



The International Wine Review

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Report #65 The Vines and Wines of Lodi

Introduction



These are exciting times in Lodi. The excellent grapes from its 800 world-class growers are renown in California's wine industry. Now this large wine region and its growing number of wineries are rapidly gaining recognition for making distinctive, premium wines. In this report, our 11th on California's premium wine regions, we focus on Lodi's diverse wines and the vineyards they come from. Reviews of almost 300 wines can be found at the back of this report.

Located directly east of the Golden Gate and the San Francisco Bay, Lodi has a mild, Mediterranean climate with a marine influence. Ocean breezes begin at the Golden Gate and wind their way through the Carquinez Strait before hitting the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and the vineyards of Lodi. Two major rivers and the nearby Sierra Foothills also influence this rich agricultural terroir. Lodi's mother lode is its talented, efficient growers and their carefully tended vines, including thousands of acres of old bush vines, many of them dry farmed and self-rooted. They've had extraordinary success growing and selling

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grapes to California's most popular wine producers, like E&J Gallo, Woodbridge by Mondavi, Trinchero/Sutter Home, Delicato, and Bronco. This success has also been the Achilles heel for Lodi's fine wine reputation. Most of that wonderful fruit has gone into anonymous California blends. Until now, that is. Today many Lodi growers also make wine, and growing numbers of premium wineries in Napa, Sonoma and elsewhere are purchasing Lodi grapes and putting Lodi on the label. Promising, young winemakers are now moving to Lodi in search of affordable land and grapes that makes wine to compete with California's best. The number of wineries has grown from 32 in 1982 to over 85 today.

Lodi's first wine grapes were planted in the mid-19th century, and a surprisingly large number of 19th century and early 20th century plantings are still producing. Most of them are Zinfandel, and that grape is still the foundation of Lodi wine. But the low yields and high costs of manually farming old vine Zinfandel put Lodi's vinous treasure at great risk. Lodi's farmers have always been super-responsive to market forces, and today that means ripping out Zinfandel and replacing it with something, often Cabernet Sauvignon, that makes more profit. It also means planting new varieties in new regions outside the historic core (now called the Mokelumne River American Viticultural Area--AVA) around the city of Lodi. And this is rapidly taking place.

In this report, we go into detail on the wine grape history of Lodi, highlighting its pioneers, from Albert Spenker, who planted some of Lodi's oldest, still producing vineyards, to native son Robert Mondavi, who introduced new technologies in the 1970s, to some of today's new pioneers producing exquisite wines from over 100 different grape varieties. We look at viticulture, the most important grape varieties, the winemakers, and the wines themselves. We pay special attention to Lodi's world-famous environmental sustainability program, LODI RULES. The report ends with a look towards the future, its challenges and its more numerous opportunities.

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