



Bigger Than Your Head

eating & drinking: the good, the bad, and the rest of it

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The Lodi Native Project: Mokelumne River

Posted by Fredric Koeppl

California's Lodi AVA was approved in 1986, but grapegrowing and winemaking in the area, straight east from San Francisco (and southeast of Sacramento) at the edge of the San Joaquin Valley, go back to the middle of the 19th Century. Zinfandel, especially associated with Lodi, home to a remarkable collection of old vines planted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The AVA was expanded south and west. Lodi is divided into seven sub-appellations, and if you've seen most of these rest easy, because I had not heard of them either: Altaville (seen on labels from Lee Family Farms); Borden Ranch; Clements Hills; Jahant; Mokelumne River; and Sloughhouse. Interestingly, these sub-appellations were the subject of a five-year investigation and evaluation process, were approved by the federal government at once, in August 2006.

As most wine regions are wont to do, Lodi is busily promoting itself and its "subs" as viable entities. One of the steps is the establishment of the Lodi Native Project, this year focusing on the Mokelumne River AVA. This area is characterized by an alluvial fan of sandy, well-drained soils and is a bit cooler than the other six sub-appellations. The idea is that six winemakers would take grapes from old vineyards, ranging from 1958 back to 1901, and make their wines using similar traditional and non-interventionist techniques, including naturally occurring yeasts; no new oak barrels or oak chips, dust or innerstaves; no acid manipulation; and no extraction of tannins from the skins or seeds.

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The establishment of the Lodi Native Project...the idea is to allow the vineyards themselves, their terroir, to be expressed through the wine.

The package of six wines is available for \$180 online at LodiNative.com or, if you're in the area, at the Lodi Wine & Visitor Center.

Lodi Native The Century Block Vineyard Zinfandel 2012, Mokelumne River. Fields Family Wines, Ryan Sherman, winemaker. Three acres, planted in 1905. 14 percent alcohol. (Sherman said in a private communication that the alcohol content on this wine is closer to 13.8 percent.) Medium ruby color; red and black currants, red and black cherries; briars and brambles, lightly dusted graphite; flavors in the mouth lean more toward blackberry and raspberry, hints of fruitcake, black tea and orange zest; dense and chewy yet sleek; borne by dusty, slightly leathery tannins and bright acidity; well-knit, polished, lithic finish. Beautifully-fashioned and poised zinfandel. Now through 2017 or '18. Excellent.



Lodi Native

