

Zinfandel Dominates Flavor of the Foothills

by Roger and Colleen Stockton, "The Wine Couple"

Often when we wine types want to know more about a particular wine we open our books to peruse the characteristics of the environment in which the grapes are grown. It is recognized that grapevines produce fruit distinctively tailored to the soil and climatic conditions of where they are grown. The French have a term called "Terroir" that epitomizes this relationship between soil and wine. When a grapevine shows it's potential to thrive in a particular site by producing luscious fruit that can be made into great wine it can be attributed to the marriage between the soil and the ecology of the site. The uniqueness of vineyard location has been recognized by the government's designation of American Viticultural Areas or AVAs. An AVA is a strictly defined grape growing region distinguished by geographic features such as soil, climate, elevation and topography that make the wines from these areas unique. California is the leader in U.S. viticulture areas with 86 currently and several more winding their way through the Federal system waiting for approval. The process is slow and complex, but what would you expect from the people who brought us the tax code?

The closest viticultural area to Tahoe is the Sierra Foothills spanning the west slope of the Sierras. The Sierra Foothills is home to a total of 6 separate AVAs. The region's claim to fame is Zinfandel. Vines up to 130 years old produce wines that can make you feel you have struck gold the minute you taste them! If you think that all Zinfandel is white, you are in for a surprise when you taste the rich and jammy red Zin of the Sierra Foothills. While Zinfandel is king here, there are plenty of other varietals that do quite well in the region.

Wine tasting in the Sierra Foothills is much like Napa Valley was 20 years ago, casual and for the most part, free. Beginning in our next column, we will take you on a tour of the Sierra Foothills wine region examining what makes each area unique. We invite everyone to experience the beauty and great taste this area has to offer with a short drive over the hill. Remember to drink responsibly and use a designated driver or follow our technique of taking a small plastic coffee cup and once you have tasted the wine, discretely spit the wine into the cup. This will allow you to remember the nuances of the wines you taste and minimize the dangers of becoming intoxicated.

A great place to taste some of these wines locally is the Reno-Tahoe Wine and Gourmet Food Festival being held at the Reno Hilton April 25th and 26th. This is one of the premier wine events in the area and this year's show will be bigger and better than last years. If you missed the show last year, here is the chance to redeem yourself and taste hundreds of wines with enough gourmet food to wish you had worn pants with an elastic waistband. The event also features educational seminars, live entertainment, plus culinary demonstrations. For more information visit www.RTShows.com or call 877-633-8467.

Bogle, 2001 Merlot;

Luscious nose of plum, cherry, cedar and vanilla leading to a balanced taste of ripe black fruit with medium tannins. Best Buy (\$9)

Single Leaf, 1999 Zinfandel;

Blackberry, cedar and spice dominate the nose accentuating the tastes of blackberry with overlays of spice. (\$13)

Madrona, 2000 Marsanne;

An uncommon white varietal exhibiting a bouquet of pineapple, banana, pear and kiwi and medium body (\$15)