



FRATELLI PERATA WINERY 2002 ZINFANDEL, ESTATE

Fratelli Perata and Zinfandel are two kindred spirits, with a relationship going back to the 1930's. When Giuseppe Perata came to Ventura County, California as a young man, he brought with him from Italy his father's winemaking skills. Every year the family made Zinfandel. It soon became the family's Zingarella. With a 50-year history of making Zinfandel wine, there was no doubt Zinfandel vines would be planted in our Paso Robles vineyard.

Full of flavor, young and vibrant. Deep, lingering, wanting more. This describes our Italian relationship with Zinfandel. Whether the vintage is particularly rich, or imminently matched with Gorgonzola cheese and a plate of pasta, we love the Zinfandel as no other variety.

These vines were planted on our hillside vineyard in 1980, designed to grow as head-pruned vines. They stand alone as little trees, no trellis system to support the heavy clusters. This gives a smaller amount of fruit from each vine, all with good sun exposure. With our dry-farmed Zinfandel, the crop is smaller, berries are smaller, but the flavor in the finished wine more intense.

The vines bud out in the spring after the threat of killing frosts are over, so no wasteful overhead water sprinklers are needed. The fruit has a shorter growing season than other varieties, so it is almost always harvested before threatening fall rains arrive. The ripe Zinfandel fruit and acidity are balanced naturally by warm weather and cool nights. Zinfandel likes the soils of Paso Robles. Here is the most striking example of terroir, spicy black pepper mixing with the raspberry/blackberry bramble of Zinfandel.

You need to have a conversation with the vines to make a good Zinfandel. Constant watchfulness yields the best the vine can offer. How was the rainfall the previous year? This year? How many spurs to leave during pruning in February determine how large the crop will be. Not too many! Is it going to be a hot year? Are winter rains predicted to come early? What will happen? Too much fruit, too cool a summer, not enough water, and the crop will not get ripe. The vines will be too stressed. How are you vines doing today?

The clusters are large and compact. The berries in one cluster may be partly green, mostly ripe and some raisins. The canopy may have to be adjusted to get a more even ripeness. Hillside vineyards such as ours also present a challenge, with the tops of the hills ripening before the lower elevations. As with our other varieties, we have the ability to harvest only the parts of the vineyard that are at their peak, waiting to harvest the balance of the crop when ready.

The year 2002. Not so much rain from the winter, very warm spring temperatures. August was cool. This is good; the Zinfandel can hang on the vine longer, flavors developing more each day. Slowly ripening, steady, no sudden hot temperatures to shock the thirsty vines. Let the Zinfandel get ripe, ripe like the 1999, maybe the 1997...

At last, the vines say, "Enough!" Gino agrees. October 12th, 4 weeks later than usual, harvest is scheduled; the crew of 8 young men come at 5:30 in the morning. They are happy to harvest Zinfandel. Big clusters, heavy, easy to pick. The picking pans fill up fast. The tractor hums and brings the first 1 ½ tons out of the field, just a few hundred feet away from where the destemmer and the winemaker wait.

The ½ ton bins are dumped into the crusher/destemmer slowly. The winemaker, Gino, stands watch, pulling out the odd clusters that don't have the best color, that are shot with green berries. As the berries are knocked from their stems, the raspberry, bramble aromas rise up. Fresh, ripe fruit. Spicy black pepper. Brambles. All there at the crusher, the first day.

Sugar levels are confirmed, acid is checked. Yes, this is what we want. The sugar this year is as ripe as 1997, more than in 2001. But the berries are smaller, the color will be better. The harvest stops before noon. The harvested fruit is cool. Fermentation will be slow and cool, so none of the flavor will dissipate into the air. Yeast is added the following day, the juice begins to ferment. The cap is punched down four times a day by hand. Much easier than Cabernet, but then, four days into fermentation the cap becomes very hard. With smaller berries, there is less juice. Yes, it was a drier year. Yes, we are becoming very strong punching down all this wine.

The 3rd and final lot of Zinfandel is harvested on October 30th. After 12 days of primary fermentation, the wine is pressed gently into American oak barrels. Most are older, neutral barrels; a couple are only one year old and will give more oak flavor. Combined together, there will be just enough oak to be interesting and not overpowering.

Bottled on February 15th, 2004, the Zinfandel is ready to drink. Alcohol skirts just under 14% by volume. We are careful not to produce alcohol bombs or short-palate fruit bombs. Ours is always 100% Zinfandel. Color is not darkened by adding other varietals, such as Petite Sirah. The pepper on the nose comes from the combination of *this* Zinfandel growing in *this* location. The bramble blackberry aromas come naturally from the Zinfandel brought in from our vineyards. This is unmanipulated, straight on Zin. Drink it young for its lively fruit and edgy tannins, or let it age. It has the legs for it.

Paso Robles and Zinfandel? Yes, we do that.