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HoseMaster of Wine™

"I think that the tendency for most people is to fall back on a comic interpretation of things — because things are so sad, so terrible. If you didn't laugh you'd kill yourself. But the truth of the matter is that existence in general is very very tragic, very very sad, very brutal and very unhappy."--Woody Allen

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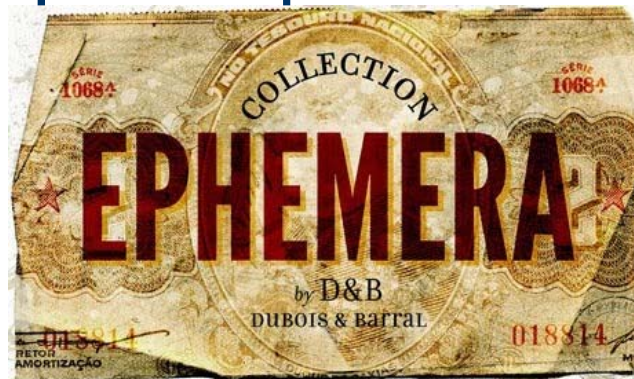
About Me



Ron Washam, HMW

Thursday, February 12, 2015

Ephemera: Special ZAP Edition



About every eight or nine years Zinfandel is predicted to be the next big thing. There was a time when Syrah was regularly predicted to be the next big thing, but Syrah's thing seems to have withered and fallen off. Zinfandel is wine's eternal bridesmaid—so close to the altar, yet so far. And it seems Zinfandel is,

right on schedule and according to Jon Bonné, and others, poised to take its rightful place in the Millennials' marriage bed, once again more cherry than raspberry. I doubt it. Will folks replace their single-vineyard Pinot Noirs with Zinfandel? I don't see that happening.

There are routine and reliably dull articles that most newspaper wine critics, very much an endangered species, so please don't buy any black market horns harvested from any of them, are forced to produce. How many "Winemakers to Watch" articles can we stand? All those gifted young people striving to make wines that allow the vineyard to speak! I live in wine country, it's fucking noisy with all these damned vineyards expressing themselves. I wish those vines would just shut the hell up. Yet another regularly scheduled article focuses on the critic gazing into his crystal ball and predicting what the next wine trend will be. Oh and there's the wine and chocolate article at Valentine's Day, the Thanksgiving article on what wine pairs with turkey, and the annual wistful essay about the meaning and romance of wine. I love those. They rarely mention getting drunk, but you sense the critic is pretty much trashed as he's writing it. It's not the critics' fault the columns are so predictable. Readers demand that sort of comfort article, and it's their job to crank it out. So every eight or nine years, an article appears about Zinfandel, predicting that it will finally get its due. Zinfandel has had so many breakout years it's the measles of varieties. But it won't become a big thing this time either. And I'm glad. And Zinfandel just doesn't care.

People who have been around California wine a long time have seen Zinfandel cycle through styles over and over. High alcohol Zinfandel--you know what I'm talking about, that gigantic, extracted, very ripe style that some folks call hedonistic but I call Pennzoil--comes into and goes out of fashion on a regular basis. I'm not talking about balance, really, I'm talking about big, chewy, sweetly-textured Zins, which might be huge and loaded with alcohol but are still balanced. Not my favorite style. I think of a

After 19 years as a Sommelier in Los Angeles, twice named Sommelier of the Year by the Southern California Restaurant Writers' Association, I moved to Sonoma County to explore the other aspects of the wine business. I've spent, OK wasted, 35 years learning about and teaching about and swallowing wine. I am also a judge at the Sonoma Harvest Fair, San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition and the San Francisco International Wine Competition--so I can spit like a rabid llama. I know more about wine than David Sedaris and I'm funnier than James Laube. Stay tuned for an informed but jaded view of everything wine and everything else. I'm living proof that alcohol kills brain cells.

[View my complete profile](#)

What the Critics Are Saying About HoseMaster of Wine

"If you want a great hoot and howl moment or two...go read the [HoseMaster's](#) year-end reflections...that guy is without a doubt the funniest SOB in the blog-world...and thank him for having the brains and balls to target his laser of laughter on anybody...[HoseMaster](#) for President...[HoseMaster](#) for Blogger of the Year...although he would be the first to say the bar is so damn low for that award, he should win it every year..."

--[Robert Parker](#)

"No one is immune from California sommelier and wine judge Ron Washam's skewering. He polishes that skewer with boundless enthusiasm and acuity."

--[JancisRobinson.com](#)

"As serious as the world of wine is, it does allow time for humor. Each Monday and Thursday, Ron Washam customarily posts a commentary on his needling wine blog [HoseMaster of Wine](#). Washam, a former sommelier and comedy writer – he might say they are closely related – is the most opinionated, humorous and ribald

lot of those wines as parodies of Zinfandel—like they were made as a joke, an exaggeration. I appreciate parody, but not in wine. Balance comes in many shapes and forms. Does the wine have balance like Baryshnikov? Or is it more like the elephant doing a headstand?

Lots of elephants at ZAP, but, it seemed to me, fewer than four or five years ago. There weren't as many wineries doing Turley impressions—not even Turley. One of my favorite Zins of the day was the [Turley 2013 "Vineyard 101" Zinfandel](#) from Alexander Valley. It was scintillating Zinfandel, with great aromatics (aroma is the first thing that suffers when a Zin is hugely extracted, at least to my way of thinking), almost delicate aromas, but powerful and authoritative on the palate showing black and blue fruit with a bit of pepper and herbs. Not the Turley style I remember from the '90's at all. It seemed much more sophisticated, though sophisticated Zin is sort of like a monkey in a tuxedo.

I started looking around the tasting for other Zinfandels that featured pretty and compelling aromas. As usual, Bill Easton's wines were gorgeous Zins, some of the best arguments for Zin from the Sierra Foothills. The [Easton 2011 Estate Zinfandel](#) from Shenandoah Valley was another favorite of mine from ZAP. It's really beautiful Zinfandel. Just like a great book, you want to keep your nose in it. But it's never a surprise that his Zins are terrific. Easton gets Zinfandel, understands that it's a grape that needs finesse.

Probably because of the vintages being offered, there were a lot of great Zinfandels at ZAP this year. I tasted about sixty wines (there were around 100 producers, most of whom had several Zins to taste, so I only scratched the surface)—my usual mix of great producers that serve to focus my palate, and wineries completely new to me. It's an engaging way to taste at a large tasting. Some classic, never-miss Zin producers followed by a rookie. And sixty wines in about three hours is more than enough. Truthfully, it's a terrible way to judge wine, to fix a wine with a number, and I'd urge you to ignore anyone who scores a lot of wines from a tasting like ZAP. It's intellectually dishonest, and simple ugly human hubris. It's like judging a dog show only you're drunk.

My favorite Zinfandel from a new producer was [Zialena 2012 Alexander Valley](#) Zin. Zialena is the brand from the Mazzoni family, longtime growers in Alexander Valley. Mark Mazzoni makes the wines, and the Zinfandel is just gorgeous. Everything I want from Zinfandel—it's a little bombastic, but shows the restraint that great Zinfandel has (think Ridge Geyserville). It's polished, but not showy. I'm not sure why anyone would buy wine on my say-so, but this is damned good Zinfandel.

I've rambled on too long. My favorite Zins, aside from the ones already mentioned, and in alphabetical, not numerical, order were [Bedrock 2013 Heritage Vineyard](#), [Elyse 2010 Black Sears Vineyard](#), [Hartford 2012 Fanucchi-Wood Road](#), [Hendry 2011 Block 28](#), [Limerick Lane](#) Anything but especially the 2012 Bedrock Vineyard, [Quivira 2012 Dry Creek Reserve](#), and [Talty 2011 Estate](#).

And, lastly, ZAP was a pleasure to attend this year. There's a point where it gets pretty damned crowded, but that's the nature of a huge wine tasting on a beautiful day. It was well-organized, with lots of interesting seminars (none of which I attended, but that's probably a good thing for the speakers), great food trucks, and plenty of volunteers policing the areas. To the ZAP organizers—Well Done! Much improved over last year. Thanks for letting the HoseMaster attend, and without a name tag! That saved my ass.

Posted by [Ron Washam](#), HMW at 7:00 AM

Labels: [EPHEMERA](#), [Wine Essays](#)



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