



**The Event:**

**Ridge Zinfandel—still tasty after all those years**

Back in May a full house gathered for a unique tasting: 13 Ridge Zinfandels from 8 vintages covering a period of 14 years (1978 through 1991). Tom Carroll, who had done a bit of research and talked with the winery about the wines, led us through the tasting. The wines were organized in three flights by vintage: 1) 1978, 1979, and 1980, 2) 1982, 1984, and 1986, and 3) 1990 and 1991.

The crowd was impressed with the ageability of these wines. The 1978 wines had held up extremely well; we had one from Paso Robles that was soft and pleasant and one from Shenandoah that was rich, sweet, and alcoholic with a great finish. Remember that these are 22 year old wines from a grape thought to peak within five years of the vintage. Shenandoah Zinfandels from 1979 and 1980 showed increasing acidity and decreasing richness, corresponding to the lesser quality of those vintages.

The mid-80's wines again agreed well with the general vintage quality. The 1982 York Creek, from a weak vintage, was thin and acidic—definitely over the hill. But the wines from 1984 and 1986, both well-regarded vintages, were still quite good. The 1984 Howell Mountain, one of my favorites of the evening, showed nice spice and sweetness with mint and eucalyptus characters.

Wines from the 1990's vintages differed more by place of origin than by vintage. The 1990 Sonoma, a blended wine from the lower end of Ridge's price spectrum, was a simple wine, probably much less interesting today than six or seven years ago. But all the other wines, while greatly differing in character, were very tasty. Of course, all these were single vineyard wines with significantly higher price tags. The 1991 Pagani Ranch seemed to be the crowd favorite—fruit, fruit, fruit! I was impressed with balance and richness of the 1991 York Creek.

So the conclusions were obvious: 1) Zinfandels from established quality vineyards during a good vintage made by an experienced producer with a good reputation, are easily capable of aging for ten or more years, and 2) Ridge is definitely a fine producer of Zinfandel. Thanks go to two Toms; Tom Carroll for his educational presentation and to my late brother, Tom Mika, for his foresight in collecting these excellent wines.

Peter Mika