

Food & Drink



LODI LEADS

If your impression of Lodi wine involves the bottom supermarket shelf, look again—the region is burgeoning with top-notch bottles and surprising varieties. *By Sara Schneider*

WHEN MARKUS AND LIZ BOKISCH realized growing Spanish grapes was their destiny, they abandoned Napa Valley and headed to an unexpected place: Lodi. The choice was more astute than crazy, as winemakers in this region due east of the Sacramento Delta know that conditions here are propitious for a broad range of varieties. And to put it bluntly, land prices fall far enough short of the likes of Napa and Sonoma that they can afford to experiment.

Many wine drinkers, on the other hand, know Lodi for its more commercial bottles. And in truth, large co-op wineries dominated the landscape into the 1960s with jugs and dessert wine. But wine cred here reaches far back, to just after the Gold Rush, when Zinfandel and now-more-obscure red varieties got a toehold. And when the drinking public in this country abandoned those jug blends for varietal wines, many of the area's longtime growers began launching labels of their own, wresting fruit from the large productions and beginning the real study of which grapes do well here in the hands of artisans.

As it turns out, many, many do. At last count, there were 125 varieties—and 110,000 acres—planted in Lodi by 750 growers, with 90 wineries bottling. Those Spanish grapes are clearly at home: 16 wineries are making Tempranillo, and 9 or 10 are turning out Albariño. “Someday people are going to think Albariño is from Lodi, just like they think Malbec is from Argentina now,” says Markus Bokisch. Italian and Rhône wines are also making a splash.

All this makes sense, given Lodi's warm Mediterranean climate. But the delta breezes blow in every afternoon, dropping temps to acid-retaining levels and making surprises possible. Bob and Mari Lou Koth grow 50 German and Austrian grapes in their Mokolunne Glen Vineyards—Kerner, Dornfelder ... And counterintuitively, crisp, savory Lodi rosés come close to channeling Provence.

A new project, though, pays homage to the wine that gave Lodi its start. Taking advantage of the ancient acres here, a group of winemakers are each making Zinfandel from old vines, without dressing it up in any way—no commercial yeast, no new oak, no added acid. Periodically, six Zins are chosen for the Lodi Native program. Ranging from soft and earthy to powerfully fruity with bright acidity, these wines make good on a truth Lodi vintners live with: As Oak Farm's head winemaker, Chad Joseph, puts it, “We can only exceed people's expectations.”



6 great Lodi bottles

Fields Family 2014 Lot 13 Tempranillo (\$28). Dusty rose petal, leather, and pepper around tangy fruit.

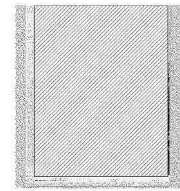
Klinker Brick 2014 Farrah Syrah (\$20). Dark plum and blueberry layered with crushed herbs and licorice.

Michael David 2015 Bechthold Vineyard Ancient Vine Cinsault (\$25). A spicy, earthy red that opens to cranberry and strawberry fruit, from the oldest Cinsault vines in the country.

Michael Klouda 2015 Carignane (\$26). Intense and deep, with dark cherry flavors and spice.

Onesta 2014 Clay Station Vineyard Grenache Blanc (\$20). Crisp and aromatic, with citrus and peaches.

Prie 2016 Mokolunne Glen Vineyards Dornfelder (\$27). Inky and complex, with juicy fruit and grippy tannins.





Liz and Markus
 Bokisch of Bokisch
 Vineyards

If you go ... a mini Lodi guide

Sip



- **Lodi Wine & Visitor Center** Pours a rotating selection of wines from across the region, many from producers without a tasting room; sells Lodi Native Zinfandels too. lodiwine.com.
- **Acquiesce Winery** What you're "surrendering" to here is a line of crisp, aromatic whites and pinks, groundbreaking in big-red country. acquiescevineyards.com.
- **Harney Lane** Enjoy a couple of bottles (the bright Albariño and

rich Lizzy James Vineyard Old Vine Zinfandel would be good choices) outside under the gorgeous trees. harneylane.com.

- **Oak Farm Vineyards** This soaring new "barn" (above) on a historic property raises the bar on tasting here. Don't miss the aromatic Albariño or warm-spiced Barbera. oakfarmvineyards.com.
- **McCay Cellars** The newest tasting room in town sits hard by the old train station. From crisp white to earthy red, the wines impress across the board—Trés Blanc, Petite Sirah, Grenache. mccaycellars.com.
- **Know Place** Insider tips: The frozen Garnacha at this 1910 watering hole in Victor harbors a satisfying kick of vodka, and the Sunday Bloody Mary, complete with an egg, adds up to breakfast. (209) 369-4444.

Eat



- **Bradley Ogden two-fer** The legendary chef (at right) reprises his fresh, produce-laden cuisine in the Towne House Restaurant at Wine & Roses and at downtown's Rosewood Bar & Grill. winerose.com; rosewoodbarandgrill.com.
- **Cheese Central** Cindy Della Monica, font of cheese knowledge, will set you up with a tasty spread for picnicking at local wineries. cheesecentrallodi.com.

- **Lockeford Meat & Sausage Services** Because you can't go home without a stash of the best sausages for miles around, follow the lines to this 45-year-old purveyor. (209) 727-5584.

Stay



- **Wine & Roses** Sharing property with the Lodi Wine & Visitor Center, this hotel and spa is a full-fledged partner in the cause of offering up the well-curated food- and wine-rich stay the region deserves. The gardens invite meandering. winerose.com. 