

# Houston Chronicle

## The irresistible allure of Dry Creek

California region offers an enticing line of top wines

by Michael Lonsford – October 30, 2006

Having visited just about all of California's wine regions — some many times — it's easy to differentiate their personalities.

The most famous — the Napa Valley — can be picturesque, in a tour-bus sort of way.

Santa Barbara, to the south, is spread out and doesn't get nearly the tourist trade that Napa and Sonoma do. The Santa Cruz Mountains are pretty laid-back, man.

Mendocino keeps pretty much to itself. There are lots of tree huggers and pot growers back in those hills.

Sonoma County? All spread out, too. The Russian River Road winds through some spectacular arboreal settings.

Sonoma Valley — think hot and dry. Alexander Valley? Serene, placid.

But Dry Creek Valley? There's something about it that's, well, alluring. Is it the wines? The people? There's always the feeling there's something special just around the next curve of Lytton Springs Road, or Lambert Bridge Road, or West Dry Creek Road.

MIT grad Dave Stare realized that back in 1972, when he established the first new winery in the valley since Prohibition. Early on he championed grape varieties — the first Sonoma fumé blanc — making red Bordeaux blends, as well as getting Dry Creek recognized as its own official viticultural area in 1983. Stare's 49th-birthday party at the winery — well, it was quite a show.

Stare is retired, and son-in-law Don Wallace and with his wife, Kim Stare Wallace, run the winery now. And he's made some changes.

For one, he hired winemaker Bill Knuttel in 2003, and the wines — always good — took on a new dimension. Wallace trimmed production after 9/11 and



Dry Creek Vineyard

*Sonoma County, California's Dry Creek Valley is home to 50-plus family-owned wineries*

focused on Dry Creek Valley fruit. Exception: The chardonnay is Russian River Valley, which is primo chardonnay country.

He also focuses on "real" old-vine zinfandel — 80 to 100-plus years old. Think short, stumpy trees with a few grapes on them.

Over lunch we tasted through most of the DCV portfolio, ending with the "big boy" — and I'm not joking. The Endeavour is DCV's top-of-the-line red wine, the 2002 being 90 percent cabernet sauvignon and 10 percent cabernet franc. And it comes in a bottle that's so big and heavy that "it comes in a six-pack wooden box that weighs as much as a full, 12-bottle case," Wallace said.

Why "Endeavour"?

Wallace laughed; he was ready. "Because it was an endeavour to find the vineyard, and it's an endeavour for guys to carry a case!"

### 2005 Dry Creek Vineyard Chenin Blanc

★★★★ 1/2 — "chenin doesn't have a good reputation, because too many wineries sugar it up. This wine is crisp, clean and fruity. Think oysters on the half shell."

### 2005 Dry Creek Vineyard Fumé Blanc

★★★★ — "peaches, melons and grapefruit here, with good acidity."

### 2004 Dry Creek Vineyard Chardonnay

★★★★ — "good citrus qualities."

### 2004 Dry Creek Vineyard Taylor's Vineyard Musqué

★★★★ — "a subset of sauvignon blanc, with orange peels and melons; only 3 1/2 acres of this at DCV."

### 2003 Dry Creek Vineyard Fumé Blanc DCV3

★★★★ 1/2 — "whoa, hoss, taste this blind and you'll be hard-pressed not to think it's French, with it's excellent minerality and wet-stone nuances."

### 2004 Dry Creek Vineyard Heritage Zinfandel

★★★★ — "supple raspberry-chocolate flavors; good price, too."

### 2003 Dry Creek Vineyard Old Vine Zinfandel

★★★★ 1/2 — "spicy raspberry-pepper-mocha flavors — complex; "old vine?" This is the real deal."

### 2003 Dry Creek Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon

★★★★ — "chocolate and cherries here."

### 2002 Dry Creek Vineyard Meritage

★★★★ — "complex red Bordeaux blend; having steak tonight? Here's your wine."

### 2002 Dry Creek Vineyard Endeavour Cabernet Sauvignon

★★★★ 1/2 — "a cornucopia of violets, blueberries, cassis, vanilla and a touch of dried herbs; sometimes bigger is better."

*Dry Creek*  
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