

# WINE COUNTRY

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## Little Bella Vineyards makes some big wines

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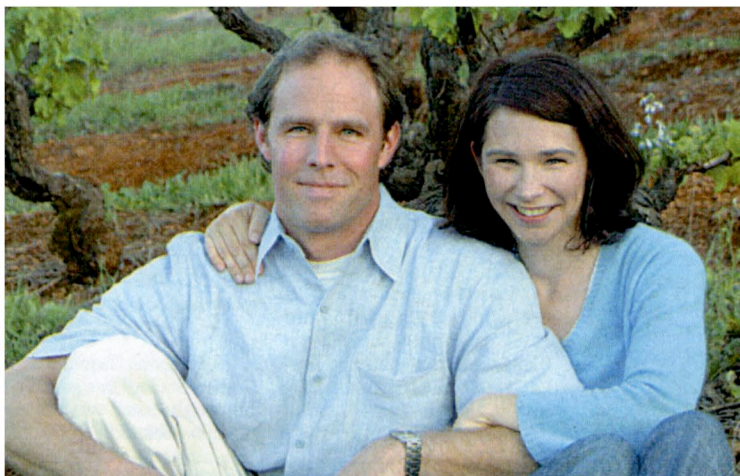
**I**T TURNS OUT that you can, in rare instances tell something about a wine from looking at its label.

The trend to using abstract design and minimalistic swishes and swirls has gotten out of hand. But in the case of the zinfandel produced by Bella vineyards of Healdsburg from its vineyards at Big River Ranch, the Russian River and a hilltop are clearly visible.

What you can't see without visiting these hilltop vineyards on the border of the Alexander Valley and the Russian River Appellations is that the 110-year-old vines are, in the words of Bella co-owner Scott Adams, "as tall as people." "We call it our zinfandel forest," says Scott's wife, Lynn Adams.

The age of the vines is probably more important than their size. According to Lynn, they produce grapes that consistently deliver intense flavors (blackberry, cassia, coffee and chocolate) that the Adamses bottle into a thick and luscious wine that could almost double as a dessert.

There is good news and bad news about the 2001 vintage, which is 100 percent varietal. The good: Influential wine critic Robert Parker gave it



**PARTNERS:** Scott and Lynn Adams married in the wine country in 1994 and cemented their relationship with the region at the same time by starting Bella Vineyards in Healdsburg not long after. Behind them are some of the 110-year-old grapevines they cultivate for their specialty, zinfandel.

90 points. The bad: Bella Vineyards only produced 975 cases. Those are big numbers for a small winery.

Granted, the Adamses make other wines—many others, in fact, but not in great quantity. For example, they also make a syrah from Big River Ranch (300 cases). But their focus is primarily on zinfandel, which comes from two other vineyards as well.

The story of Bella vineyards is a romantic one. In 1994, Lynn and Scott were married in the wine country and decided to dedicate their lives to two pursuits: outdoor living and fine

wine. A year later, Scott's family went into partnership with the young couple and bought their first vineyard, at the far end of Dry Creek Valley on the west bank of the creek. Before long, Lynn and Scott Adams had moved to the valley to manage the property.

They spent 4½ years learning about grape growing, all the while tending the vineyards before they felt ready to think about winemaking.

In the midst of establishing their winery, they had two daughters (who, Lynn boasts, quickly learned to sample grapes and stack

cartons). The winery is named in their honor (Belle and Lily).

Belle Canyon is the home vineyard, where old-clone vines produce zinfandel (300 cases of the 2001 vintage). Lily Hill, also in Dry Creek Valley, delivers yet another zinfandel (800 cases were made of the 2001).

The Adamses have added two late-harvest wines to their portfolio that they are offering as credible alternatives to port. They see the late-picked estate zinfandel as an ideal accompaniment to the cheese course, and the Big River Ranch late-harvest

zinfandel as an incomparable companion for decadent chocolate desserts.

As a winery that produces tiny amounts of single-vineyard wines, Bella Vineyard allows itself the luxury of postponing its release dates. The owners feel strongly that the wine should be completely ready to drink before it is released, and for that reason delay the date for a year or more to allow sufficient time in the barrel and in the bottle.

The winemaking team consists of Scott Adams, Joe Healy and Michael Dashe, a 20-year wine industry veteran who had stints at Schramsberg, Far Niente in Napa, Chateau Lafite Rothschild in Bordeaux and Cloudy Bay in New Zealand.

The last step for the couple has been to build a cave, which has become an elegant place for wine tasting. It is open from 11:30am to 4:30pm daily. Bella is at 9711 W. Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg; call 707-473-9171 or visit [www.bellawinery.com](http://www.bellawinery.com).

On April 24 and 25, Bella will be one of dozens of wineries participating in the Dry Creek Valley's Passport Weekend. Unfortunately, the event is already sold out.