

# YEAR'S BEST US ZINFANDELS

Our blind panels tasted **151** new-release US zinfandel wines over the past 12 months. **Joshua Greene**, our critic for California, rated **33** as exceptional (90+) and **13** as Best Buys. Find a complete list of wines tasted and all reviews at [wineandspiritsmagazine.com](http://wineandspiritsmagazine.com).

## 94 | Ravenswood \$39

**2015 Russian River Valley Belloni Zinfandel** Ricardo and Natalia Belloni grew up in Italy's Emilia-Romagna region, moved to California and eventually purchased a vineyard on Wood Road outside Santa Rosa in 1971. It's a flat site on clay-loam soil, and the vines—mostly zinfandel, with petite sirah, carignane and alicante bouchet—were originally planted around 1900. It was the age of the vines and the relatively cool Russian River climate that attracted Joel Peterson to the vineyard, part of his collection of single-site zinfandels since 1991. When Belloni hits, as it did in 2015, it's a wine of restrained power, its fresh blueberry flavors underscored by an earthy focus—by forest floor and savory notes of bluefoot mushrooms. There's warm generosity pushing against the cool restraint, the flavors lasting on overdrive. (550 cases)

## 94 | Ravenswood \$60

**2015 Sonoma County Old Hill Vineyard Zinfandel** William McPherson Hill, an early proponent of non-mission grapes in Sonoma County, founded his ranch in 1851. This vineyard, a parcel he and his descendants held onto until 1940, was overrun by poison oak and blackberries when Otto Teller purchased the property in 1981. Teller cleared the brush to reveal vines that were nearly 100 years old, sustained on St. George rootstock. Rather than rip them out, he found an interested buyer for the fruit in Joel Peterson, who has made a single-vineyard wine from Old Hill since 1983. Will Bucklin, the current owner, conducted a census of those ancient vines and identified at least 14 varieties—mostly zinfandel, along with grenache, petite sirah, carignane and alicante bouschet. He continues to sell grapes to Peterson, who produced an elegant 2015 from the mix. It's bright and juicy, lasting on cherry freshness, with earthy tannins adding spice to the succulent fruit. This is a delicious California classic, remarkably easy to drink. (900 cases)

## 93 | Clif Family Winery \$45

**2015 Howell Mountain Napa Valley Gary's Improv Zinfandel** The Beatty Ranch in Angwin sustains century-old zinfandel vines,

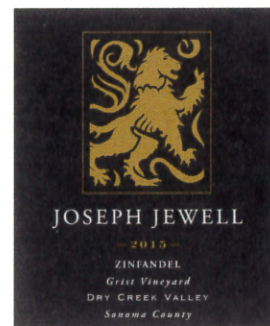
looking west over the Napa Valley at elevations above 1,800 feet. Laura Barrett caught this fruit at the peak of ripeness, though the wine still demands hours in a decanter to open past the initial blast of alcohol. It turns racy, with fresh, wild red-berry flavors, black-olive notes and mineral-inflected tannins. Forget it in the cellar for ten years, or leave it in a decanter for 12 hours before you pour it with grilled Provençal lamb. (W&S 12/17; 370 cases)

## 93 | Green & Red \$30

**2015 Napa Valley Chiles Mill Vineyard Zinfandel (Best Buy)** While Jay Hemingway's two other estate vineyards face northeast, rising up the ridge in the Chiles Valley, Chiles Mill faces northwest. When Hemingway replanted the vineyard in the mid-1990s, he selected the material from the Trentadue Ranch in Geyserville; aside from zinfandel, the cuttings included a bit of petite sirah, syrah, carignan and grenache, along with some Italian varieties. In 2015, those vines seem to have benefited from both the cool morning fog and the warm afternoon sun, offering a wine that's at once supple and voluminous while remaining firm and tight. When you first open the bottle, you might find balsamic concentration to the flavors and dried mushroom scents. Give it time in a decanter and the wine gains in freshness, a raspberry rasp and boysenberry tartness reining in its rich middle. Cellar it, or decant it for grilled quail. (900 cases)

## 93 | Hobo \$30

**2015 Rockpile Branham Rockpile Vineyard Zinfandel (Best Buy)** Bristling with energy, this wine gains its edge from a cofermentation of fruit from old zinfandel vines and a little petite sirah harvested at the same time, which puts it on the early side of ripeness. Kenny Likitprakong fermented it with 30 percent whole clusters and without added yeasts, then aged it in French oak puncheons. That oak mellowed the wine toward supple fruitiness, with umami notes of forest mushrooms and tart cherries, but the emphasis is on rocks, sage brush and high-elevation chaparral. (226 cases)



## 93 | Joseph Jewell \$42

**2015 Dry Creek Valley Grist Vineyard Zinfandel** From a vineyard at the top of Bradford Mountain, this zin was planted in 1974 on red volcanic soils. The wine's bright color predicts its raciness, with equally bright notes of tarragon against sleek, dark-toned grape-skin tannins. Powerful, savory blackberry flavors last, resonant with spice. (W&S 2/18)



## 93 | Kunde \$60

**2015 Sonoma Valley Reserve Century Vines Zinfandel** Planted in 1882, the Shaw Vineyard is a mix of ancient, dry-farmed vines with any replacements grafted to selections from the original budwood. There were four passes through the old vines in 2015, the fruit from each kept separate through a cold soak, fermentation and aging in both French and American oak. Winemaker Zach Long blended the lots together into a vibrant zin, deep red in color and flavor, the wine's beautiful ripeness offering cool, savory, floral spice tightening around a sweet fatness of cherry flavor. It remains firm and zesty for days after it's been opened, predicting decades of development ahead. (1,740 cases)

0 74808 02019 5