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California's Zinfandel Trifecta?

The 2007 vintage is looking even better than the previous two, based on samples poured at the annual ZAP tasting

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The 2007 Zinfandels had a coming-out party Saturday at the Zinfandel Advocates & Producers (ZAP) tasting in San Francisco, and it looks like California has pulled off a trifecta. The 2007s have the potential to surpass the [2005s and even 2006s](#).

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Most of the 2007s poured at the 18th annual tasting were barrel samples, and it isn't a blind tasting. I've been going to the ZAP tasting since 1995, and while I've learned not to read too much into specific wines, it's often a good indicator of the general quality of a vintage. I've sampled about 200 different 2006s in blind tastings in our Napa office since last year's ZAP event, and the vintage has lived up to its potential. Ditto the 2005s from two years ago.

On Saturday, there were 252 producers pouring wines for a crowd of 8,000. Wine drinkers may be playing it safe in this tough economy, but there was gusto aplenty at the tasting. California Zin fans are a special breed: feisty, quirky and inimitable, just like the wine they love.

The Zins poured Saturday were largely from the 2006 vintage, but there was a smattering of 2005s and barrel samples from 2007. The 2007 Zinfandels have the same supple, balanced and fruit-forward qualities found in the 2006s but seem to have more depth and weight. The [2007 growing season](#) was long and had moderate weather throughout the season, which allowed Zinfandel to fully mature without driving up alcohol levels.

What follows are some of my favorite 2007s from the tasting. I would give all of these wines a preliminary rating of 89-91 points, non-blind, on *Wine Spectator's* 100-point scale.

Robert Biale Napa Valley Old Crane Ranch 2007 (\$42) is supple, peppery and deeply flavored. Old Crane is a classic Napa vineyard, and this winery is a consistently superb producer.

Cedarville Estate El Dorado Fair Play 2007 (\$22) offers a burst of bright cherry fruit and followed it with excellent acidity, structure and length.

Dancing Lady Old Vine Della Coast Vineyard Alexander Valley 2007 (\$30) is superspicy with rich and densely layered flavors. This new producer is using grapes that have previously gone into Seghesio Old Vines Zin.

Hartford Hartford Vineyard Russian River Valley 2007 (\$55) is dense and muscular but well-built and offers ripe, loamy tannins.

Ridge Lytton Estate Lytton Springs Dry Creek Valley 2007 (\$NA) is racy, zesty and spicy with layered and focused flavors.

Rusina Alexander Valley 2007 (\$28) shows expressive aromas and elegantly layered flavors. Who says Zins have to be over-the-top to make a statement?

Saucelito Canyon Backroads San Luis Obispo 2007 (\$18) is not only a great bargain, but it offers distinctive smoke and mineral aromas and ripe but balanced flavors.

Also worth mentioning are a handful of 2006s. Saxon Brown Oak Vineyard Sonoma Valley (\$40) is appealingly briary and zesty, with long and lively flavors. Davis Family Old Vine Russian River Valley (\$30) is powerful yet elegant and layered. Carol Shelton Wild Thing Cox Vineyard Mendocino County (\$28) lives up to its name: rich and racy yet still supple and complex.

I will provide full reviews and ratings of these wines in the months to come; look for my annual Zinfandel report in the June 30 issue of *Wine Spectator*.