

## Welcome!



And thanks for joining our Discovery Value Series. As this series is designed to be a great introduction to the expansive world of wine for quaffers of all levels, additional background information and detail will be included to help those just embarking on the journey. The stellar lineup of wines, however, are anything but beginner. In putting together our first few months of the Discovery Series, we grappled with how to approach wine in such a way as to accommodate passionate devotees and those with nascent curiosities alike. After much deliberating (and much “tasting”!) we opted to venture off the beaten path and forge our own way through the vineyards.

Please let us know how you enjoy the wines and if the Newsletter can be improved in any way. We're always happy to have feedback on both our wine and the education that we offer.

Cheers and Best,  
**The Wine Counsel Staff**

## This Month's Offerings

Well, Summer has crept into San Francisco and this can only mean two things: rooftop barbeques and breaking out your warmest woollens. While we've had to resort to our fur-fringed parkas only once so far, it's our understanding that the rest of the country (and frankly, the rest of the Bay Area) has been experiencing that vernal cycle into warm weather. What better way to usher in the season than a pair of wines fit for the occasion?

We start our series here at home in California, leaving behind the familiar vineyards of Napa and Sonoma for those further South: Santa Barbara and Paso Robles. This pair is perfectly suited for that afternoon backyard BBQ—the white for an enchanting pre-Q refreshment and a powerhouse Zin to wash down the fruits of your festival of grilled goodies.

### 2000 Andrew Murray “Enchanté”

Santa Ynez, California

80% Viognier, 10% Roussanne, 10% Marsanne

A  
N  
D  
R  
E  
W  
M  
U  
R  
R  
A  
Y  
V  
I  
N  
E  
Y  
A  
R  
D  
S

We admit to having some serious issues with the names that Andrew Murray has given his portfolio of wines. In fact, at a recent tasting of Santa Barbara wines, we were so amused (and bemused) by “Enchanté”, that the better part of the afternoon was spent whispering it to one another in our most suave faux-French accents and giggling like schoolgirls. But at the end of the day, all notes were in consensus: it was absolutely delicious, charming...and it would be mortifying to be caught sneaking something with such an appallingly cutesy name into a dinner. After much deliberation and choking down of a parvenu sense of decorum, we bought as much as we could get our hands on. “Enchanté” was \*that\* good.

Imagine your girlfriend (or if you live in San Francisco, your boyfriend) in a sun-dress on a warm spring day, and you get close to the bouquet of this Rhone blend. It possesses an intensely concentrated nose of white peaches, honeysuckle, casablanca lilies, and just a hint of fresh grassiness. Wonderfully full in the mouth, the blend shows loads of white fruits with just a graceful touch of peach-pit bitterness (the Viognier) to balance the sweetness. Simply beautiful and charming.

#### Andrew Murray Winery

Andrew Murray focuses solely on Rhone varietals (see sidebar), and has steadily improved the quality of his wine year after year. If you happen upon his Viognier, grab it immediately—it's gorgeous stuff and among the best in California. Other standouts include his single-vineyard designated Syrahs. His production is rather small, so he may be hard to find on most store shelves. We'll certainly let you know if we get a hold of more of these outstanding wines.

#### Santa Barbara (Santa Maria, Santa Ynez)

Santa Barbara's cool maritime climate is absolutely perfect for growing Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and other white grapes that make wines of great finesse and depth. The region does produce exceptional Syrahs as well, but these can be somewhat hit or miss. Although there are notable exceptions (parts of Santa Ynez), the fog overwhelms Cabernet Sauvignon—unless you have a specific recommendation, it's probably wise to steer clear.

#### What's a Rhone Varietal?

If there's anything the French do well, it's making depressing movies and losing major land-battles. And although upholding ancient traditions pulls in at a distant, but critical third, the French perform this with equal panache and aplomb.

Stretching through the Southeastern quadrant of France, the vineyards of the Rhone Valley have been planted to Syrah (red), Viognier, Marsanne and Roussanne (whites) since the days when the Romans began the tradition of invading the Gauls and the French began the tradition of immediately throwing down their arms and giving in to foreign occupation. In some subregions of the Rhone Valley, planting anything other than these four varietals (grape varieties) is expressly forbidden, although in general, Mourvedre, Carignan and Grenache are blended into the final product.

Wines using these grape varietals, either singly or in various concoctions, are dubbed “Rhone blends”. California's penchant for producing single varietal wines (using just Cabernet Sauvignon grapes to produce a wine, for example), has been changing due to the efforts of the Rhone Rangers movement—a coalition of wineries dedicated to the use of Rhone varietals.

We absolutely adore Syrahs and there's a growing place in our heart for Viogniers. Look for different incarnations of these Rhone varietals in upcoming months.

**1999 Pesenti Zinfandel**  
**Paso Robles, California**  
**100% Zinfandel**

One of the best kept secrets of the wine world is the use of “secondary” labels to bottle wine that didn’t make a winery’s premiere bottling. Pioneered by the Chateaus of France, this practice is intended to insulate the reputation of a winery—wines which for whatever reason didn’t make the cut are bottled under an entirely different Chateau name and sold for substantially less. There are various reasons for doing this, one of which might be that the wine is genuinely not good. More likely than not, however, wines are bottled under the secondary name in order to keep down supply of the primary label (and thus keep prices high during prolific vintages) or else as an experimental shop for the winemaker to test out new techniques or new vineyard fruit. With a little research, it’s possible to pick up a secondary wine made from the same fruit, by the same winemaker.

In the case of our Zinfandel, Larry Turley (the champion of high-end California Zins) purchased the Pesenti vineyard in 1999, and unsure of the quality of fruit he had purchased with the vineyard, bottled it under the name of “Pesenti Winery”. Larry sent down his star Zin- (and rain-) maker, Ehren Jordan, to ensure that these grapes from their new vineyard in Paso Robles were properly pressed and bottled. The resulting nectar was so decadently good that Turley has used the 2000 harvest to create a single vineyard Zinfandel under his own label—an honor of the highest order.

The 1999 Pesenti Zinfandel is no shy animal and drinking it is akin to eating scoops of spicy blackberry jam with crème de cassis liberally mixed in. The scent is an intoxicating blend of black fruits, burnt sugar and overripe raspberries. In the mouth, it’s an expansive and enormous hedonistic experience. Prepare to redefine how you look at Zinfandels—this is the essence of the Turley approach and style of winemaking.

**Pesenti Winery**

Success has killed a winery. Well, sort of. Pesenti Winery will no longer put out Zinfandel, but their fruit will be used for a single vineyard zinfandel bottled under the Turley label. The good news: Turley’s resources are vast, their name alone will sell anything, and Ehren Jordan (the winemaker) can craft wines that continually astound. The bad news: it’s tough to get a hold of Turley Zins, much less their single vineyard designated wines. We have a selection of Turley Zins on hand, so please contact us if you’re interested in seeing the mettle of this winery.

**Paso Robles**

Paso Robles has long been sourcing grapes for the major wine producers, but only over the last decade has the region begun focusing on honing viticultural techniques to improve grape quality. The past 5 years, however, have been a litany of successes for Paso Robles—fruit of outstanding quality have led to the establishment of new wineries. The region holds huge promise as a prime region for Zinfandel, Syrah, and Cabernet Sauvignon. The warmer weather lends itself to crafting wines bursting with huge, accessible fruit. Look to our purchasing more from this up and coming area.

**The “Heritage” Grape**

California’s Zinfandel Advocates and Producers (a.k.a. ZAP) tout Zinfandel as America’s “heritage” grape, a not unpalatable proposition given how intertwined the grape has been with our cultural history. While Zinfandel was known to be planted on the East Coast as early as 1825, its prominent place in American wine lore began in the latter half of the century, as failed ‘49ers turned to agriculture when dreams of gold failed to pan out. Amongst the gold rush miners, Zinfandel was only slightly less popular than rotgut as the drink of choice.

**Modern Rotgut**

A century later, Zinfandel’s fortunes continued to wane. Looking to cash in on an unrefined American palate that preferred fizzy sweet white wines, Sutter Home pioneered the bottling of “White Zinfandel” in 1973. Pressed from normal red zinfandel grapes “White Zin” was produced by allowing the juice to macerate with the skins only long enough to pick up a slight pinkish tinge—sugar and a bit of gas were then added in to complete the transmogrification. Apparently unconcerned by the fact that it was neither technically white nor, for that matter, really Zinfandel, the American public slurped down millions of cases by 1986. Parachute pants went with slouchy off-the-shoulder sweatshirts, and Riunite (Zinfandel in drag) went on ice. So nice.

**Redemption**

Like an episode of VH-1’s Behind the Music, the besmirched varietal was to pick up whatever shrapnel of dignity remained, to find rebirth and new ascendancy. New producers rediscovered old Zinfandel vines, lowered crop yields, and picked the fruit when absolutely ripe. The result: a new breed of concentrated high-end Zinfandels that pack more “yum” into a bottle than should be allowed by the ATF. Turley, Martinelli, and Rosenblum, among others, perennially produce Zins that are monstrously huge, and devastatingly good.

With a resuscitated reputation, interest in Zinfandel once again took off, including interest in its origins. While DNA testing still hasn’t nabbed O.J. Simpson just yet, it has pinned down the origin of the Zinfandel grape to a Southern Italian varietal called Primitivo. Thus the “American” grape with a dodgy past wasn’t exactly “heritage”—but frankly, for all that Zinfandel has been through in the States, I’d think the Italians would be good enough to allow us the honor of claiming it the varietal closest to our hearts. And parachute pants.

**Please Contact Us!**

Wine Counsel  
350 Bay Street #328  
San Francisco, CA 94133  
415.203.9602  
info@winecounsel.net