

Zinfandel and barbecue a match made for summer

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By Bill Garlough

With all of summer's festivities, like Naperville's Ribfest, barbecue takes center stage for casual dining. If beer is too filling and vodka tonics or margaritas are too strong, wine may be your beverage of choice. With barbecue's rich, bold and spicy flavors, a slightly chilled red zinfandel is an ideal pairing with this summer fare.



Bill Garlough (center) enjoys Ribfest with friends Chuck Bokar (left) and David Buddingh (right).

Zin city, U.S.A.

Zinfandel wine and barbecue are both American in nature.

While zinfandel's roots may trace back to Eastern Europe, its presence in today's wine world is decidedly American. Until recently, zinfandel was California's most widely planted red grape varietal (recently surpassed by cabernet sauvignon). It is not prevalent anywhere else in the world. Zinfandels are jammy with boysenberry notes, loaded with fruit and are slightly peppery. They have soft tannins and tend to be dry in style. Zinfandel is a warmer-climate grape but is known to thrive in cooler climates such as the Russian River Valley in California.

California regions known for quality zinfandels include Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley, the Russian River Valley, Chalk Hill and Mendocino's Redwood and Anderson Valleys. There is a trio of zinfandel vintners that consistently produce quality wine. Known as the three "R's," these exceptional wineries are Ridge, Rosenblum and Ravenswood. Other quality houses include A. Rafanelli, Rochioli, St. Francis, Lolonis, Gary Farrell and Nalle.

Chew on this

To fully appreciate this topic, consider the difference between grilling and barbecue. Grilling is rapid searing over high heat to seal in the juices, such as cooking a steak in 10 to 12 minutes. Barbecue is a slow process of cooking the meal over indirect heat or hot smoke. Cook times are measured in terms of hours, not minutes.

Uncorking the possibilities

Rosenblum "North Coast" Zinfandel - \$12
Ridge "Geyserville" Alexander Valley Zinfandel - \$20
Ravenswood, Sonoma Valley Zinfandel - \$15
Chateau Montelena Zinfandel - \$24
Niebaum-Coppola's Edizione Pennino - \$29
St. Francis "Old Vine" Zinfandel - \$15
Navarro Mendocino County Zinfandel - \$15

While man has been cooking over a fire for more than 250,000 years, in the early 1500s there was an Indian tribe (the Taino Indians) living on the islands of the Dominican Republic that were first observed smoking meat and fish. They used a wooden grate called a "barbacoa" over an open flame to cook their meals. They are credited with being the first people to use a fire pit and a raised grill grate to slow cook their meals. Bold spices such as cayenne pepper also were used. In the 1700s, early Spanish explorers described the West Indies food as having intense smoky and spicy flavors.

Barbecue foods tend to be rich, spicy and full bodied. The caramelization of the sugar in the sauce and the powerful smoke flavors tend to impart a strong and distinct flavor. The

jammy, slightly sweet fruit of a zinfandel is the perfect counter to these dishes. Ideal meats include: barbecue ribs, barbecue chicken (preferably with a bold sauce), duck breasts, beef brisket, grilled steaks, hamburgers, grilled pork tenderloin with a spicy rub and grilled leg of lamb (butterflied).

A hot trend is adding zinfandel to the basting sauce, with bone-in chicken thighs being a favorite.

Clint Mitchell of Vino 100 on Route 59 in south Naperville reports that the 2005 vintage of zinfandel has received critical acclaim and recommends Deux Amis Zinfandel at \$19 a bottle. So, jazz up your next barbecue with a slightly chilled glass of zinfandel and enjoy your summer.

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