

Set Sail for Dry Creek Vineyards



In 1972, after finishing his formal education (degree in Civil Engineering from MIT and an MBA from Northwestern), David Stare packed up his family and set sail in a westerly direction to pursue his winemaking dream. He made port in Sonoma County, California where he bought 55 acres of prune orchards in Dry Creek Valley, then enrolled in Enology and Viticulture classes at UC Davis.

By now, you've probably noticed a few references to sailing. That's because the Stare family has, what can be mildly described as, a passion for sailing. Right down to the colorful and distinctive sailboats that grace the labels on every one of their wines.

Dry Creek Valley is located in the northern portion of Sonoma County where it lies just to the west of the Alexander Valley. This little gem is only 16 miles long and 2 miles at its widest point. It extends from Lake Sonoma at the northwestern point and runs southeasterly where it joins the Russian River Valley at the city of Healdsburg, home to Dry Creek Vineyard.

This valley is blessed with hot summer days, cool ocean-fueled evening breezes and varied topography containing an exceptional range of soil types and microclimates. This combination creates a diverse range of growing areas that gives the Stare family the ability to cultivate a varied portfolio of delicious wines.

Italian immigrants were the first to settle into the Dry Creek Valley in the latter part of the 19th century where they reserved the fertile valley floor for cash crops such as wheat, apricots and prunes, while relegating the rocky slopes to the Zinfandel grapevines from which they made wine intended for family use. However, the rich and spicy wines quickly gained their own reputation and by the late 1800s, wine production became a flourishing industry of its own. Unfortunately, Prohibition (1920-1933) nearly destroyed the wine industry in the valley.

David Stare established the region's first new winery since the end of Prohibition, naming the new venture after the site itself; Dry Creek Vineyards. He disregarded the status quo and set his own course when he ripped out the existing prune orchards and planted Sauvignon Blanc rather than the ubiquitous Chardonnay. The original 55 acres and single varietal have grown into ten estate vineyards totaling 200 acres and 11 different varietals.

Kim Stare Wallace is now hoisting the sails, along with her spouse, Don Wallace, in the family winemaking business. Today, they have the wind at their back and are running full speed making consistently delicious wine.

Chenin Blanc is a classic varietal found in the Loire Valley – and it transplants well to Dry Creek Valley. The **2014 Dry Creek Vineyard Chenin Blanc** explodes with aromas of peach, nectarine and citrus on the nose thanks to the stainless steel fermentation that allows the wine to retain much of its bright fruit characteristics. Those scents translate onto the palate where they are joined by notes of mineral and slate on the crisp finish. I think this would be wonderful to serve with fresh shucked oysters. **\$14**

Kim and Don have been thinking about whether to keep the traditional Fumé Blanc name or change the label to reflect the more well-known varietal name; Sauvignon Blanc. I don't care what you call it, the **2013 Dry Creek Vineyard Fumé Blanc** is great just the way it is, with plenty of grapefruit and kiwi scents to tantalize the nose. Since the wine is not treated to any oak during production, there is nothing to get in the way of enjoying the solid green apple and citrusy flavors that linger on the crisp finish. Great with shellfish. **\$14**

Zinfandel is one of the vineyard's hallmark varietals, and the **2013 Dry Creek Vineyard Old Vine Zinfandel** is a wonderful example of what beautiful fruit the 95+ year old vines can produce. Using a touch of petite sirah and carignane for balance and depth, the wine displays an aromatic nose featuring scents of blueberry and black pepper that lead to flavors of red cherry, plum and blueberry that seem to glide over the palate. Notes of red licorice and spice fill in the lovely finish. I had this last week with hickory-smoked ribs and it was perfect. **\$34**

DVC produces one of my favorite Bordeaux-style red wines. The **2012 Dry Creek Vineyard "The Mariner"** is a blend of all five classic Bordeaux varietals: cabernet sauvignon, merlot, malbec, cabernet franc and petite verdot. Perfume aromas of rose petal, cranberry, blueberry and oregano waft from the glass while vibrant flavors of plum, black cherry and violets blanket the tongue. Warm notes of roasted coffee and cocoa file in on the round, smooth finish. Just the right wine to pair with duck, steak or just a comfortable chair. **\$46**