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11 Impressive California Zinfandels

New releases of highly rated Zins from Napa, Sonoma and Mendocino

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Tasting Highlights bring the best wines from our editors' most recent tastings to WineSpectator.com members.

Senior editor Tim Fish has been pouring his way through flights of California Zinfandel as we gear up for our annual report on the varietal, scheduled to run in the June 30 issue of *Wine Spectator* magazine. This week's selection focuses primarily on single-vineyard Zinfandels throughout Napa, Sonoma and Mendocino counties.

Carol Shelton leads the way, with three bottlings receiving high marks. Each comes from a different appellation, expressing distinctive *terroir*. Mountain fruit paves the way for several of our picks from Napa Valley. The Black Sears vineyard on Howell Mountain is a well-regarded grape source, and V. Sattui puts forth a ripe and spicy effort in 2010. Also coming from Howell Mountain is Robert Craig's powerful Zin, which could benefit from a year or two in the cellar. And in the northeastern corner of Napa Valley, at nearly 1,200 feet of elevation, sits the Chiles Mill vineyard, where Green & Red has been making quality Zinfandels since the 1970s.

It's a solid group of wines, ranging in style from soft and sleek to ripe and robust. And all are sure to please Zin enthusiasts.

CAROL SHELTON Zinfandel Alexander Valley 'Xander Zin Harris-Kratka Vineyard 2009 Score: 92 | \$33
Plush and richly structured, yet balanced by a solid core of acidity and tannins. Aromas of black cherry and toasty oak lead to layered wild berry, mineral and sage flavors that finish with ripe but firm tannins. Best from 2015 through 2021. 242 cases made. —T.F.

CAROL SHELTON Zinfandel Sonoma County Karma Zin Bastoni Vineyard 2009 Score: 92 | \$33
Focused, sleek and compact, with raspberry, cinnamon and anise aromas that lead to layered flavors of boysenberry and spice, with a hint of caramel. The tannins show on the finish, but are polished and ripe. Best from 2015 through 2021. 469 cases made. —T.F.

CHIARELLO FAMILY Zinfandel Napa Valley Giana 2011 Score: 91 | \$55
Jammy and loaded with finesse, offering baked cherry and Asian spice aromas, with ripe blackberry, sage and white pepper flavors. Drink now through 2020. 554 cases made. —T.F.

ROBERT CRAIG Zinfandel Howell Mountain 2010 Score: 91 | \$50



Carol Shelton

Three of Carol Shelton's Zinfandel bottlings earn high marks in this report.

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Dense and powerful, though lacks something in the finesse department. Still, this is a Zin that's hard to ignore. Currant and smoky cracked pepper aromas lead to stout, tannic flavors of blackberry, fresh tobacco and mineral. Hands off for now. Best from 2015 through 2021. 340 cases made. —*T.F.*

GREEN & RED Zinfandel Napa Valley Chiles Mill Vineyard 2010 *Score: 91* | *\$26*

Densely jammed with fruit, but braced with enough structure and acidity to keep this vibrant and zesty. Offers notes of dark cherry and toasty vanilla, with lots of underbrush and cracked pepper. The tannins tighten on the finish. Drink now through 2020. 875 cases made. —*T.F.*

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DE LOACH Zinfandel Lake County Nova Vineyard Vineyard Designate 2010 *Score: 90* | *\$32*
Distinctive aromas of red clay and plum lead to supple raspberry, caramel and spice flavors. For those who like them soft and jammy. Drink now through 2018. 291 cases made. —*T.F.*

DE LOACH Zinfandel Sonoma County Forgotten Vines Vineyard Designate 2010 *Score: 90* | *\$36*

Zesty and ripe, but balanced by a solid core of acidity and tannins. Aromas of dried cherry and licorice open to briary plum, toasty sage and cracked pepper flavors. Drink now through 2019. 290 cases made. —*T.F.*

MAYO Zinfandel Russian River Valley Ricci Vineyard Old Vines The Francis Reserve 2010 *Score: 90* | *\$50*

Superripe and plush, a style many will love. Aromas of cherry pie and caramel lead to jammy raspberry, cinnamon and spice flavors. Drink now through 2018. 312 cases made. —*T.F.*

MAYO Zinfandel Russian River Valley The Barnstormer Old Vines 2009 *Score: 90* | *\$35*

Offers bold aromas of baked cherry and toasty oak, with jammy plum, cinnamon and caramel flavors. For those who like them ripe, rich and plush. Drink now through 2018. 780 cases made. —*T.F.*

V. SATTUI Zinfandel Howell Mountain Black Sears Vineyard 2010 *Score: 90* | *\$42*

Muscular and superripe, but loaded with personality and balanced with enough acidity to keep this lively. Aromas of blackberry and spicy oak lead to dense flavors of currant, toasty sage and licorice. Drink now through 2020. 842 cases made. —*T.F.*

CAROL SHELTON Zinfandel Mendocino County Wild Thing Old Vine 2009 *Score: 90* | *\$19*

Zesty and racy, with floral raspberry and cinnamon aromas that lead to lively and appealing flavors of cherry, spice, herb and anise. Drink now through 2018. 3,330 cases made. —*T.F.*

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