

American Wine Awards 1999

1997 Rabbit Ridge Zinfandel

ACHIEVEMENT **RED WINE VALUE OF THE YEAR**

While Rabbit Ridge proprietor and winemaker Erich Russell makes several irrefutably excellent Zinfandels that cost up to \$35 a bottle, he also pours class and thrift into a single \$15 package: the, 1997 Rabbit Ridge Sonoma County Zinfandel. Russell (who was nicknamed Rabbit because of his speed on the high school track team) is also, understandably, one of California's biggest Zinfandel proponents. And that means reminding hesitant customers that there's more to life than Cabernet. "People are becoming so sophisticated, especially about food," he says. "One of the huge problems with Cabs is that they're so darn tannic--they don't go very well with food. My Zin, even when it's young, isn't tannic. It's big and has tons of fruit." On what occasion does Russell suggest that you let his rabbit out of the hat? "Oh, God," he says, "It's so flexible. Throw it into Thanksgiving with beans, onions, dark meat, white meat, and you'll find it's really something to give thanks for."