

CONNOISSEURS' GUIDE TO CALIFORNIA WINE



2010 ZINFANDEL RETROSPECTIVE

It has been argued that for any wine to be able to claim greatness, it must prove its mettle by being capable of aging and improving with time. That is a debate we choose to avoid in the light of the myriad wines that are amazingly interesting and wholly satisfying when young, but we have cellars for a reason and Zinfandel is well-represented in them. In truth, we most often find well-made Zin to be in prime-drinking shape at about five or six years of age, but there are those that, when young, project a long-aging trajectory, and we recently collected a handful from the 2010 vintage to see just how they have weathered ten years of keeping. We are pleased to report that the best have not only reached their tenth birth-days in splendid form, there are several eye-opening examples that show extraordinary life and the ability to keep growing for many more years. We generally find good Zinfandel to be at its best with some five or six years of age, but that does not necessarily mean that certain well-made bottlings cannot show very positive growth for a decade or more. This month, we take a moment to check in on how a handful of previously recommended examples from 2010 are doing as they near their tenth anniversaries, and we are pleased to report that most are not only holding up just fine, but many have gotten more interesting with time and several are simply stunning with years of improvement yet ahead. 2010 was tricky for most late-ripening varieties here in California, and we approached our original tastings of Zins from the vintage back in 2012, 2013 and 2014 with a fair bit of trepidation as to what we would find. The growing season was quite slow and, owing to concerns that the grapes might not fully ripen, many wineries chose to apply a technique known as leaf-stripping in late Summer to open the vine's canopies and allow for more sun exposure to grapes in order to hasten ripening. As luck would have it, however, the weather soon heated up with temperatures running in excess of one hundred degrees, and many Zinfandel vineyards suffered sunburning that led to raisiny, excessively ripe flavors. It turned out, however, that there were more than a few Zin successes all the same, and the harvest was, very happily, not complete burnout. All of the wines collected for our retrospective tasting came direct from their respective makers – for which we offer our earnest thanks – and, while one or two have seen better days, we were pleasantly surprised at the way most now wear their age and attest to the fact that good Zinfandel will reward lengthier cellaring than many believe.

EASTON

92 EASTON Estate Bottled Shenandoah Valley 2010

There are wines that gain in grace with age, while others are notable for their ability to remain energetic and intensely fruity over time, and this very generous, immensely flavorful Zinfandel falls within the latter camp. It is bursting with fully ripe berries with a lightly complexing veneer of sweet, slightly woody spice, and it boasts especially fine balance considering its conspicuous ripeness. It will hold at this level for another five years without tiring but will prove a thoroughly satisfying, downright delicious foil to grilled, wild-boar sausages or a rack of ribs tonight. **\$32.00 on release and originally rated at 90 points.**