

Cooking with Kae

By
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El Dorado County wines often the best-of-the-best

“As for awards, it’s worth noting that despite El Dorado region’s size, wines made from grapes grown here win a significantly disproportionate share of medals from the California State Fair Wine Competition and others,” said Jolaine Collins, spokeswoman for the El Dorado Winery Association. “El Dorado wineries consistently bring home medal winners from competitions throughout the state and beyond. As you know, our region has long been noted for producing reds that thrive in warmer climates, especially Zinfandel – and, increasingly, Petite Sirah, Syrah and Barbera.”

I sipped several of these award winning wines during Passport Weekend in April. Many of them are still available in tastings room. If you can’t find it at the winery, I was told people are selling winning vintages on eBay. However, a new crop of award winners is bound to be forthcoming after the Aug. 21-Sept. 7 California State Fair.

That event along with the San Francisco Chronicle competition, are two worth bragging about. In

2008, El Dorado County wineries won 19 medals at the Chronicle competition – 4 percent of the total.

Sue and I sampled Jodar Vineyard’s 2005 Cabernet that was a double gold medal winner in this year’s Chronicle event. The \$22 bottle is worth every penny.

At Miraflores, besides awards at competitions, the 2005 and 2006 Zin each earned 90 points in *Wine Spectator*, and the 2005 Syrah Methode Ancienne earned 92 points from *Wine Enthusiast*. These are trade publications whose rating systems are well regarded. In July ‘08, Miraflores was featured in the *Enthusiast* after being written about by *Spectator* the previous month.

“Methode ancienne” means the grapes are stomped by foot, not machine.

Tasting the 2005 and 2006 Zins side-by-side, we found the younger one to be much bigger. But both (each is \$22) would be good to have in your personal cellar.

Conti Estate, Charles B. Mitchell Vineyards’ 2006 Fair Play Reserve Barbera earned

best of California double gold at the 2008 state fair. Unfortunately the winery is sold-out of it. During Passport weekend, barrel tasting of the 2007 was offered. It should be available in the bottle this month.

A barrel tasting we particularly liked was the 2007 Zin at Latcham. That, too, should be in bottle form this summer.

Vintner Margaret Latcham served a dip that day which included her wine. It’s perfect for any summer gathering – especially with an El Dorado County wine in hand.

Latcham Vineyards’ Sun Dried Tomato Spread

1 lb. cream cheese
1/2-3/4 C sun dried tomatoes
1/2 C sour cream
Latcham Barbera or Zin
Pine nuts

Soften cream cheese in mixer. Slowly add enough wine until cheese is light and fluffy. Add tomatoes and continue to blend. Top with roasted pine nuts and serve with crackers.