

## LoCA for Lodi wine

June 16, 2015

1:50 AM MST



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The LangeTwins Sauvignon Blanc 2014 is crisp and highly aromatic, floral and fruity, with a smooth texture, \$14.  
*Patricia Decker*

The genie is out of the bottle! Your wish is Lodi's command. Good wines are coming out of California's Central Valley, and Lodi is the epicenter for an explosion of distinctive, affordable wines. With approximately 100 varietals grown, from Albariño to [Zinfandel](#), Lodi offers something for everyone, from crisp citrusy whites to full spicy reds. If you like to drink [wine](#) everyday, these bottles are for you. [Lodi wines](#) are really good, and with a large variety to choose from, literally A to Z, there's also an added bonus, they're easy on the wallet, with most selling for under \$25.

Lodi's Mediterranean climate, geography, and diverse soils, framed by a tradition of family winemaking, is what makes Lodi wines so special, according to Camron King, Executive Director of the Lodi Winegrape Commission. King, along with Craig Ledbetter, third generation winegrape grower of [Vino Farms](#), recently came to Los Angeles to spread the word. At a tasting luncheon for wine writers at Drago Centro, six wines demonstrated the range, beauty, and affordability of Lodi wines and



surprised everyone in attendance with just how crazy good they were. [LoCA](#), a catchy name uniting Lodi and California, makes an apt logo for the region.

*Patricia Decker*

For over 150 years, wine has been woven into the fabric of what Lodi does. Waves of European immigrants, inspired by the wild vines that climbed the trees along creeks and rivers, planted wine grapes here. Thriving vineyards made the region's reputation as a winegrape grower, and Lodi busily shipped fruit to producers in other regions, to be bottled as their own. Over time, more than 110,000 acres of grapes were planted, and growers slowly became winemakers. Small family businesses, passed from generation to generation, sold grapes and made wine under the radar for years.

But in the past 25 years, 8 wineries have swelled to more than 85, including big producers with deep pockets and small family-owned boutique cellars. Together, they grow 24% of California's wine grapes, of which two-thirds are red varietals. Realizing that Lodi fruit makes seriously good wine, producers have focused on getting out the message, "you've been drinking Lodi wines for a long time, but didn't know it". Business is booming, with a new emphasis on Iberian varietals, like Albariño, Verdelho, and Tempranillo. In fact, Lodi leads the state with its diversity, racking up the highest number of different winegrape plantings other than Chardonnay, Merlot, and Cabernet.

And with its prestige growing, Lodi is a destination, as well as a beverage. Only 100 miles directly east of San Francisco, this quaint town, charming and friendly, is populated by [tasting rooms](#). Wines are often poured by the grower or the winery's family member, a very hands on wine tasting experience.

Lodi has been known as the "Zinfandel Capital of the world", and rightly so, as it produces over 40% of California's premium [Zinfandel](#), many from vines that are over 100 years old. Yet, old vines are not exclusive to Zinfandel in Lodi. In fact, the [Bechthold Vineyard](#), planted to Cinsault, has been farmed since 1886, making it the oldest Cinsault vineyard in the world. And it still produces world class fruit!

Lodi is "phenomenal for growing grapes" according to King. Lodi's warm days and cool nights give the grapes a 40-45 degree temperature swing during the growing season, which, King says, "develops rich fruit flavors, acidity, and phenolics". Cool Pacific breezes that sweep across the Sacramento River Delta moderate the afternoon heat, allowing the sun to work its magic. With the climate and sandy soils their ace in the hole, the larger Lodi region was recognized as an [AVA](#) almost 30 years ago, with seven smaller AVAs within the Lodi area defined about a decade ago.

Lodi's future is on focused plantings, and a commitment to sustainable farming in their [Lodi Rules](#) program. Since 2005, 25% of producers employ practices such as biodiversity and soil health, which is overseen by a third party, a first in the state. Once verified, a [Certified Green](#) label is affixed to the wines, a guarantee that 85% of the fruit met the standards. This proud badge of honor celebrates the winery's view to the future, improving vineyard health and preserving the environment for generations to come.

Getting back to the wines, a fabulous cross-section of Lodi representative wines were tasted, three whites and three reds, to the astonishment of wine professionals. Why? Because the balance and flavor profiles far outweigh the price point, with 95% of wines retailing from \$17 to \$25. King summed it up best when he said, “So much diversity, so much beautiful wine comes out of the region. Lodi doesn’t put on airs. It’s approachable in a way that people can understand it.”

First, the **LangeTwins Sauvignon Blanc 2014**, is crisp and highly aromatic, due to the estate grown Sauvignon Musque Clone. Floral and fruity, this wine displays tropical fruit (think pineapple) and Meyer lemon. Bright acidity lifts the richer tropical fruit, and the balance and body is delicious. Smooth texture, and a creamy mouthfeel comes from sur lie stainless steel fermentation. This zesty wine is widely available, and retails for \$15. **LangeTwins** are fifth generation winegrowers in the Lodi area, cultivating a whopping 22 varietals. Certified sustainable, they are dedicated to crafting premium wines.

Second, the **Harney Lane Albariño 2013**, is dry and mineral with citrus, pear and pineapple fruit. Made from 100% estate grown fruit, and finished in 50% stainless steel and 50% neutral oak barrels, this wine is a bit more lush than Spanish Albariños, yet finishes long and crisp. An award winning wine, it retails for \$19. **Harney Lane**’s Mettler family has been growing grapes in Lodi for over 100 years and only in the past decade tried their hand at winemaking. Although known for their old vine Zinfandel, they seem to be successful with Albariño, which is commonly grown in Lodi. In fact, it is “Lodi’s version of Chardonnay”, according to King, and while Chardonnay is grown, most of it ships to other areas that are known for their Chardonnays.

Third, the **Bokisch Vineyards Verdelho Vista Luna Vineyards 2013**, is dry and aromatic, with honeydew melon, key lime and sweet orange. Medium and round in body, the palate tastes of apple, papaya, tangerine and hazelnut, with a hint of yeasty dough, and a mineral streak. This small production of what producer Markus Bokisch affectionately calls his “Iberian white stallion” channels his Spanish heritage. Certified Green, this expressive white wine, a blend of 95% Verdelho and 5% Verdejo, is a perfect summer sipper, selling for \$18. **Bokisch Vineyards** is relatively young, specializing in red and white Spanish varietals, and primarily grows fruit for other producers.

Fourth, the **Bokisch Vineyards Tempranillo 2012**, is styled like a Spanish Rioja, a blend of 90% Tempranillo and 10% Graciano. It’s dark fruit and earthy notes make for a complex wine, accented by aromas of rose petals and spice. Flavors of berries and plums, spice, licorice, orange peel, and a dusting of cocoa accent its bright acidity, finishing long and soft, all for a bargain \$23. Tempranillo is known as the “Cabernet” of Spain, and this one echoes the silky complexity of the high altitude Riojas of its homeland. Certified Green, the wine is memorable, very yummy.

Fifth, the **m2 Wines Soucie Vineyard Zinfandel 2012**, a glorious old vine Zinfandel, is dense and lush, with berry, black pepper, hint of mint, and spice aromas. Raspberry, cassis, spice, earth and toasty oak flavors round out this wine. Layne Montgomery of **m2 Wines** buys Soucie Vineyard fruit from almost 100 year old vines, and blends in 2% of Petite Sirah. Beautifully balanced, it’s high alcohol level is almost imperceptible, and it lingers beyond the soft finish. Retailing for \$28, m2 demonstrates how versatile the Zinfandel grape is. As King says, “in youth, Zinfandel is strong and

bold, as it matures, it takes on more character and a smoother style, suave and debonair, and in old age, it has an unmistakable character, fun and full of life”.

The sixth and final wine, the **St. Amant Marian’s Vineyard Zinfandel 2013** is ripe and concentrated, another century old vine Zinfandel. This 100% Zin exudes rich berry fruit, cassis, black pepper, and chocolate aromas and flavors, a stunning example of a classic Zinfandel. In fact, Marian’s Vineyard, referred to locally as the “Mother of all Zins”, regularly gives birth to deep, expressive wines. Stuart Spencer of **St. Amant Winery** buys this fruit to make his compelling wine, which can be found in broad distribution in California and the US for \$24.

A shout out to **Drago Centro**, the food was fabulous and paired extremely well with the wines. The first course, an appetizer of burrata, cherry tomatoes, speck, olive crostini and basil pesto, was silky smooth and insanely delicious, and paired well with the Harney Lane Albariño and Bokisch Verdelho. The second course, an entree of New York steak, with artichoke fricassee, zucchini, olives, and crispy shallots was made more intense and delicious with the Bokisch Tempranillo and m2 Zinfandel. And finally, a dessert of chocolate and olive oil terrine, candied almonds, strawberry jam, and macaroons was perfect with the St. Amant Zinfandel.

Lodi, a consistent producer of high quality grapes, has morphed into a producer of high quality wines. Steeped in history, driven by family ties, the wine landscape is changing rapidly. Excellent wines at amazing prices, it’s a wine lover’s dream come true.



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Burbank Wine Shopping Examiner

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