

# The Perfect Glass

After years of working in the wine industry, local entrepreneur creates his own label

.....

By Liz Young • THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH



Scott Zanon left the wine business 14 years ago, but he never lost his desire to find a perfect zinfandel. Now, he's found it. But it's not a big-name brand stocked at his local supermarket. It's a wine of his own design, complete with his name on the label — Zanon Zinfandel.

Zanon is an Upper Arlington resident who owns LifeServers Inc., a company that sells automated external defibrillators, more commonly known as AEDs.

Before starting LifeServers, Zanon worked in the wine industry for 16 years, about 10 of which were spent as a buyer for a distribution company.

“When I did the buying for the company, I got to travel the world, and I got to travel to California a lot,” he said.

Zinfandel was always one of his favorite wines, Zanon said, so a few years ago, he reached out to a family with a vineyard in Dry Creek Valley in Sonoma County, Calif., that he knew from his time as a buyer in the wine industry, asking them to let him know if they ever had any extra zinfandel juice.

Last summer, they called.

Zanon worked with them to set a price and a system where he would blend the wine himself in Dry Creek Valley using the winery’s equipment and facilities.

Intending to put his product on shelves and on restaurant menus, he hired Vintage Wine Distributor, which sells wine and beer to restaurants and retailers in Ohio and has warehouses in Columbus and Solon.

The company specializes in “smaller, boutique-type wines” like his and distributes statewide.

“It all worked,” Zanon said. “Currently in the market is the 2011 Zanon Zinfandel Dry Creek Valley.”

Zanon said the wine has been sold in Ohio since February and is currently offered at about 50 stores and restaurants.

In central Ohio, locations carrying it include both Giant Eagle Market District stores, both Hills Market locations, Weiland's Market, Gallo's Kitchen and Bar, La Chatelaine and Trattoria Roma.

There were 280 cases of the 2011 wine available, Zanon said, but he'll have 600 cases of the 2012 wine, which should be available later this year. Each bottle is priced at \$18.99 retail.

Ohio Wine Producers Association Executive Director Donniella Winchell said it's unusual for someone who was in the wine industry to launch his own label.

"It shows entrepreneurial spirit. It's a very crowded market out there, and having a very sort of unique marketing position is always good," she said.

Winchell added those who start a wine label typically share one reason for doing so.

"Very often, folks who are interested in the wine business create a wine to represent some of their accomplishments in life," Winchell said.

The Hills Market's Worthington location started selling Zanon Zinfandel when it was first released, said Jan Wilson, the wine director.

"I liked the fact that it had sort of a local connection," Wilson said, "but the wine also is good, and I liked the way it tasted, and I liked the way it was priced and it was presented."

She said she knew Zanon from his days in the wine business and was "not surprised at all" that he started making his own wine because she said he also makes his own hot sauces from peppers he grows.

Zanon said he doesn't sell those sauces, though.

So far, Wilson said, Zanon Zinfandel has been a hit, sometimes selling out by the morning after the shelves are stocked.

"It's well-made, nicely balanced, a great food wine," Wilson said.

Matt Citriglia agrees.

He's director of education for Vintage Wine and a master sommelier who lives in Grandview Heights.

"It's good stuff. It is old school (zinfandel)," Citriglia said. "So many of the zinfandels today ... they're so alcoholic and out of balance and out of whack."

Zanon Zinfandel is 14 percent alcohol, while most zinfandels are between 15 and 17 percent alcohol, Zanon said.

Citriglia also said Dry Creek Valley is probably the best area to grow zinfandel vines, and said the wine is relatively inexpensive compared with some of the other Dry Creek Valley zinfandels, which are typically priced at \$25 to \$45 retail.

Winchell said zinfandel is a popular wine in Ohio. "We don't grow any, but we consume a lot of it," she said.

Zanon said he doesn't have plans to market his wine outside Ohio, explaining that making his zinfandel was more of a bucket-list activity for him.

Besides, he said, "I can only get so much juice each year."  
[eyoung@dispatch.com](mailto:eyoung@dispatch.com)

@lizyoungosu