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DRY CREEK

New wineries in land of zin keep links to past

by VIRGINIE BOONE
the Press Democrat

Dry Creek Valley is an area marked by the persistence of hardworking farming families and a longstanding wine appellation as strong as the zinfandel for which it is famous. Names such as Pedroncelli, Seghesio, Rafanelli and Teldeschi are etched on the valley's age-worn road signs. These are the families who have persisted, through Prohibition, world wars, the vagaries of the zinfandel



Scott and Lynn Adams, in front of their new, rustic Dry Creek Valley tasting room at Bella Vineyards, a popular destination at the 2004 Passport Weekend.

grape, the emergence of cabernet sauvignon and the Napa Valley, population growth and market competition from other parts of California and beyond.

"Zinfandel still reigns as king of Dry Creek Valley," said Rob Weinstock, chief viticulturalist at Alderbrook Vineyards in Dry Creek, who grew up farming his own family's vineyards. "Its value as a cash crop during Prohibition and the Great

Depression saved many ranches from foreclosure."

Zin helped the families survive; in turn, their survival served to establish zin as one of the premier red grape varieties in California.

Dry Creek is one of the standard bearers for zin and is recognized for producing big, dense, fruity zinfandel wines with hints of spice and vanilla. Cabernet sauvignon,

sauvignon blanc and merlot also are grown in notable quantities there, and there are pockets of growers taking an interest in syrah, but most wineries don't set up shop in Dry Creek without caring about zin. Enterprising families continue to be drawn to the valley, looking to find their own plot of land to continue the legacy. Bella is one of them.

The hit of last year's Passport Weekend and one of Dry Creek's newcomers, Bella is owned and run by Scott and Lynn Adams, a young couple with two small daughters who moved up to Healdsburg from San Francisco several years ago.

While the Adamses were deliberate and determined about moving to the Wine Country and getting into the wine business, their route to Dry Creek was serendipitous.

As it happened, during their wedding weekend a valley or two over in Rutherford, one of their geographically challenged friends managed to plan a bicycling tour through the Dry Creek Valley, more than an hour out of everybody's way. The tour would launch near Preston Winery.

Despite the distance, everyone enjoyed themselves, the wedding went without a

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LYNN ADAMS
owner of Bella Vineyards

hitch, Scott and Lynn's interest in wine continued to grow, etc., until a couple of years later, when Scott enlisted his dad to look for potential vineyard sites. "He was going to check out a winery," Lynn Adams recalled. "It was in Dry Creek, almost exactly where the bike tour had started."

The search stopped there.

"We definitely felt like Dry Creek had this special, magical feeling of community," Lynn added. "We found it a place to call home very easily."

Scott was drawn to the area's agrarian roots. "It felt very rural, especially when contrasted with some of the other areas where we were looking. It has an old-world appeal."

The pair's instincts proved right. As they immersed themselves in starting a new winery, "it was surprising how open to us they were," Lynn said of her Dry Creek neighbors. "We were outsiders

from San Francisco, coming from different industries. So many of them took us in to see what they were doing. They were really rooting for us."

Bella is now producing stellar estate-grown, old-vine zinfandel from their property at the end of West Dry Creek Road, where they have just put the finishing touches on a new tasting room. Their deluxe wine caves, where they host a revolving door of packed parties, concerts, tastings and cooking classes, were unveiled late last year.

Bella's Lily Hill and Belle Canyon Vineyard zinfandels (named for each of their daughters) are classic Dry Creek zins, showing a remarkable concentration of dense cherry and raspberry flavors.

"We're aiming to make big wines that have an elegance about them," Scott explained, something the best Dry Creek wines all strive to achieve.

Lynn added, "The farming comes first. We let (the grapes) do their thing. That's the history around here."

INFORMATION: 9711 W. Dry Creek Road, 473-9171, www.bellawinery.com. Open daily 11:30am-4:30pm.