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## The Greatest American Wine Fest

Posted by Tom Wark on Jan 15, 2013



After 22 years, the [Zinfandel Festival](#) produced by [Zinfandel Advocates and Produces \(ZAP\)](#) remains the most meaningful public wine tasting and most important gathering of wine producers in America. **The Zinfandel Festival is the annual opportunity to taste the full depth and breadth of America's only truly original contribution to fine wine. Furthermore, the Zinfandel bottlings at the Zin Fest derive from every corner of California, and even beyond. It remains, after 22 years a remarkable opportunity for the true wine lover.**

Like past Zin Fests, the 2013 version will present hundreds of Zins to taste. Some will be produced from 100 year-old vines. Some will come off of mountain vineyards located at 2,000 feet above sea level. Some will deliver on the promise of ultra ripeness. Some will demonstrate that Zinfandel can produce a traditional claret style drink. Perhaps more than any other grape, Zinfandel amplifies and presents the entirety of the California wine industry.

The Zinfandel Festival is broken up into four distinct opportunities over the course of three days.

**Thursday, January 31** [Epicuria Food & Zin Pairings](#)

**Friday, February 1** [Flights](#)

**Friday, February 1** [Winemakers Dinner](#)

**Saturday, February 2** [Grand Tasting](#)

The grand tasting is aptly named and is the culmination of the three-day fest. I wish I had reliable advice as to how to attack a room full of hundreds of Zins waiting to be tasted. I don't. It can be an overwhelming experience. I only suggest you adopt some strategy since no matter how you attack the room, you can't taste everything. Over the years, I've deployed the following strategies for working the room:

**The Old School:** Hit those Zin producers that put Zin on the map. Ridge, Turley, Rosenblum, Ravenswood, Renwood, Dashe, De Loach

**The New Kids:** Seek out those producers you've never heard of. Discovery is great delight of wine. Zinfandel probably provides more opportunities to discover something new than any other varietal.

**The References:** This one is fun. Head to a winery table. Taste the wines, then ask the person behind the table pouring to recommend one winery, then go taste its wines. Ask for a recommendations, then taste those wines. And so on and so on.

What also needs to be said is that ZAP, the producer of the Zin Fest, must rank among the most important wine organizations in America. This is not merely an event producer. ZAP sponsors important historical and viticultural research around this most important grape. ZAP has worked tirelessly to identify and help preserve important old Zinfandel vineyards. And it annually takes its Zinfandel show on the road to different cities, taking Zin outside of its traditional home state and showing it off to wine lovers across the country.

**I can think of no non-regional association that has done more to promote real intimacy between consumers and the California wine industry.** This effort is what draws folks to ZAP, joining the organization as members alongside producers. There are various levels of membership in ZAP, each delivering its own level of benefits. The most enthusiast Zinfandel supporters can join at the Imperial VIP level and enjoy dinners with vintners and places at the table of each and every ZAP event. And yet there are ZAP membership levels a far lower prices for those who simply want to support this important organization and get some benefits in the deal.



At the very least, if you are a serious student of wine, a devotee of California wine and want to experience something special, get your tickets to the upcoming Zinfandel Festival:

**When:** January 31 – February 2

**Where:** The Concourse and The Fairmont Hotel—San Francisco

**Why:** See Above

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## 7 Responses



1. **doug wilder** - January 15, 2013

The festival tasting is a daunting prospect for even someone who tastes professionally. If you don't know anything about Zinfandel, pick those from an area you may have heard about, like Dry Creek Valley, or Sonoma. Visit with Charlie and Steve at the Connoisseurs' Guide table. They taste more Zinfandel than anyone. With so many producers there is little chance of tasting them all but you can also ask other guests what they liked.

The tables I will visit earliest are Bella, Bedrock, Limerick Lane, and Tres Sabores.

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2. **Bill Smart** - January 15, 2013

Tom – wonderful coverage and thanks to you for saying such nice things about ZAP – an organization that does indeed do a tremendous job in their efforts to help educate consumers, trade and key accounts about the finer points of great Zinfandel. These four days of education and tasting are far from a “large party” – the kind of press the event has received over the years. Rather, from this winery's POV, the four days of ZAP is a wonderfully informative exploration into the Zinfandel varietal. The tastings are extremely well organized, the quality of the attendee is outstanding and overall, I believe “Zin Week” is the best single varietal tasting event on the planet. I hope you'll be able to attend and stop by the Dry Creek Vineyard table for a sampling of our new releases.

Cheers,

Bill Smart

Dry Creek Vineyard

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3. **Tom Wark** - January 15, 2013

Bill,

You bet I will stop by. And I agree with your assessment of it being the single best varietal tasting event on the planet.

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4. **Terroirist: A Daily Wine Blog » Daily Wine News: #SVBWine** - January 16, 2013

[...] According to Tom Wark, the Zinfandel Advocates and Producers' annual Zinfandel Festival is "the most meaningful public wine tasting and most important gathering of wine producers in America." The organizers of the International Pinot Noir Celebration might disagree. [...]

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5. **Daily Wine News: #SVBWine | Wine 2020** - January 16, 2013

[...] According to Tom Wark, the Zinfandel Advocates and Producers' annual Zinfandel Festival is "the most meaningful public wine tasting and most important gathering of wine producers in America." The organizers of the International Pinot Noir Celebration might disagree. [...]

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6. **Wes** - January 18, 2013

California Zin Rock![shop for wine from California](#)

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7. **Tom Silberkleit** - January 23, 2013

I'm with you, Tom. All I can say is that this is one of my favorite California tasting events. A large percentage of the people pouring are winemakers and/or owners. There's a real passion exchanged between the wineries and the attendees. It's not only great fun but will almost certainly convert many wine drinkers over to this wonderful American heritage grape.

Regards,

Tom Silberkleit, editor-in-chief  
The California Directory of Fine Wineries

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