



The Lowdown in Lodi

by: [Virginie Boone](#) - 1.7.11

Stretched between the low-lying Central California towns of Sacramento and Stockton, where the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta flushes itself across a fingers-spread of rivers and creeks, Lodi is among the powerhouse wine regions of the state. It's a longstanding growing area that has been selling grapes to and making wines for dozens of big-name wineries with big pedigrees and budgets (Beringer, Mondavi, etc.) for generations.



As with any pre-Prohibition-born growing region, zinfandel is a huge part of Lodi's history, as are several fade-into-the-background varietals once so important to the Italian families who took up residence here: albariño, alicante bouschet, barbera, carignane, moscato, petite sirah, primitivo, tannat, teroldego, verdelho and vermentino. In a renaissance of the old, producers big and small are making ever more intriguing styles of wines from these historic varietals, as well as playing competitively in the world of cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay, sauvignon blanc and syrah. A cost-effective place to farm, especially if one is third- or fourth-generation, Lodi allows both the popular and the adventurous to thrive.



A farming town since 1874, with a knack for nurturing watermelons, grains and Tokay table grapes, Lodi was first acknowledged as a unique wine-growing region in 1956 (it wouldn't become an official appellation until 1986), thanks to distinctively loamy soil and cooling Delta winds which flow off the Mokelumne River that travels through town.

For decades, farmers grew table grapes that were used as a base in brandy, sherry and ports, but in the mid-1960s, third-generation grower Steve Borra founded Borra Vineyards on 30 acres of what is now a 100-year-old farm, making him among the first vintners to establish himself with wine grapes after Prohibition.

It wouldn't be until 1979 that Robert Mondavi would anoint the area in a much bigger way. Mondavi, who grew up in Lodi, came calling from the Napa Valley, buying land and historic buildings on Woodbridge Road and quickly establishing Woodbridge Winery as a household name. It remains such, though Mondavi has since passed and the mega-winery has gone on to pad Constellation Brands' portfolio.

Other big names in Lodi include Delicato, Talus and Michael David. And of course, the area's history includes locals Michael Crete and Stuart Bewley's 1980 introduction of the world's first wine cooler. But while Lodi boasts more than 100,000 acres of wine grapes, much of which still go into large-scale wines, it's also increasingly home to innovative, micro-producers such as Abundance, Bokisch, Harney Lane, Ripken and more, many of them blessed by their families' role in Lodi's history and their own ambitions to show the world what else Lodi can do.

Get a good taste of Lodi through these offerings:

[Bokisch Vineyards 2009 Albariño](#)

Tiny Bokisch is devoted to Spanish varietals, making not only a zippy, refreshingly acidic albariño with plenty of pretty peach and apricot notes, but also impressive versions of tempranillo, garnacha, garnacha blanc and graciano. Co-owner Markus Bokisch's mom is Spanish; he and wife Liz both worked in Spain's wine industry and in Yountville, Calif., for Joseph Phelps before buying plantable land just east of the town of Lodi in Clements Hills. For fun, try either of two albariños they make — the Las Cerezas Vineyard bottling, from a block planted in 1999; or the Albariño Terra Alta, what they like to call “the perfect oyster wine.”

\$16, www.bokischvineyards.com

[Klinker Brick Winery 2008 Farrah Syrah](#)

Another husband-and-wife operation (Steve and Lori Felten) without a tasting room, though one is currently being built, Klinker Brick is a name to watch in California syrah, thanks much to its Farrah bottlings named for the couple's grown daughter, who is carrying on the family's long farming tradition in Lodi. The 2008 is an intense syrah with notes of black cherry, bacon fat and white-pepper. It has an almost peat-like, whisky aroma, and is ideal for wintry foods. It's made by winemaker Barry Gnekow, who is also the consulting winemaker for Hahn Winery in the Santa Lucia Highlands.

\$20, www.klinkerbrickwinery.com

Uvaggio 2009 Vermentino

Uvaggio winemaker Jim Moore is making a serious case here for Lodi Vermentino, a white Italian grape not too distant in flavor from pinot grigio but more intense. This bottling is a stunner that'll keep you thinking and asking for more. It's compelling — savory with herb and green olive notes, and yet freshly fruity and delicate, well integrated and plenty acidic to stand up to a free-range of food, with only 11 percent alcohol.

\$14, www.uvaggio.com

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Photo: A vineyard in Lodi, Calif. Credit: Lodi Conference and Visitors Bureau

<http://zesterdaily.com/drinking/lodi-california-varietal-wines/>