

## Loving Older Zinfandels

By Charles Olken

### ...To cellar or not to cellar

As zin grew in popularity, and with the blossoming of a modern California winemaking establishment, we began to see more and more examples of zinfandel that seemed to beg for cellaring. Over the years, Connoisseurs' Guide has reported on what now we would call "elderly" and we have concluded that putting massive quantities of zin in the cellar is a less than rewarding strategy.

The problem is not that some wines will age into true beauty, but that too few of them take a long aging path. Unlike solidly structured cabernet, zinfandel cannot be counted on to still be in its growth stages by the time it is six or eight years old. The wines that get that far in good shape are remarkable, and many will get better still, but the ones that fail even this middle-aged test of time are too many in number. For most zins we would consider aging, the truth lies somewhere in the middle—the range of results is simply broader from top to bottom than one experiences with varieties that age more satisfactorily.

In many cases, the wines I would have predicted for the longest lives have not shown a predilection for such happiness and, instead, in more than one case, the most interesting wines in middle age are bottlings that I might not expect to prove so rewarding. I continue to age a few zins simply because they do show so well when they succeed and that is what makes the whole topic so fascinating and challenging at the same time.

Full tasting notes are not provided because the wines are not available, but if you have any of these or know anyone who does, you will get the point straightaway...

### 1998 Zinfandels

#### Frank Family Vineyards ★★

Even as it runs up against middle age, this wine has lost very little and retains its concentrated, compact fruit, its fullness on the palate and its balanced tannins. I would be happy to drink this beauty anytime over the next five years or so.

