

2008 Dashe Cellars

McFadden Farms Zinfandel “L’Enfant Terrible”

HISTORY

If we had one word to describe this unusual wine from a vineyard high in the mountains of Mendocino County, it would be “wow.” This is a wine that has shown us that it is possible to create complex, balanced, world-class wine from California Zinfandel—and that to be great, Zinfandel doesn’t need to be jet-black in color and high in alcohol. Substantially lower in color than typical Zinfandel, the L’Enfant Terrible is a wine that defies expectations. From start to finish, it is unusual in character: lower in alcohol, unfinned and unfiltered, extremely low in SO₂, fermented using native yeasts found on the grapes, organically grown. It’s a wine made in a style that we love—totally drinkable, yet with a complexity that grows stronger over time. With patience, it evolves into a thrilling wine.

It really tastes more like a wine made from one of the great regions in the Beaujolais region of France than wine made in California. It has the earthiness and minerality of a European wine, blended with the warm, sweet red fruit character of a superb California vineyard. Although light in approach, the wine also has a velvety thickness on the midpalette that is extremely attractive.

The vineyard is in a cooler wine region—the mountains of Potter Valley, with its warm days and quite cool nights. We call it “L’Enfant Terrible”—the rebel child—both because it tastes unlike anything you’re likely to find in California, and because this Zinfandel vineyard is surrounded by white grape vines—Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Pinot Blanc—so it appears like a misfit within this cooler growing region.

PRODUCTION

Totally natural from start to finish. The grapes started as organically grown, by the great grape-grower Guinness McFadden, and had almost no additions to the vineyard except for elemental sulfur. It was fermented using native yeasts found naturally growing on the grapes, in a stainless steel tank. It is unfiltered and unfinned, to keep the fruit as pure and distinctive as possible, reflecting the character of the vineyard.

Unfortunately, in the vintage of 2008 a springtime rain shower knocked the flowers off of the clusters, dramatically decreasing the yields by 60%. Although the quantities were tiny, the quality was great. Since we had too little wine to age in our 900 gallon cask, we aged the wine on its lees—the yeast material that conducted the fermentation—in old barrels, and stirred the barrels once a week to keep the wine in contact with the lees. By using older barrels we intentionally kept this wine away from heavy oak influences, and enhanced the lovely fruit character of the wine.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Varietals: 100% Zinfandel (even though it tastes like Gamay!)

Appellation: Potter Valley, Mendocino County

Alcohol: 13.8% by vol.

Time in oak: 8 months, 100% older French, stirred once a week.

Production: 220 cases, 750mL

Release date: June 15, 2009

Sugg. retail price: \$24.00 bottle, 750mL

Optimum time for consumption: 2009-13

TASTING NOTES

Color : Beautiful ruby red

Aroma:: Toasty, earthy, minerals, then intense strawberry and black cherry aromas, white pepper.

Taste: Entry is of fresh red fruit, delicious in its purity and freshness. Spicy, complex, full of mineral and earthy notes. A bit richer in the mid-palette than the 2007. Initial impression of austerity gives way to complex flavors of black cherry, granite, and spice. Clean, lingering fresh fruit finish.