

Wine of the week: Karma Zin, 2007 Rue Vineyard, Old Vine Zin

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THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Published: Wednesday, February 1, 2012 at 3:00 a.m.

Carol Shelton is a zin-ophile.

"Zin is super user-friendly and unpretentious, fruit-forward and food-friendly as well, all qualities I find quite endearing," she said. "Also, I love it that zinfandel is very transparent to its terroir, more than any other varietal, in my opinion."

Shelton is the winemaker behind our wine-of-the-week winner — the Karma Zin, 2007 Rue Vineyard, Old Vine Zin for \$33.

What makes the wine a standout?

"Our Karma Zin was made from 110-plus year old vines in the Russian River Valley," Shelton said. "It is a blend of zinfandel, 85 percent, with the remaining 15 percent being a field blend of alicante bouschet, petite sirah and carignane."

Zinfandel made quite an impression on Shelton, and she's been crazy about the varietal ever since.

"When I was the winemaker at Windsor Vineyards for 19 years, I was bottling over 48 different wines in any given year," she said. "The zinfandel wines always stood out for me with their wonderful jammy fruit and complex spice layers. I loved to see how they interacted with the terroir to produce some definitively different flavors."

Making a line-up of zinfandels gives Shelton an edge.

"Making zins from different regions, from Cucamonga to Mendocino to various Sonoma County appellations, gives me an overview of the terroir impact from each one and how they relate to each other," she said. "It helps me select the winemaking techniques and specific barrels that help to bring out the best that each region can offer."

Shelton became winemaker for Sonoma County's Windsor Vineyards in 1981, and in 2000, she and her husband Mitch Mackenzie, a former software engineer, launched Carol Shelton Wines.

"My parents owned their own travel agency for many years so I knew it was hard work, but I had no idea how many hats a small-business owner has to wear," Shelton said.

"Many people think we just have long hours during crush time, but we actually have long work hours just about every day of the year. We are still trying hard to find a way to 'have a life' outside of work, and it is very tough to find that balance, even (or especially) when you love your work as much as I do."

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