



PHOTOS COURTESY OF IRONSTONE VINEYARDS

John and Gail Kautz planted winegrapes in the Lodi Sierra Foothills in 1968, and they planted Chardonnay in the region a decade before anyone else.

Rock Solid

IRONSTONE VINEYARDS PRACTICED SUSTAINABLE FARMING IN THE LODI SIERRA FOOTHILLS BEFORE IT WAS DE RIGUEUR

BY MERIDITH MAY

The Kautz family is synonymous with California's Sierra Foothills AVA. In 1988, John and Gail Kautz built a state-of-the-art winery and entertainment center in Murphys, a historic town situated in what was the hub of the gold rush era. Now with vineyards in the Lodi AVA as well as the Sierra Foothills, the family has grown their holdings to 7,000 acres.

Since the beginning, they have maintained sustainable vineyard practices. Kautz won a Ford Foundation award for conservation in 1968, and he pioneered integrated pest management programs in Lodi that are still followed today.

I recently met with Joan Kautz, John and Gail's daughter, who heads up global sales and marketing for Ironstone Vineyards and

its growing portfolio of brands. I was impressed by the quality of the wines, and my notes are a nod to the family, their outstanding vineyard practices, and the new generation that's lifting their standards to greater heights.

Joan Kautz, the youngest of John and Gail's four children, opened the door for Ironstone's distribution around the world; it's now exported to almost 50 countries.



Ironstone 2021 Reserve Chardonnay, Sierra Foothills (\$26)

The grapes for this wine are grown in red, iron-rich soils of schist, granite, and limestone at 2,400 feet above sea level. Joan Kautz describes the use of used barrels here as "integration versus overpower," and we can taste the subtlety imparted by 12 months of aging in French oak. Aged sur lie, the wine possesses a creamy, leesy mouthfeel up front; back-of-the-palate minerality is striking in comparison, along with a flow of cinnamon honey-drizzled pears and a squeeze of lemon. **93**



Ironstone 2022 Pinot Noir, Lodi (\$15)

Including 10% Syrah, the fruit for this wine was sourced from the Kautz family's Thornton Ranch close to the California Delta, which connects to the Pacific. With notes of spiced cherries, roasted coffee, and roses picked from the soil as well as earthy undertones, it's a stunner: We guessed that it was valued at three times more than its actual retail price. **92**



Ironstone 2021 Cabernet Franc, Lodi (\$15)

With Chinon-like notes of Provençal herbs, dark cherry, and jasmine in a delicate, seamless frame, this also overdelivers for the price. **92**

Ironstone 2021 Reserve Cabernet Franc, Sierra Foothills (\$26)

From the Kautzes' Murphys estate, this concentrated red aged for 12 months in French and American oak offers aromas and flavors of chocolate, plum, lavender, soy sauce, sweet laurel, and violets. Dusty cocoa settles atop a mineral platform on the elegant finish. **93**



Ironstone Reserve 2021 Ancient Vines Zinfandel, Rous Vineyard, Lodi (\$30)

This vineyard was planted in 1909; its twisted, gnarly 112-year-old vines are grafted onto St. George rootstock in deep, loamy, sandy soil. They yield a mature-tasting, ripe, and savory red with notes of melting dark chocolate, plum liqueur, and sage. According to Lodi expert and *Tasting Panel* editor-at-large Randy Caparoso, "Ironstone's finest, of course, is its Rous Vineyard Zinfandel, known for floral/violet and blueberry/cherry qualities very specific to this vineyard. It's very distinctive and one of the finest in Lodi in terms of layering and balance." He adds, "This section of land is called the Victor Triangle, located on the east side of the Mokelumne River AVA; centered around the small census-designated place of Victor, it's known to have pockets of particularly deep (90–100 feet) sandy soils. The visible impact of these soils is lower-weight clusters and smaller berries." **93**

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