

Desert Sun.

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Hail a 'CAB' in Paso Robles

Kathy Strong, Going My Way

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Happily nestled inland just north of San Luis Obispo, Paso Robles offers a bounty of agri-treasures discovered amid lush green hills dotted with grazing cattle and laid-out ranches that bespeak a rich rancho heritage that spans centuries.

Without a doubt, one of the biggest bounties of the area is its proliferation of quality wineries that dot hilltops and are secreted down rural country lanes.

In fact, the last ten years has seen the region's vineyard acreage double, bringing the total number of wineries to more than 200 in the region, simply translating that wine-lovers have even more reasons to linger longer in pastoral Paso Robles and "plant" their own loyalties to an ever-impressive wine region.

The first family pioneers in the present-day wine industry in the area began planting their vineyards as early as 1917 when the Nerelli family established a vineyard at the foot of York Mountain.

The 1920s was the early period of growth for winemaking in the Paso Robles area—with some of these wineries remaining today in the capable hands of founders' grandchildren. However, the 1970s and 1980s witnessed an even more impressive rise of new vineyards as savvy winemakers took advantage of Paso Robles' wide range of micro-climates, elevation levels and soil conditions made it an ideal place for the premium wine growing of 40 varietals.

Just four years ago, a handful of these vineyard pioneers formed a new wine collective, the Paso Robles CAB (Cabernet and Bordeaux) Collective—known as the PRCC—to promote the full potential of the Paso Robles production of the classic,

age-worthy Cabernet and red Bordeaux varietals. The non-profit felt that this appellation righteously deserved more attention. In fact, the world-class quality of its signature Cabernet Sauvignon and red Bordeaux varietals is why “Wine Enthusiast Magazine” named Paso Robles Wine Region of the Year in 2013. Open to all wineries that produce superior quality Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux varietals in the Paso Robles AVA, founding members include wine leaders JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery, DAOU Vineyards & Winery, J. Lohr Vineyards and Wines, ADELAIDA Cellars, Eberle Winery, Vina Robles Vineyards & Winery and Chateau Margene. This April, the wine trade will gather to sample the latest vintages and learn more about the region’s 22 member wineries at Allegretto Vineyard Resort. Tickets to the CABS of Distinction various events, April 13 & 14, are available for the oenophile who wants a serious behind-the-scenes experience. The events include **En Primeur Barrel Tasting & Current Vintage Walk-Around Tasting, panel discussions and tastings, and The Judgement of Paso where guests are invited to blind taste wines from Bordeaux, Napa and Paso Robles.** Tickets may be purchased at www.pasoroblescab.com.

Discover the new vintages

You don’t need to be a serious oenophile to discover more about the latest vintages of Paso Robles wine country. Take your own wine tasting adventure throughout the region or plan on attending the 34th Annual Paso Robles Wine Festival, a four-day celebration of the character, flavors and personality that the region gifts wine lovers. Held this coming May 19-22, festival goers will find new, themed pop-up seminars, as well as an educational winemaker seminar, a Grand Tasting with more than 75 wineries and a Grand Tasting Picnic Lunch from one of five participating food trucks and restaurants. Also included this year will be popular winemaker dinners and culinary treats from the region’s best chefs. Tickets are available at www.pasowine.com.

Stay at Allegretto and JUSTIN

To relish the complete Paso Robles wine country experience, you need to stay among the vines and awake to the scents and beauty of a working vineyard. Two relatively new luxury offerings will fulfill your wine country dreams: Allegretto Vineyard & Resort and JUST Inn at JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery, recently named American Winery of the Year by “Wine Enthusiast.”

Allegretto Vineyard & Resort, part of the Ayres family collection, opened last fall with 171 guest rooms, a boutique spa, pool and cabanas, manicured gardens and a 12,000-square-foot piazza. Drawing inspiration from the surrounding countryside, Douglas Ayres built and designed the Allegretto in the style of an Italian vineyard estate, filling the corridors with art and artifacts from his many travels. Today, the family-owned Ayres brand includes 21 hotels throughout Southern California, however Allegretto marks the collection’s first full-service resort.

The Tuscan-style resort on 20 acres of vineyards and fruit orchards does a great job capturing the essence of Paso Robles: history, food, wine and beauty. The European-inspired guest rooms and suites, some with balconies or patios, open to gardens. A world unto itself, the resort also offers the Cello Ristorante & Bar with locally farmed and foraged cuisine and a wine bar featuring the resort’s own private wine label among others.

Your other delicious option for a wine stay is “justly” a favorite of many. JUST Inn at the prestigious JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery has a big following for such an intimate inn, opening just a few seasons ago. In other words, book early. The four guest accommodations make for an idyllic romantic escape, each suite a unique, contemporary design. The overnight stay includes a tour of the winery and wine cave, as well as breakfast. The 600-square-foot Justification and Savant Suites are on the second floor and offer fireplaces and hydro tubs. The first-floor Isosceles Suite, named after the winery’s signature wine, is an amazing 1,200 square feet with kitchenette and living room area. A short stroll away is the very private Vintner’s Villa. Totally surrounded by the JUSTIN vineyards, the 1,400-square-foot villa will make you want to move in. You almost could with a full kitchen, dining room and so much more.

The recently redesigned Restaurant at JUSTIN excels in locally sourced ingredients that reflect the seasons. Enjoy lunch, brunch and dinner along with the award-winning wine list that includes some rare offerings from the cellar.

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If you go

- Allegretto Vineyard Resort: www.allegrettovineyardresort.com
- JUST Inn at JUSTIN VINEYARDS: www.justinwine.com