

THE WINE GUY: MY DESERT ISLAND PICKS

BY DAVE MCINTYRE – September 28, 2007

Good value and high quality make the zins and cabs from Sonoma County's Dry Creek Vineyard go-to favorites.

Dry Creek Vineyard is what I call a “desert island winery,” though not because the sailboats that festoon their labels make me think of the tropics. If I were stranded on a desert isle and had to survive on the products of a single winery, I would want one that produces a wide variety of wines at consistently high quality and good value. Dry Creek easily makes the grade.

Those sailboats reflect a passion of David Stare, who founded the winery in 1972. Now under the direction of his daughter, Kim Stare Wallace, and her husband, Don Wallace, the winery remains family-owned and -operated, despite being relatively large for Sonoma County's Dry Creek Valley.

From a lineup that includes a delightful chenin blanc, three delicious sauvignon blancs (which they label as fumé blanc, an alias for the grape popularized by Robert Mondavi in the 1960s), and several zinfandels and Bordeaux-varietal reds, it can be difficult to pick a favorite.

But I flipped recently for three reds from the 2004 vintage: The Dry Creek Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$22) is gorgeous, spiced with clove and white pepper and lush with sweet ripe black currant, plum, and cherry. The Sonoma County Old Vine Zinfandel (\$25) sets the standard for Sonoma County zin, while the Somers Ranch (\$30), a single-vineyard zinfandel, is rich and velvety with raspberry and cherry fruit, with nuances of smoke and cedar.

Normally, I wouldn't think of zinfandel as a wine to drink on a desert island, but Dry Creek Vineyard has one other point to praise about their reds—they've kept the alcohol in check. The cabernet and the Old Vine zin top out at 13.5 percent, while the Somers Ranch keeps its balance at 14.5 percent alcohol—still tame compared to some zinfandels these days.

