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# Truffles the winery cat steals the show at Zin Valle Vineyards

By Sara Sanchez / El Paso Inc. staff writer  
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Truffles the cat is Zin Valle's official winery mascot. Truffles the cat is Zin Valle's official winery mascot.  
Photo by Sara Sanchez

She wears a fabulous fur coat and spends half of her day lounging and the other half socializing.

She's not a chic wine taster at Zin Valle, but rather the winery's furry and beloved mascot, Truffles the cat.

"After a few days here, she was downstairs, and people started petting her," said Ryan Poulos, co-owner of Zin Valle Vineyards near Canutillo on Highway 28. "She's just become such a focal point of the tasting room, that rather than trying to hide her or keep her out of the mix, we said, let's just fully embrace this."

Poulos and his mother, Kathi, adopted Truffles from the nearby Animal Rescue League shelter in Canutillo. Little is known about Truffles' story, just that she already came with her signature clip in her ear, usually a sign of a catch and release spay and neutering program.

The Poulos family originally wanted a cat that would slink into the background, keeping a close eye on the facilities while keeping to herself and staying more on the shy side. At the shelter, Truffles was one of the least social cats they saw.

But soon after Truffles arrived at the winery, she opened up into her social, people-loving self. She's one of the first greeters at the winery, peering out at the world from her cushion at the base of a set of stairs.

"We thought we were getting this semi-shy cat and she's turned into Miss Center of Attention," Poulos said. "Four or five people petting her at a time, and she just loves it."

Kathi Poulos, the founder of Zin Valle, is often sitting near Truffles, Ryan Poulos said. Kathi will often sit at the table near Truffles' favorite spot to let visitors know about the winery and the cat.

"We call her the cat ambassador," Poulos said.

While Truffles is unique, the idea of a winery and cat pairing is not.

Winery cats are close in mission to barn cats, which usually live outdoors and tend to be more on the feral or hermit side of personality.

But both winery and barn cats help keep mice and other pest populations under control, and a feline's presence might even help ward off birds looking for a grapey snack at a winery's delicate and valuable vines.

The Pouloses have spent the past 20 years building up their facilities, right on the border of Texas and New Mexico.

The space also features an indoor wine tasting bar and cellar, where Truffles spends her days snoozing and exploring. She helps keep the mouse population low and has been found guilty of napping on the job.

Beyond Truffles, Zin Valle has its arms wide open to pets. Dogs are welcome in their outdoor spaces, which include tables, a food truck, live music and more. The family's love of animals is even seen in their products, including the Man's Best Friend merlot that features a portrait of a different

Anyone who buys a case of the merlot gets entered into a contest for the next year's bottle star, Poulos said, and a dollar of each bottle sold is donated to the Humane Society of El Paso.

Zin Valle grows zinfandel, malvasia bianca and gewurztraminer grapes, all varieties that are heat-tolerant and that do well growing in the desert's sandy soil.

The vineyard's tasting room offers flights and more that feature wines produced at the vineyard and at Fattoria Svetoni, Zin Valle's sister winery in Montepulciano, Italy.

Outside, Heavenly Slices sells wood-fired pizza out of a food truck.

"The atmosphere here is impeccable and the service is out of this world," said Heather Walsh, owner of Heavenly Slices. "When you have a winery cat, it's so fun."

On one recent sunny Saturday, Zin Valle was buzzing with activity. A live band played Tom Petty covers, while visitors enjoyed the fruits of the winery team's labor.

Poulos said Truffles has been an instant hit with patrons of Zin Valle. Their regulars ask for her, and newcomers are instantly drawn in by the cat's sweetness and love of scratches. She helps entertain kids while parents enjoy a sip of wine.

She even has her own Instagram page now, @trufflesthewinerycat. Some visitors have even asked Poulos if they can buy Truffles. Fifty bucks, or any other asking price, won't do it.

"One aspect is, people come to wineries and for the first time might be intimidated. They think there's some code of conduct," Poulos said. "We like to be an entertainment venue more than anything, that they remember the fun they had more than the pH levels of anything."

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#### Visit Truffles

**Where:** Zin Valle Vineyards, 7315 Canutillo-La Union Road,

Canutillo, TX 79835

**Hours:** Noon to 5 p.m., Wednesday-Sunday

**Information:** 915-877-4544; [zinvalle@gmail.com](mailto:zinvalle@gmail.com)

**Social media:** @trufflesthewinerycat on Instagram

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