

New World Wine

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VIE — a New, Cutting-Edge Winery A startup Lake County winery whose products are second to none

VIE Winery's current lineup of Syrah, Zinfandel, and Roussanne provides an excellent example of the New World Style.

In our recent article *Types of Wineries*, we discussed wineries whose products focused on specific vineyards, single varietals, national styles, and direct sales. We might have added to that list those wineries that have become known for their style of winemaking. Most New World wineries offer a spectrum of wines that vary considerably in style. A single winery may offer a classy vineyard designated Chardonnay alongside a blended one and perhaps even an unoaked example. One varietal, three styles.

Our article *Style in New World Wines* identified a style that is becoming increasingly popular. It features a high level of extraction, good acids, and high alcohol levels. Wines made in this manner often rely upon quality fruit sources, often single vineyards noted for a specific varietal. A small new winery in Lake County, California, which typifies the New World Style came to our attention recently. We tasted four of their products and found them all superior wines.

VIE focuses on sourcing world-class grapes from some of California's finest vineyards, such as Beatty Ranch (Howell Mountain), Thompson Vineyard (Los Alamos), and Las Madres Vineyard (Carneros). We've tasted wines from these sources before, but none better than VIE's. They believe in minimal intervention, restrained use of oak, long cold soaks, and use only natural yeasts. VIE's wines are truly hand-crafted. They produce only around 750 cases a year. You won't find these truly exciting wines at your local supermarket, but you can order them using the winery's downloadable order form.

VIE 2005 Roussanne, Round River Ranch, Lake County; 14.1% alc., \$22

Golden straw color. Soft, aromatic nose of caramel, apricot, and green tea. Intense varietal flavors with French oak nuances follow with good acids and a lingering, fruity finish. A stylish wine that will please Chardonnay lovers. This distinguished white Rhône varietal has found a very agreeable home in California's Central Coast and upper Lake County. Softer and rounder than Viognier, it's what California Chenin Blanc might aspire to be, if only it could. **Highly recommended.**

VIE 2004 Last Leg Cuvee; 15.3% alc., \$29

A blend of 60% Zinfandel, 35% Syrah, 5% Petite Sirah, using whole berry, indigenous yeast fermentation. Peppery and slightly smoky nose of blackberries and ripe plum. A dense, jammy wine, packed with rich, delicious ripe fruit flavors reminiscent of a late harvest Zinfandel. A uniquely Californian red blend, unlike anything produced in Europe, Australia, or South Africa. Best enjoyed as a stand-alone wine or with sharp Cheddar cheese or dark chocolate. **Unforgettable. Highly recommended.**

Many of the distinguished European wines are blends. Red Bordeaux, Sauternes, Champagne, Rioja, Chianti, Côte-Rotie, Hermitage, Chateaufort-du-Pape, Côtes-du-Rhône – all blended wines. Historically, California has been the champion of pure (or almost pure) varietal wines. But in recent years two New World red blends have emerged from this region: Meritage (a narrowly defined Bordeaux-style blend) and a Zinfandel blend (Zinfandel plus either Cabernet Sauvignon or Syrah). VIE's Last Leg Cuvee is an outstanding example of the latter.

VIE 2004 Las Madres Syrah, Carneros, Sonoma County; 15.1% alc., \$29

Dense, ruby-purple colored and richly textured. Unmistakable varietal nose of ripe blackberries with meaty and earthy overtones. Very rich, deep flavors. It's excellent acid balance carries the flavors to a very long and satisfying finish. Tannins are notably soft for a wine of this level of extraction, resulting in a wine that drinks very well now but will continue to develop nicely over the next several years. A powerful, stunning Syrah — archetypical of the New World fruit-driven style. A perfect complement to duck or venison with a Cumberland, or other fruit based, sauce. Excellent with any blue-veined cheese. VIE Winery's 2004 Syrah could easily pass for a top Australian Shiraz costing twice as much or more. **Very highly recommended.**

VIE 2004 Beatty Ranch Zinfandel, Howell Mountain, Napa Valley; 15.9% alc., \$29

Clear, dark ruby color. Tears beautifully in the glass. Perfumed, lively nose of bright cherry and plum with a pleasant peppery note. An exuberant and inviting wine, rather than a deep, brooding one that requires discovery and contemplation. Rich on the palate with clean varietal flavors. In spite of its high alcohol level, this is not an "over-the-top" monster. The VIE Winery 2004 Zinfandel is a stylish, classy, full-bodied wine from a distinguished vineyard in one of California's finest Zinfandel appellations. **Exquisite, and highly recommended.**