

# Zinfandel

## General Varietal Characteristics

- The Red varietal of California
  - As of today, still believed to be the only uniquely CA grape
  - Thought by some to be related to either Italy's Primativo or Croatia's Plavic Mali; but as of yet no DNA confirmation.
  - Zin is to California, what Sangiovese is to Toscana  
what Nebbiolo is to Piedmonte  
and what Shiraz is to Australia
- It is a rich, robust RED wine grape
  - Full of fruit, tannins, depth and complexity
  - Full of black raspberries and cracked pepper flavors
  - Can also be very tannic, concentrated and high in alcohol ( although less tannic than Cabernet Sauvignon)
- Fuller in body, color and flavor than most reds, it is most often associated with such wine words as "hearty" and "robust"
- Less affected by soil, climate or wood than other reds
- Can be highly productive, but the vines must be closely monitored and manicured to ensure even ripening. Clusters can ripen unevenly with raisins on the shoulders and green grapes in the center while the rest of the cluster is more or less ripe. Unless fully ripened, Zin can be light and spicy like Gamay and if too ripe, it can be jammy like Port.
- Best Zins come from older vines – more than 40 years old
- Although capable of aging beyond 10 years (i.e. High tannins and alcohol + rich fruit), it's best between 4-6 years
- '94, '95 and '97 considered best vintages in the past 15 years.
- Zin is the least pretentious, most affordable full bodied red.
  - Best in Sonoma come from Dry Creek and Bradford Mtn
  - Best in Napa come from York Creek and Howell Mtn
  - Santa Cruz Mtns is next best thanks mainly to Ridge
  - Amador County and Paso Robles follow...
- Styles vary widely: The 3 most notable are:
  - Pure - bursting with raspberry and cracked pepper, low in alcohol - the antithesis of Late Harvest
  - Blends - more of a claret style - most often blended with Petite Sirah( to add tannins), Carignane ( to add acids) and Alicante.
  - Late Harvest - ultra, over ripe, high alcohol (up to 17.5) and almost port-like

## Zin Consortium 2004 – Partners in Zin

### The search for the best Grapes:

Marilyn and I looked at 4 Vineyards in August. Foxhill Vineyards in Alexander Valley had nice grapes, but he waters every week up until harvest and we thought that wasn't a good practice. We tried to meet with Antoine, the Viticulturist from Wilson Vineyard, but he never showed up. We decided not to meet with Jack Aire from Everette Ridge because we had heard that he clear cut the forest to plant his vines. Not a good thing. Maurice LeVois had an unkept vineyard up on Bradford Mt. with puny shriveled grapes. When we saw and met Andrew Forchini, we were impressed with his knowledge of his grapes and his honest down to earth nature. His grapes were recommended by an acquaintance and he sells to William Selyem and Christopher Creek. He plants a field blend of zin, alicante, Petite Syrah and Carigiane. These are dry farmed, well taken care of, no mildew. They give a foliar spray of Vit/minerals, and sulfur for mildew. We would be getting the second pick.

### Winemaking Process

Harvest/Pick-up and Crush. September 18, 2004. Grapes were waiting for Steve and me at the Forchini Winery in two wooden bins. The trip down to Woodside was uneventful. Marilyn and Brian Smith, Mandy and Dave, Steve and Lynne and Chris Tracy plus Heidi (Chris's dog) gathered for the crush alternating and sharing the many tasks of: bucketing grapes from the truck to the crusher, weighing and recording each bucket, drinking wine, turning the manual crusher crank, unofficial photographer, pulling stems and pips from the must, drinking wine, testing the juice for brix, acid and ph, making additions, drinking wine and cleaning up. The crush was difficult because the grapes were not falling from the stems completely. Little and big pieces of stems ended up in the must. We spent a lot of time that night and the next weeks pulling out stems and punching down the must. We know it was the grape because the cab we crushed later that night came off totally clean. Totally exhausted, we dragged ourselves up for a sumptuous meal...and drank more wine. The crush of 1 ton plus (2300 pounds) of grapes took about four hours.

Fermentation. The fermentation graph curve was rather typical except that it took 5 days to start cooking. Usually by the third day the brix is dropping quickly and the temperature is rising quickly. Because the brix was at 27.5, we added water to dilute the sugar to what we thought was 24/25 brix. In hindsight, we should have diluted it more because our final Alcohol was 16.22% which means our beginning brix was about 32. Sometimes suspensions in the testing juice give false low readings, and we had a lot of suspensions.

Because of the high sugar content of the grapes, we treated this as a high risk fermentation, meaning we added potassium metabisulfite to the must to kill off any competing wild yeasts that would compromise the fermentation and we added superfood, which are nutrients that assure healthy yeast growth and division. Along with high grape sugars come low acidity, which if left low will result in a flabby flat wine. Soooo, we added tartaric acid to bring it to a normal range. On day two AMH Assmanshausen yeast was added. Its characteristics are long lag time with slow to medium fermentation rate. Color in red fermentation is protected and the wine is enhanced with spicy, fruit flavor and aroma. By the middle of October it was evident that primary fermentation was not continuing to dryness. We pressed off the skins and put it in the

barrel. On October 25, we sent a sample to Gusmercellulo in Napa to test the wine. They confirmed that there was still 1.27% sugar, 15.55% alcohol, no bacterial contamination and very little viable/alive yeast. They suggested adding a small preventative dose of lysozyme to kill any lactobacillus and restart the primary fermentation. This was a heroic effort of two weeks, but it paid off and the wine finally proceeded to dryness. After racking it off the sediment, we tucked it back into the two barrels, added the malolactic bacteria/nutrients and settled in for the winter.

### **The Wait**

Spring 2005. With the malolactic fermentation, the ML bacteria changes the malic acid into lactic acid which results in a stable wine once bottled. If it doesn't go through this process, then there is a chance that ML fermentation will start in the bottle and produce a fizzy wine or worse...explode. Well, nothing has been easy with this wine so why should we expect this to be any different? When it didn't finish, we reinoculated the wine with a super dooper high alcohol tolerant ML bacteria, but it too failed. At this time we were noticing that the wine was very cloudy with suspended solids. On advice of our mentor at Woodside Vineyards, we added gelatin to clarify it and two weeks later racked it off the sediment. This has proven to be successful.

Summer 2005. When the wine still hadn't finished malolactic fermentation, we sent a sample to the lab and had them run tests to determine what the problem was and if it had the potential for ever going through. Results indicate there is some inherent inhibitor in the wine and it most likely will never complete. The alcohol is probably too high. This is actually good news because we now can bottle and not worry about any activity in the bottle.

We also had a sensory evaluation by a panel of three enologists. Some of the comments are:

Appearance: Light red color, clear.

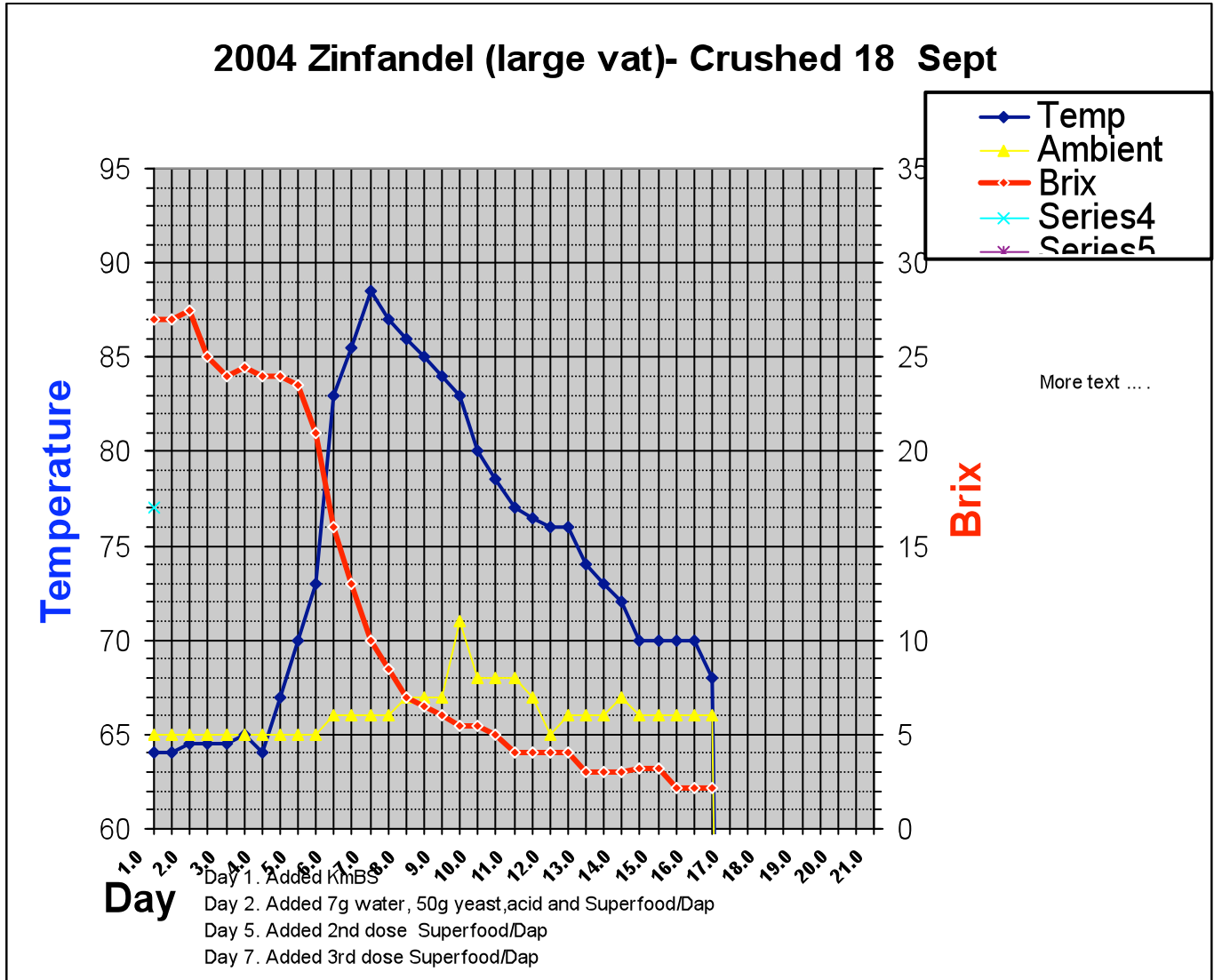
Aroma: Strong alcoholic entry, followed by rose petals and sweet berries with cream. Some woody aromas, slight licorice, very slight raisiny character. Long finish, but slightly prickly and carbonicans well as astringent and tart. Barrel/tar/oak finish. Varietal intensity low.

Taste: Soft, sweet entry followed by warm and spicy, berry and ripe fruit. Light bodied. Low to moderate fruit intensity. Long finish. Lots of sweet oak. Two felt it was too acidic and the third felt it was not acid enough. (typical of wine tasters – no one agrees!)

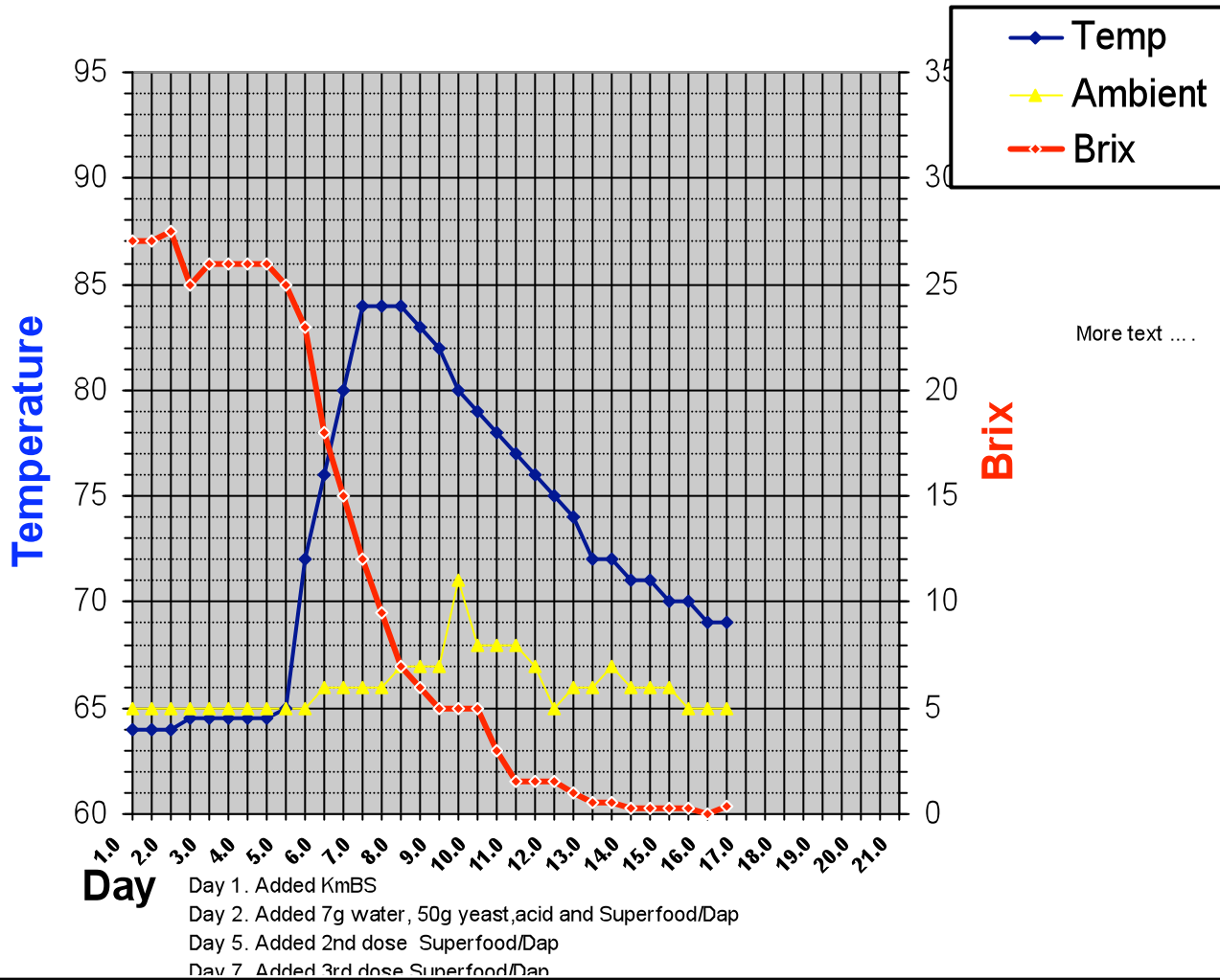
We like the wine and think it is ready to bottle. Steve and I feel that the grapes themselves were too high in sugar/ph which presented problems throughout the whole process. The inability of the grapes to come clean from the stems also presented clarification problems. With the added interventions we had to do with the wine, the fruityness was probably compromised. In all, we are proud to serve this at our table. I'm hoping to be able to get us all together in the next month for bottling. Think about a label design and wording. What shall we call ourselves and the wine?

Late Harvest Zinfandel  
Dry Creek-Forchini Vineyards

Aromas of rose petals and sweet berries with cream, slight licorice and woody.



## 2004 Zinfandel (small vat)- Crushed 18 Sept



### Back Label

This late harvest Dry Creek Zinfandel has aromas of rose petals and sweet berries with cream. Some woody and licorice aromas are also present. We taste ripe fruit and lots of sweet oak. Grapes produced by the Andrew Forchini ranch in Sonoma county. Andrew also provides grapes to William Selyem and Christopher Creek. The grapes were dry farmed, well taken care of with no mildew.

The grapes were harvested at 26.5 Brix. The resulting wine has the following characteristics: alcohol 16.25%, TA .62 g/100ml, pH 3.56, no residual sugar. The wine aged 12 months in French and American oak. There was no malolactic fermentation, despite our heroic efforts.

**Partners in Zin:** Lynne M. O'Dell, Steve Jensen, Brian J. Smith, Marilyn Z. Smith, Dave Clare, Mandy McClellan, Leo Ruth, Sheryl Ruth, Audrey Tracey, Chris Tracey, produced and bottled in Woodside, CA 2004 – 2005.

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