

## Wine A to Z: Zinfandel, the mysterious grape with dual personalities

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[Zinfandel](#). What style of [wine](#) comes to mind when you read that word? Are you thinking pink? Or are you seeing red? Both answers are correct when it comes to Zinfandel, or zin, as it is commonly referred to. Your answer probably depends on where you live and when you became a wine drinker. As if that isn't enough to divide a wine community, where zinfandel's origins lie is an even deeper debate.

Zinfandel grapes are largely thought of as a variety that originated in America, but years of research and study and advancements in technology have suggested otherwise. As early as the late 1960's, the relationship between America's Zinfandel grape and Italy's [Primitivo](#) grape has been questioned. Similarities between the two (flavor of the wine produced, grape yield, bunch size and form, ripening time) initiated the link, and current (early 1990's) technology, using a form of DNA fingerprinting, confirmed that Zinfandel and Primitivo are indeed clones of the same variety.

As extensive research is prone to do, more questions were raised as to the origins of America's zinfandel grape, leading to a small amount of vines planted in Croatia. It would seem that Crljenak Kastelanski shares that same DNA fingerprint as Zinfandel and Primitivo. Because the relationship has been discovered and accepted, the use of the term ZPC, or Zinfandel/Primitivo/Crljenak Kastelanski, is being employed on some Croatian wine labels. While it is generally agreed upon that zin and primitivo are more or less the same grape, they are not legally allowed to be used synonymously on American wine labels.

How did the wine end up pink? The story is that of a stuck fermentation, or yeast that didn't finish its job. When yeast cells die off before all the sugars are consumed and converted to alcohol, the wine retains its sugars and results in a sweeter style of wine. The pinkness results from the standard method of producing a blush, or rose, style of wine - separation of juice from skins. Credit for the creation of White Zinfandel is usually given to a winemaker from Sutter Home, who, in the early 1970's, drained off and vinified some juice from vats of just-pressed zinfandel grapes. These two actions resulted in White Zinfandel, a wine that, for many of a certain generation, has been referred to as a "starter wine."

While White Zin still outsells "red" Zin in America, the efforts of ZAP (Zinfandel Area Producers), a non-profit group established in 1991, have made great strides in introducing zinfandel in all its red glory to wine consumers. Lodi, in California's San Joaquin Valley, has the largest land area of zinfandel grapes growing, as well as some of the oldest. Although zinfandel grapes are currently being cultivated in over fifteen states, California is still considered its "home," and its largest grower. It is for this reason, perhaps, that many wine drinkers outside of California are less familiar with the red version of this wine, where it is most frequently enjoyed as a fruity, spicy, dry red.

In whichever color you prefer your zin, there is much more to the story of this grape, and a plethora of styles of wines created from it. Stand by for more about this mysterious grape with the split personality!