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Sonoma

The Heart of Wine Country

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Garden Creek Vinevards 2011 Alexander Valley Tesserae (\$95)

At this under-the-radar Geyserville winery and vineyard, owners Karin and Justin Warnelius-Miller do nearly all the work themselves, with some help from family members and the Gonzalez family who tend the vineyards. Their Cabernet Sauvignonbased Tesserae (mosaic pieces), like this one, is seamless, refined. and supremely age-worthy. In fact, Tesserae is cellared for seven years before it's released; as 2015 Cabs roll out in late 2018, Karin and Justin pour their 2011 for visitors (appointment only) as the current release, and also show older vintages to demonstrate how beautifully they age. The brand name is not fanciful: Garden Creek actually runs through the property. She's Warnelius, he's Miller, and they come from winegrowing families.

RHÔNE-STYLE REDS

Carol Shelton Wines 2014 Florence Vineyard Dry Creek Valley Petite Sirah \$40

Jack Florence's vineyard produced this bold, spicy wine, which in the hands of winemaker Carol Shelton scored 95 points at NCWC. It's jammy like a ripe Zinfandel, with black raspberry and blackberry fruit coated in melted chocolate and sprinkled with baking spice. The bright, crisp finish balances the richness.

Donelan Family Wines 2014 Cuvée Christine Sonoma County Syrah \$48

A cool-climate vineyard in Green Valley of Russian River Valley and a warm Knights Valley site contributed the grapes for this juicy, succulent Syrah with hints of salty prosciutto and roasted meat. Red berry and dark cherry fruit is well-ripened and generous, and the texture is suave, with a brisk finish.

Francis Ford Coppola Winery 2015 Francis Coppola Nimble Vineyard Reserve Dry Creek Valley Syrah \$38

Meaty and rich, it offers bright blackberry, blueberry, and dark plum fruit, with spicy oak notes and hints of worn leather and smoke. Best of Class winner at NCWC.

Mathis Wines 2015 Mathis Vineyard Sonoma Valley Grenache \$32 Peter Mathis is a Grenache guru, and his expertise with the grape is apparent in this generous wine with vivid black raspberry, pomegranate, and plum flavors. It's also earthy, smoky, and savory, motivating NCWC judges to award it 97 points.

Ramey Wine Cellars 2014 Cole Creek Vineyard Russian River Valley Syrah \$65

Syrah and 6 percent white grape Viognier were fermented together, a common technique in the Northern Rhône Valley, to enhance the aromatics. Layers of boldly flavored blueberry and blackberry fruit, charcuterie, leafy fresh herbs, and spice unfold in this cool-climate wine with slightly dusty yet supple tannins.

The Meeker Vineyard 2014 Hoskins Ranch Dry Creek Valley Grenache \$38

Crisp acidity, firm tannins, and a core of juicy cherry, dark berry, and strawberry-rhubarb pie flavors make it a fine foil for a range of foods. Grenache can be overripe and blowsy; this one has great structure and freshness, plus a complex savory component.

Thirty-Seven Wines 2015 Sonoma Coast Grenache \$26

Effusively floral, smoky, and richly flavored in juicy wild berry, pomegranate, and black raspberry fruit, it has the supple texture of a Pinot Noir and the tannins and acid structure of Merlot. It's a lot of wine for the price, and scored a lofty 98 points at NCWC.

ZINFANDEL

Dry Creek Vineyard 2015 Old Vine Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel \$35 Intensely spicy and with a distinct dark chocolate streak, it brims with briary boysenberry and blackberry fruit. Supple tannins and midpalate richness are countered by a mouthwatering, juicy finish.

Gehricke Wines 2015 Russian River Valley Zinfandel \$30

Gehricke is a new brand for August Sebastiani and his 3 Badge Beverage Corp. in Sonoma. It's an upgrade from lower-shelf, inexpensive wines to premium class, with grapes purchased from noted vineyards. The Zin comes from the Ponzo Vineyard on the border of Russian River and Dry Creek valleys and has the site's signature wild strawberry, cola, raspberry, and blueberry fruit profile.

Muscardini Cellars 2015 Los Chamizal Vineyards Sonoma Valley Zinfandel \$44

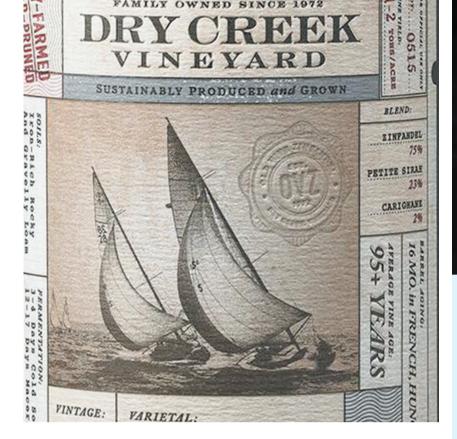
This is old-school, powerful, potent Zinfandel (15.2 percent alcohol) from a vineyard planted 800 feet above the city of Sonoma, some 50 years ago. The juicy, brambly blackberry and dark-cherry flavors are kissed with hints of brown sugar and vanilla, and the finish is reminiscent of chocolate-covered raisins.

Pech Merle Winery 2015 Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel \$23

John Pepe, who has 40 winemaking vintages under his belt, produced this full-bodied, jammy, grilled-meat-loving Zin with luscious blueberry, blackberry, and black cherry personality. Hints of clove, anise, and mocha add interest, tying the wine to service with grilled lamb chops, sausages, and steaks.

▼ Donelan Family Wines 2014 Cuvée Christine Sonoma County Syrah





Pezzi King Winery 2015 Harris Kratka Vineyard Reserve Alexander Valley Zinfandel \$48

NCWC judges awarded it 95 points for its vivid pepper and bakingspice notes, which come from oak barrels and the grape variety itself. Juicy blackberry and strawberry pie flavors also are laced with hints of mocha, sarsaparilla, and semisweet chocolate.

Seghesio Family Vineyards 2015 Old Vine Sonoma County Zinfandel \$40

The average age of the Alexander Valley and Dry Creek Valley vines that contributed grapes to this wine is 70, and grower names include Passalacqua and Saini. "Veteran" vines produce painfully low volumes of gloriously intense grapes, and in 2015, Ted Seghesio turned them into a concentrated, brambly-berry, spicy wine that checks in at 15.4 percent alcohol, yet shows no heat on the long, juicy finish.

St. Anne's Crossing 2015 Los Chamizal Vineyards Sonoma Valley Zinfandel \$38

A 97-pointer at NCWC, it offers sweet, ripe boysenberry fruit, with hints of raisin and melted dark chocolate. A crowd-pleaser, for sure, it's reminiscent of the aromas that came from the Knott's Berry Farm kitchen, where cinnamon-crusted pies were baked by the dozens.

St. Francis Winery & Vineyards 2015 Old Vines Sonoma County Zinfandel \$22

The minimum age of grapevines for this blend is 50 years; some plots are as many as 80 years old. Big and bold, its blackberry and dark cherry fruit is jammy and accented with vanilla, licorice, and black pepper.

Wilson Winery 2015 Sydney Estate Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel \$42

If big, rich, potent (15.6 percent alcohol), black-fruited Zinfandels are your thing, this one's an NCWC 97-pointer for you. Wild blackberry and dark plum flavors are super-ripe and jammy, yet there's enough acidity and tannin structure to maintain balance. Lavishly oaked with vanilla and spice, it's a signature style for Wilson.



Immortal Estate 2014 Impassable Mountain Sonoma County Cabernet Sauvignon (\$303)

Tim Martin has a knack for creating high-end wine brands, and Immortal is one of them. His Gauge Branding company created Tusk Wines in Napa Valley (average price \$868 for one — yes, one — bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon) and it sells out in an elephant's heartbeat. Fashioning gotta-have luxury goods is Martin's gift, and his latest is Immortal Estate, previously Hidden Ridge Vineyard. Lynn Hofacket and Cassidy Ward planted the vineyard in the Mayacamas Mountains. not far from Cornell and Pride Mountain, in 1990. Their winemaker, Timothy Milos, continues with Immortal. The branding comes from critic Robert Parker Jr., who described a Hidden Ridge wine as "nearly immortal." After Hofacket's death, Martin and his partners acquired the vineyard and used Parker's comment, and Turritopsis dohrnii, more commonly known as the immortal jellyfish, as brand anchors. The wine is excellent — floral and with juicy dark fruit and silky tannins. The price comes from the Colorado 303 area code of Immortal investors.

RED BORDEAUX VARIETALS & BLENDS

Alexander Valley Vineyards 2015 Estate Alexander

Valley Cabernet Sauvignon \$32

Winemaker Kevin Hall continues to lift AVV's game, making the finest wines in this producer's long history (its first Cab was bottled in 1968). The 2015 is 100 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, from a certified organic vineyard, and redolent in lively dark cherry and boysenberry flavors. Judicious use of oak lets the concentrated fruit shine, adding a hint of spice but not overt toastiness.

Amapola Creek Vineyards & Winery 2014 Sonoma Valley Cabernet Sauvignon \$90

Richard Arrowood, of Chateau St. Jean and Arrowood Vineyards fame, rather guietly produces exceptional wine from his and wife Alis' organic vinevard in the relatively new Moon Mountain District AVA of Sonoma Valley. Despite this wine's bold dark-fruit flavors and significant palate weight, it's also remarkably polished and elegant, with a hint of dusty mountain minerality.

Arbor Bench Vineyards 2013 Dry Creek Valley

Cabernet Sauvignon \$49

Rich, almost jammy, and easy to drink now, this NCWC 95-pointer offers savory cedar, pepper, and sage in the aromas, followed by layers of plush, ripe black cherry, black raspberry, and dark plum flavor and a slightly creamy café au lait middle.

sonomamag.com NOV/DEC 2018 NOV/DEC 2018 sonomamag.com Syrah