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WINE ENTHUSIAST[®]

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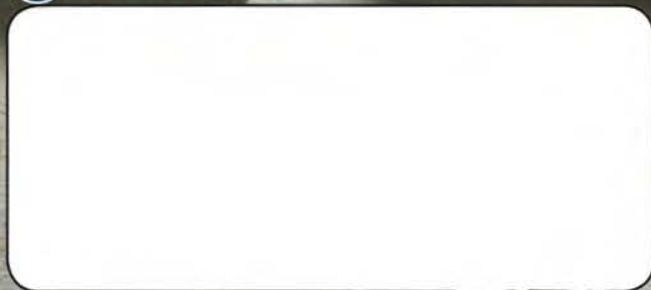
INSIDER'S GUIDE TO ZINFANDEL

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Russian River Valley

Where Napa Valley and Dry Creek Valley represent warm growing regions for Zinfandel, the Russian River Valley—most of it, anyway—is cool. Russian River Zins tend to be lower in alcohol and higher in acidity, especially in our recent run of cool vintages (2010–12).

One of the best areas for Zinfandel is in the Olivet-Piner area of the Santa Rosa Plain, south of River Road (also prime Pinot Noir territory). This area is open to the maritime influence flowing up from the Petaluma Gap, which receives a daily dose of chilly air from San Francisco/San Pablo Bay.

Rod Berglund, owner of Joseph Swan Vineyards, says his grapes from the Mancini Vineyard are incredibly late ripeners—he often doesn't pick until November, which makes this Zinfandel highly vintage-dependent.

Bob Cabral, director of winemaking for Williams Selyem, whose Papera Vineyard is nearby, says, "You'll never get the syrupy, viscous, concentrated fruit of Dry Creek Valley."

In fact, in a good year when the rains hold off, Zins from the Santa Rosa Plain hit the sweet spot. The long hangtime lets them achieve perfect ripeness, while moderate temperatures, particularly at night, avoid the dried-out berries that can make overripe Zins bitter and pruny.

These cool-climate Russian River Zins age well. Berglund doesn't even release his for four-plus years, which isn't particularly cost-conscious. But, he says, "It's neither wise, nor fair to sell it when it's young." —S.H.

RECENT TOP-SCORING ZINS FROM RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY

- 95 Williams Selyem 2011 Papera Vineyard Zinfandel (Russian River Valley); \$52.
- 91 River Road Vineyards 2011 Bischetti Old Vine Zinfandel (Russian River Valley); \$18.
- 90 Joseph Swan 2007 Mancini Ranch Zinfandel (Russian River Valley); \$28.

Other recommended producers: Carlisle, **De Loach**, Hartford, Martinelli, Ravenswood, V. Sattui

