

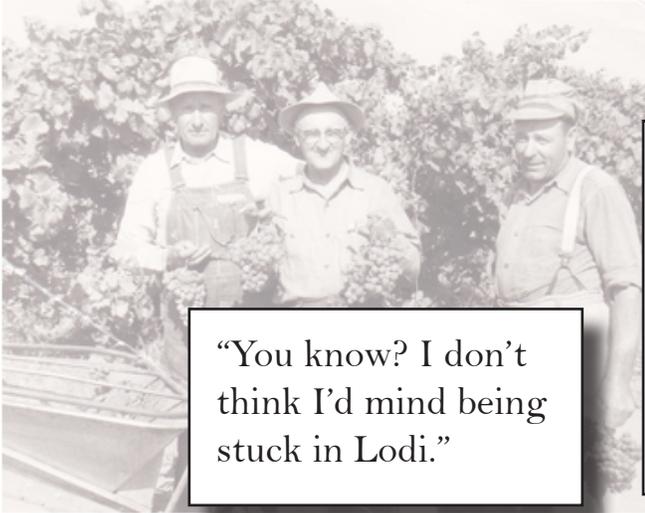
# LOVE BY THE GLASS

BY DOROTHY J. GAITER

# FEEL STUCK?

# TRY SOMETHING NEW FROM AN OLD REGION

wine from a local winery. For now, consider what some innovative winegrowers in Lodi, California, are doing. Lodi is at the northern end of the state's Central Valley, 100 miles east of San Francisco, south of Sacramento and west of the Sierra Nevada mountains.



"You know? I don't think I'd mind being stuck in Lodi."

Lodi (pronounced Low-Die) is the self-proclaimed Zinfandel Capital of the World. It has been a major grapegrowing center for more than 100 years and has long provided a sparkling top of fruit for mostly inexpensive wines -- 25% of in January in a piece titled, "Redeeming Lodi you've ever had a \$10 bottle of wine from C region has to offer."

Today's Lodi is about much more than Zinfandel project under way there, the Lodi Native project. I know that John Fogarty of Creedence Clearwater Revival "wasn't in Lodi again"—he'd actually never been there days when only the huge wine houses there Woodbridge, Turner Road Vintners, Sutter Home, and others have been receding. Lodi still produces a high-quality wine. It produces about 38% of the state's premium Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. But there are some who are making fascinating alternatives to the best known in Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

Like other wine regions that want you to see, winegrowers in Lodi are spending big bucks, and much the area has changed.



After I couldn't meet with the leader of the Lodi Winegrape Commission several weeks ago--notice the emphasis on grape--they sent me a small sampling of the interesting white wines that some are making there. There were from 2013 a mouth-watering and mineraly McCay Cellars Tres Blanc white blend of Vermentino, Verdelho, Muscat and Pinot Noir, and an Uvaggio Vermentino, which had minerals, cantaloupe notes

and a pleasant earthiness, and smelled like orange blossoms. Uvaggio's owner and winemaker, James Moore, calls Vermentino "a thinking person's Pinot Grigio."



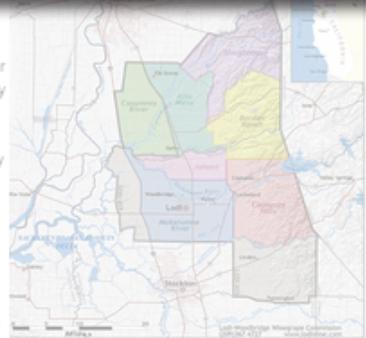
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"...there are now more than 70 boutique wineries [in Lodi] and some are making fascinating alternatives to the same-old, same-old, making interesting wines best known in Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain."

"[The Lodi Native Project] is ultimately a way to continue preserving these old treasured vines and to make a case for the uniqueness of their awesome terroir."

different grape varieties, to the commission reports, and they grow in diverse soils in seven sub-AVAs. Among them is the historic Mokelumne River AVA, home of the oldest continuously planted vineyard, Bechtold Vineyard, established in 1886, according to the commission. The vineyards are farmed by more than 750 growers, some whose families have been growing grapes for generations. Grapegrowers actually started in Lodi during Prohibition when the Volstead Act permitted home winemaking, so train and truck shipments of winegrapes made their way east during those "dry" years.



In the years, Constellation, Gallo, Louis Martini, Robert Mondavi, and Sutter Home "have been on Lodi for signature grapes such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay," according to the commission. Other California wineries outside the area buy Lodi grapes, including Fetzer Vineyards, Dalicato, Napa Ridge, Ravenswood, and Beringer, among others.

about that Lodi Native project. Beginning in 2012, six winegrowers agreed to try to spotlight Lodi's heritage Zinfandel plantings by each making a wine following agreed-upon "sensible viticulture and minimalist winemaking practices." That means, among other things, using native yeast fermentation and no new oak.

"The focus is on Zinfandel," they agreed, "but on the taste of vineyards rather than varietal character or brands." These Lodi Natives are sold in six-packs at the Lodi Wine & Visitor Center and the 2013s will be released in July, Stuart Spencer, the commission's program manager, wrote me. He added, "Several of the customer would need to try to appreciate the uniqueness of their wine."

You know? I don't think

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