlisle Zinfandel Sodini Vineyard

My 4th place wine, the group's tied for 5th

Tight on the nose with light and elegant aromas of strawberry, soil tones, and suggestions of floral perfume. Finely textured and bright on the palate, this shows gorgeous fruit, all red and dusty with savory base notes and fine, taut tannins lingering on the long spicy finish. This will probably improve for several years but is already showing nicely layered complexity. 92pts

2012 Bedrock Zinfandel Sodini Vineyard

My 6th place wine, the group's 7th

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Dark strawberry fruit greets the nose with darker berry accent notes and plenty of savory, slightly beefy complexity. There really is fabulous purity to the fruit here on the nose. Bright, round and intense in the mouth, there's a fine mineral streak to this on the palate along with plenty of bright, slightly jammy, plummy and cooked berry fruit, but there is also a bit of heat and the tannins build on the finish lending this a bit of an aw feel on the finale. This is the only wine tonight that really needs to be aged. 91pts

2012 Carlisle Zinfandel Montafi Vineyard

My 5th place wine, the group's tied for 2nd

jammy, spicy and chocolatey on the nose, this has obvious vanilla oak and some dried jerky spiciness on the nose along with very pure and bright aromas of raspberry jam. Supple, seamless and almost soft in the mouth with tannins that caress the palate with a hint of creaminess. This fills the mouth with black cherry and black raspberry fruit all framed by subtle hints of briary spice and cocoa. The most Zinfandel of the wines tonight, this shows fine length on the finish, but the midpalate intensity is what sets this apart. 92pts

2012 Bedrock Bedrock Heritage

My 3rd place wine, the group's 8th

Really powerfully scented with jammy fruit, a hint of orange peel, nuanced oaky spice and dark earthy notes on the nose. One is struck by how soft this is in the mouth. It really is low acid and while that is not my thing, this does deliver great earthy, chewy flavors that are savory, mineral and gamy along with layers of rich black fruit and black spice. Quite floral on the finish and a bit nutty there is a lot here to like and while I might not finish a second glass the quality is undeniable. 93pts

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COMMENTS

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LOIRE VALLEY WINES

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