



Fratelli Perata 2000 Zinfandel, Estate

Paso Robles is Zinfandel. Not just Zinfandel, but historically Zinfandel. For a variety of reasons this grape is ideal for Paso Robles. This was discovered early in the history of grape growing here, and that is a good thing. Fratelli Perata as a family winery has its roots in Zinfandel, also. When Giuseppe Perata came to Ventura County, California as a young man, he brought with him his father's winemaking skills. Every year the family made Zinfandel. It soon became the family's Zingarella. With a 50-year history of making Zinfandel wine, there was no doubt Zinfandel vines would be planted in our Paso Robles vineyard.

Zinfandel vines bud out late in the spring. They like warm weather and cool nights. This balances the ripe fruit with the natural acid of the grape. They like to be head pruned like a goblet of fruit, not stretched out on a trellis wire, ready for a firing squad. This gives a smaller amount of fruit from each vine, all with good sun exposure. They like the soils of Paso Robles. Here is the most striking example of terroir, spicy black pepper mixing with the raspberry bramble of Zinfandel.

Harvest in the fall is usually Zinfandel, first. Its short growing season means it can be harvested before the fall rains. It hates rain. It molds in a rain. Big berries in a tight cluster push against each other after a rain, break, and mold. One year, we did not harvest our Zinfandel for ourselves because it rained on the fruit. We sold the fruit. We like to use only the best fruit for our wines. Some years the farmer loses his bet with Mother Nature. That was one.

Zinfandel is big berries, heavy clusters, and deceptive. In the clusters might be ideally ripe berries, green berries, and raisins. It is very difficult to get a good reading of sugar and acid without crushing the entire crop in the process. Here is where experience shines. Gino can look at his vines and pick the best time. Ripe, sometimes phenomenally ripe if the year permits, is all the winemaker's choice.

The 2000 vintage gives us a chance to have some fun with Zinfandel. The temperatures were warm, but not too hot, a nice growing season. The rainfall was not plentiful but adequate enough so no irrigation was done to our head pruned vines. The vines were harvested very ripe in 1999, stressing the vines; going into the 2000 vintage meant the vines were already working hard. We like that, it means the berries won't be fat and the wine flabby. Our crop was small.

Harvest was on September 16, 2000. The Brix was 25.5, pH 3.4, TA .788 g/100ml. The crew working the harvest like picking Zinfandel: the clusters are huge compared to Cabernet and Merlot, they can walk around the vine to pick all the clusters, and it goes fast. The fruit came to the crusher early in the day at a cool temperature for a long slow fermentation. This helps release all the flavors from the grape skin, along with punching down the cap 4 times a day by hand. After 13 days, the wine was gently pressed to old oak barrels. Old oak is more neutral in flavor, saving the fruitiness of the Zinfandel.

Unlike any of our other wines, Zinfandel is bottled young, though still unfinned and unfiltered. Bottling for the 2000 was February 23, 2002, giving it 17 months of barrel age. This helps maintain the great fruit and black pepper of Zinfandel.

And it is unlike other wines. Picked ripe, the tastes are raspberry to plum. Always, at less than two tons per acre, we are able to get pronounced black pepper from Zinfandel. Some years, like the rainy 1995, the color is light. We don't add any other wine to darken it, like Petite Sirah. Some years it is incredibly dark, like 1997. Our Zinfandel is always 100% Zin. It always has big fruity flavors. This year is no exception.

Zinfandel has been often degraded as a hamburger wine, picnics. We can drink Zinfandel with just about anything. This vintage was paired strikingly well recently with porcini mushroom ravioli in a creamy prosciutto mushroom sauce. It also can do triple chocolate cake. Enjoy.