

# 2006 Old Vine Zinfandel *Reserve*

Buchignani/Garcia Vineyard  
Dry Creek Valley

The Buchignani (“Boo ken ya nee”) family planted this vineyard starting 120 years ago and have been farming it ever since. These gnarled old vines produce sparse bunches of incredibly flavorful fruit. Old Zins ripen unevenly, challenging the talents of the grower and wine-maker and adding character to the wine. We’ve been making Zinfandel from this vineyard for 35 years.

JoJo Garcia, who’s married to Suzie Buchignani, is the best dry farmer I know. This is very specialized farming that requires tireless effort and a great deal of experience to produce optimal fruit and long living vines. 2006 gave us a gentle growing season, not too hot, no unseasonable rain and good even crops. The 06 Sonoma wines show good structure and balanced fruit, nothing out of place. This Zinfandel was picked almost a month later than usual, taking longer in the cool summer to achieve full ripeness and flavor. The picking day was chosen by walking the vineyard every few days until it just feels right, from the smell, the look of the fruit, the touch, the taste. It’s a target chosen through experience, since instruments do us no good in a vineyard like this.

We hand-picked into small bins so as not to crush the berries. At the winery we sorted out any damaged bunches or berries but sorted less for ripeness than we usually do because these gnarled old vines ripen the fruit unevenly. If you pick out all the under-ripe and over ripe berries you disturb the balance in the wine. We’ve learned to trust these old vines. The real secret in making this wine is the whole berry fermentation. We remove the berries from the stems but leave the berries uncrushed. Fermentation on whole berries retains the fruit essences that make the wine rich. Whole berry fermentation allows us to let the temperature during fermentation to peak at 94°F, which extracts maximum color, more flavor, longer tannins, and high glycerin levels, which adds to the viscous mouth feel. The whole berries retain compounds that mask the high alcohol, like vermouth in a martini. We start the fermentation on native yeast and finish it on specialized yeast that tolerates the high alcohol, produced from the ripest grapes. The result is this remarkable wine. We made just 25 barrels, 8 of the barrels were new, 3 French, from a cooper who makes very aromatic barrels, and 5 American, 2 from Pennsylvania and 3 from Missouri oak, all three year air dried.

The nose is fruity with nuances of blackberries, ripe cherries, chocolate, tobacco, licorice and oak, with nuances of allspice and cedar. A rich explosion of fruit expands in the middle of the palate. The high alcohol drives the flavor up without a hint of heat. Everything about this wine is intense. The finish is exceptionally long and lingering. This wine can be aged for at least 12 years, maybe 20.

Winemaker: Robert Rex

Harvested: October 10, 2006

Brix at Harvest: 27.5°. Estimated maximum Brix after soak 33°

Acid at Harvest: 5.8 g/L as Tartaric, 1 g/L added. pH 3.65.

Yeast: Started on native yeast and later inoculated with L2226 yeast.

Aging: 28 months in 38% French Oak, 62% American Oak, 32% new

Fining: none. Filtration: Cross flow at bottling

SO<sub>2</sub> at Bottling: 22 ppm free, SO<sub>2</sub> at release 12 ppm

Bottled: 550 cases – March 7, 2009. Released: February 1, 2010

Alcohol: 17.4% (the bottle says 17.2%), Residual sugar: 0.12%

Awards & Reviews: 95 pts Wine Enthusiast, Gold Medal, Sonoma Harvest Fair

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