

PICKING OLD VINES AT RIGHT TIME LEADS TO ZIN DELIGHT

Wine is a time capsule.

That's how Alisa Jacobson, the winemaker of Joel Gott Wines, sees it.

"Each vintage is different due to the climate and I love that you can open a bottle of wine and be taken back to the time the grapes were on the vine," she said.

Jacobson is the winemaker behind our wine-of-the-week winner — the Joel Gott, 2011 California Zinfandel. The zin is easy-going and approachable — a great quaffer. That said, it's more layered than most, with notes of raspberry, blackberry, black cherry, cinnamon and black pepper.

The house style, Jacobson said, is one that strives for balance.

"When I taste other zinfandels on the market, I find them alcoholic and sweet, essentially over-ripe and over-extracted," she said. "I like a more balanced style of wine that shows the fruit as well as acid and natural flavors of the zinfandel. I pick the fruit once I find the flavors in the

vineyard that I want in the wine and before the grapes get too ripe."

Jacobson said what the uninitiated don't know about zinfandel is how historic a grape it is.

"We work with a family in Lodi who are third-generation farmers on their land," she said. "The grapes on that property were planted as early as 1922 ... Fruit off old vines is dense and concentrated. Much of our zinfandel blend comes from these types of vineyards."

Jacobson just passed her 10th anniversary at Joel Gott Wines in St. Helena.

"I've loved every day of it," she said. "The Gotts (Joel and wife Sarah) are great people to work for as they have a lot of energy and great ideas that have taken our winery to some exciting places. We get grapes from as far north as Mendocino and as far south as Santa Ynez ... Joel has always been open to new opportunities and keeps the pace of the winery exciting."