Notes of fresh black cherry and raspberry intertwined with vanilla, nutmeg, and cocoa powder dominate on the nose. The body is silky in texture with a round, viscous mouthfeel. Ample acidity bolsters the fruit and body with an elevated finish.

If vines could talk, the old-vine zinfandel in Ray Teldeschi’s 26-acre vineyard on the east side of Dry Creek Valley could weave quite a tale. Paperwork shows that the bench plot was planted in 1915, but local folklore suggests it dates back farther than that, to the 1880s. Save for annual trimming and thinning, the vines have remained relatively untouched ever since. All the while, the gnarled wonders have sent roots deeper and deeper into the clay soil, building the foundation for longevity.

Ray, who’s almost 70, has farmed the vineyard for the better part of about 65 years — pretty much all his life. His father taught him how to care for old vines, about the perils of frost. The meticulous care of these vines, as passed down through five generations of the Teldeschi family, is evident in the outstanding fruit delivered at harvest.

These days, the Teldeschis set aside for Kreck Wines the best of the fruit they grow: a few blocks from the 7-acre plot on which all the old vines sit. Clusters from these vines are relatively small; the fruit is dark. The wine, in turn, is light in color but dense in fresh fruit and classic zinfandel spice. Ray likes to say the wine tells the story of grapes that have learned how to “tough out” life over time. That story continues to unfold.
Flavors are of blackberry pie, dried figs, and ripe plum layered with white pepper and toffee. Big, bold Zinfandel fruit with layered nuances continue to evolve from beginning to end. A full mouth feel and viscous middle is balanced by the moderate acidity.

The 40-acre Del Barba Vineyard in Oakley, east of San Francisco Bay, is almost completely surrounded by residential neighborhoods. This urban development has shrunk what was once a thriving wine region in California. However, some of the remaining vineyards in this area are true gems, sought-after by some of the best Zinfandel producers in the business. We met the Del Barba family in 2016 when looking to source some old vine fruit from this region. Not only did we find an incredible vineyard, we found a family who had been farming it since the early 1900s.

Today on this parcel fourth-generation farmer Tom Del Barba cultivates a small section of 130-year-old zinfandel. The unique characteristics of the head-trained vines are a product of the region. The sandy soil forces the vines to send roots all the way down to the water table, sometimes 20 feet below the surface. While temperatures in this region regularly break into triple-digits in the summer, cool evenings preserve the precious acidity in the fruit.

These conditions stress the zin, but in all the right ways. Below the canopy, the yield is full of flavor and attitude. This profile carries over into the wine: fruit-forward with intense color, big and bold. Perhaps the best way to describe old-vine zinfandel from Del Barba Vineyard is “resilient.” Considering the encroaching sprawl, that word suits the Del Barba family nicely, too.