

2009 Dashe Cellars Zinfandel Late Harvest Dry Creek Valley

HISTORY

Small packages can contain huge surprises, as our Late Harvest Zinfandel exemplifies. This intense wine—made from grapes grown on Bella Winery's Lily Hill vineyard in northern Dry Creek Valley—is both complex and balanced, and is a superb example of how a sweet desert wine can be made to be elegant and balanced. Made entirely from grapes grown on the shallow, rocky soils of this steep vineyard, the environment makes the vines struggle to survive, which in turn help the vines create very concentrated, complex grapes. One of the reasons that we love this vineyard for Late Harvest zinfandel is the wonderful acidity of the grapes. Even when we wait an extra four weeks or so to harvest the grapes (the average time that we need to leave the grapes to have them turn into Late Harvest) the grapes maintain their acidity. The resulting wine is always focused and clear—it's never cloying, and always finishes with a crisp, clean, sweet-spicy note.

The 2009 vintage was a classic California vintage, hailed as one of the best in a decade. Moderate temperatures at harvest allowed us to slowly ripen the grapes, resulting in one of the best late harvest wines we've made.

PRODUCTION

As always, it's always a nail-biter to get Late Harvest Zinfandel in so late in the season. We harvested in late October, and the grapes arrived at the winery right at 38° Brix of sugar.

We crushed the grapes to a small 1,500-gallon tank and as is our tradition at Dashe Cellars, we fermented the grapes naturally, using the native yeasts that naturally live on the skins of the grapes. Since the grapes were super ripe, the fermentation roared off at the start, and then rapidly slowed as the yeast created over 10% alcohol. The fermentation finally sputtered to a halt when the alcohol had reached about 14 percent and the sugar level was 9 percent. We always allow the wine to achieve its balance of sweetness and alcohol naturally, by letting the fermentation finish up on its own.

As is our tradition, the wine was aged in older French oak barrels to not overpower the intensity of the fruit. During our blending trials, we decided to stay with our tradition of bottling the wine as soon as possible to maintain its fresh fruit flavors and conserve its lovely sweet concentration and purity. The wine is unfinned and received minimal handling to the bottle.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Varietals: 100% Zinfandel
Appellation: Dry Creek Valley
Sonoma County
Alcohol: 14.1% by vol.
Residual Sugar: 9 %
Time in oak: 5 months
Oak: 100% French; no new oak
Production: 975 cases, 375mL
Release date: November 1, 2011
Sugg. retail: \$24.00 bottle, 375ML

TASTING NOTES

Color: Dark purple
Aroma: Lovely aromas of black raspberry, cherry, and floral notes of lavender and violets. The aromas have hints of dried cranberry and plum, cocoa, vanilla, black pepper spice.
Flavors: Lovely, soft black raspberry, black currant, blackberry, plum, and hints of chocolate and vanilla. The lovely, complex fruit is balanced with nice acidity, making the wine sweet but not at all cloying—an ideal and not overpowering dessert wine.