

TOP 100 VALUES OF THE YEAR

# Wine & Spirits

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plus PAIRING CHALLENGE: NOLA GUMBO & WINE

June 2021  
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## Year's Best US Zinfandel and Mixed Blacks

### NORTH COAST

#### LAKE COUNTY

##### 88 | Lost Hog \$17 2019 Lake County Zinfandel (Best Buy)

Strawberry and rosemary come together in this wine's simple fruit, lined by a crisp edge of tannins. It's clean, soft and warm, a floral zin for lamb. You might add some extra points for the adorable hog label. —J.G. (1,400 cases)

#### MENDOCINO

##### 93 | Dashe \$32

**2018 Eagle Peak Les Enfants Terribles Heart Arrow Ranch Zinfandel** Mike Dashe lists this wine among the "light reds" in his production and, at 13.5 percent alcohol, it is significantly lighter than most contemporary zins. Its strength is in the evocation of a place. It grows in Redwood Valley, part of the Eagle Peak AVA established in 2014. Golden Vineyards owns the 1,000-acre ranch, where it limits the vineyard parcels to 60 acres, the farming certified biodynamic. Dashe ferments the wine as whole berries with some whole clusters and without added yeasts, then ages it in a 900-gallon French oak barrel, bottling with limited sulfur. It tastes as if the yeasts have consumed only enough of the whole berries that the structure and shape of the grape is still intact, allowing light to shine through the skin. Those skins hold bright tannins, thriving with energy, providing thorns to the rose scents and iron to the dark plum and pomegranate flavors. A bottle will go fast as it's a wine to make you smile. —J.G. (373 cases)

##### 90 | Vaughn Duffy \$25

##### 2019 Mendocino County Bartolomei Brothers Vineyard Carignane (Best Buy)

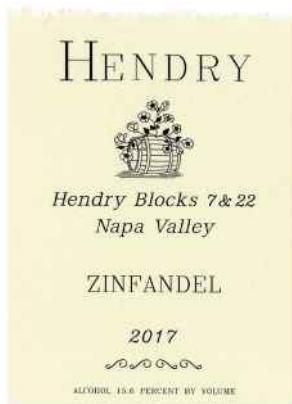
Working with the old vines he uses for his carignane rosé, Matt Duffy began making a red wine in 2018. This second vintage is bright and juicy, a single note of red fruit with some undertones of redwoods and mushrooms. It takes shape with air, leaning into its foresty side. For *landjaeger* sausages. —J.G.

#### NAPA VALLEY

##### 96 | Storybook Mountains \$75

**2016 Napa Valley Estate Reserve Zinfandel** This is luxurious zin. It's a different take on Napa Valley luxury than what's on offer in the cabernet realm. Rather than the sweetness of warm black fruit and the polished tannic richness of dark toasty oak, this

is savory in its luscious flavors and detailed in its tannins. Jerry Sep's grows this zinfandel in red volcanic soils, in the hills above Calistoga as they lead up into Knights Valley, his vineyard facing north toward Mount Saint Helena and east toward the Palisades. His Estate Reserve, selected for its elegance and age-worthy structure, is a Napa Valley red that develops over decades. At five years of age, this tastes like a handful of wild blueberries picked in the August sun, its freshness just one element of the wine's dynamic complexity. —J.G.



##### 95 | Hendry Ranch \$38

##### 2017 Napa Valley Blocks 7&22 Zinfandel

These two blocks of zinfandel, in the benchlands at the base of Mount Veeder, were both planted to clone 2; the vines at Block 7 date to 1975 and to 1995 at Block 22. It's interesting to taste this side-by-side with Block 28 (also recommended here), comparing fruit from a mass selection of old vines with a clonal planting. Block 28 may be more complex in its tannins; the wine from Blocks 7 & 22 may be more comforting and delicious, its complexity held in a floral scent, like pollen collected in a beehive. Or floral dark chocolate, a richness that smooths the tannins and their mineral spikes of power. Cellar both wines and you may find yourself grabbing one or the other, depending on your mood. —J.G. (1,294 cases)

##### 95 | Hendry Ranch \$38

##### 2017 Napa Valley Block 28 Zinfandel

The Hendry family planted this 4-acre block in 1998 in the benchlands west of the town of Napa. They used a selection of cuttings from old vines at the Brandlin Ranch on Mount Veeder, a property George Hendry had been farming. The vines from those cuttings are now mature, and they gave a tense, floral 2017 zin with brisk energy in its tannins.

Those tannins combine woodland rusticity and mineral refinement, their subtle staying power described by one taster as "spring-water minerality" and by another as "broken rock." The floral, strawberry-scented fruit will clean up alongside spicy cured pork sausages; or stash this away in the cellar—the structure will sustain the wine for five or ten years. —J.G. (588 cases)



##### 95 | Once & Future \$50

##### 2019 Napa Valley Green & Red Vineyard

**Zinfandel** The Tip Top Vineyard was the last and highest parcel Jay Heminway planted in the hills of his Green & Red estate. It's a steep, northeast-facing ridge that provided some of his most compelling zinfandels and petite sirahs. After Heminway passed away in 2019, his daughter Tobin has been running the vineyard and winery, and she began selling fruit to other zinfandel loyalists, including Joel Peterson. This wine is an 80/20 blend of zinfandel and petite from Tip Top, and it is an old-fashioned California beauty. Petite grounds the wine with substantial power, but zin keeps it light and filigreed, with floral scents of raspberries and roses, fragrant and delicate to the point of being lacy. This is fresh and detailed, suited to age but hard to resist drinking right now. —J.G. (350 cases)

##### 94 | Storybook Mountains \$55

##### 2017 Napa Valley Eastern Exposures Zinfandel

The ruby color and the lasting rose-scented fruit of this wine share the cool vibrancy of grapes ripened in Napa Valley's morning sun. The edgy mineral tannins provide a classical structure to that clean fruit intensity, adding notes of bay and madrone. One taster called it out as the driest zinfandel of the day, while another placed its vibrant flavors with the roast goat at a local Caribbean restaurant. The grace and clarity of the wine also would work with roast quail, or

## Year's Best US Zinfandel and Mixed Blacks

roast boletes... Selected from the most aromatic lots of zinfandels at Storybook, this includes a small amount of viognier in the blend. Decant it to bring out the floral fragrance. —J.G.

**92 | Once & Future** \$50

**2019 Napa Valley Dickerson Vineyard Zinfandel** On the cusp of their 100th birthday, the vines on Zinfandel Lane in St. Helena have survived the colonization of Napa Valley by cabernet sauvignon and earned their fame in Joel Peterson's vineyard-designed zinfandel, first made in 1982. Now, under his new label, Peterson gained access to some fruit from Dickerson in 2019, capturing the site in a soft and elegant Napa Valley red. High-toned with rose scents when first poured, this gains detail over the course of several days, integrating tart notes of strawberry leather, cloves and earth into a pure fruit core. —J.G. (150 cases)

**91 | Hendry Ranch** \$38

**2018 Napa Valley Primitivo** This wine comes across as sweet with menthol and eucalyptus notes. Then, that sweetness retreats with a day of air, the flavors turning toward red cherry and *kirschwasser* with some menthol and dark chocolate in the end. It feels refreshingly brisk, clean and elegant. —J.G. (907 cases)

**91 | Storybook Mountains** \$50

**2018 Napa Valley Bottled Poetry Zinfandel** A new wine from Jerry Seps and his daughter, Colleen Williams, Bottled Poetry is a blend of the softer lots of zinfandel from their estate, with a small addition of Bordeaux varieties. It strikes a balance between full-on richness and tart, zesty red fruit. The structure is weighty and substantial while red plum and spicy tomato notes provide some pert delicacy around the edges. Notes of cardamom and allspice warm the finish. Decant a bottle for braised lamb. —J.G.

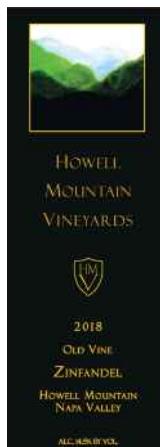
**90 | Frog's Leap** \$35

**2018 Napa Valley Zinfandel** Bright with zinny floral spice, this is fermented as a field blend with petite sirah and carignane. It leans into red plum flavors in the middle, then lasts on spice. A fresh and summery 2018, this is ready to decant when the garden starts to rev up production in August. —J.G.

**88 | Buehler** \$25

**2018 Napa Valley Zinfandel (Best Buy)** Soft and gentle with honeyed red berry flavors, this is a gracious, floral zin to pour at a cookout. —J.G.

### NAPA VALLEY SUB-DISTRICTS



**95 | Howell Mountain Vineyards** \$55

**2018 Howell Mountain Napa Valley Old Vine Zinfandel** Mike Beatty's zinfandel parcel grows at an elevation of 1,800 feet, where the vines were planted at the turn of the 20th century. In 2018, those vines offered up Howell Mountain's volcanic power with soothing gentleness and grace. At first, it fills the mouth with tannins, dry and austere, yet the chewy red fruit lasts and gives a lively, delicate impression. The flavors open several days after the bottle is first opened, a tangy array of red cherry, blueberry and blackberry, flavors that sustain their freshness in the company of the pungent volcanic earthiness. A high-elevation beauty, this has the substance and balance to age for a decade or more. —J.G. (600 cases)

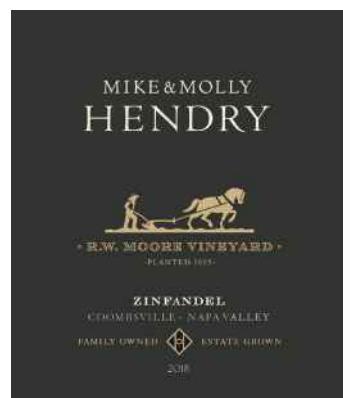
**94 | V. Sattui Winery** \$54

**2018 Howell Mountain Napa Valley Black Sears Vineyard Zinfandel** From a high ridge facing east at an elevation of 2,400 feet, this wine's volcanic power is tamed by fruit ripened in the cool morning sun. That fruit is bright purple, rich with the pithy acidity of ruby-red grapefruit, energized by the sting of its smoky tannins. Focused in its fine ripeness, this feels sleek and trim for a Howell Mountain zin, accessible enough as a young wine to decant for something spicy, like an Indian curry. But best to hold it for five years or more to let the complexity evolve. —J.G. (714 cases)

**93 | Brandlin** \$50

**2018 Mount Veeder Napa Valley Old Vine Brandlin Vineyard Zinfandel** Henry Brandlin, a Swiss immigrant, planted zinfandel at his estate on Mount Veeder in 1926.

Thomas Schmidheiny, a cement magnate from Switzerland, purchased the property in 1998 and installed Daniel Zepponi to manage it. While most of the property's 49 acres of vines are relatively young, this wine comes from the original planting, its complex presence speaking of the evergreen forests of Mount Veeder and the luxurious concentration of fruit from these ancient vines. The cool red cherry and saturated strawberry flavors share the texture of filet mignon, a decadent match for this wine. —J.G. (136 cases)



**92 | Mike & Molly Hendry** \$42

**2018 Coombsville R.W. Moore Vineyard Zinfandel** Mike Hendry manages the vineyards at his family's ranch west of the town of Napa; he started working with Bill Moore at his vineyard on the east side of town after marrying Moore's niece, Molly—launching this wine in 2009. The latest vintage is bristling with tannins and tart blackberry flavor. While oak aging has helped enrich the wine, it's the berry flavors that last, concentrated with a gentle undertow of richness. —J.G.

**92 | Stags' Leap Winery** \$150

**2017 Stags Leap District Ne Cede Malis Petite Sirah** Planted in 1929 at the Stags' Leap estate, this five-acre block is a mix of 16 varieties, focused primarily on petite sirah. Often restrained in style, the 2017 vintage brought up the volume in this wine, a big, plush red that builds on its spice notes as it opens with air. The satin texture reveals scents of cracked peppercorns, from pink to green and black. There's also an herbal note of thyme over the flavor of dried cherries. Serve it with roast goose for an historical perspective on food and wine. —J.G.

**92 | Stags' Leap Winery** \$125/1.5L

**2018 Stag's Leap District 125th Anniversary Petite Sirah** This is long on fresh black