

THE COAST NEWS GROUP

*Jim Gerakaris, Justin Vineyard and Winery's
sommelier and wine educator, tells the Justin story
and what made it so famous with its world-renowned
Isosceles wine.*

Taste of Wine: A new view of Paso Robles wines

by Frank Mangio July 30, 2019

There was a time when, if you were a wine lover from Southern California and you wanted to visit some of the finest wineries in the state, Paso Robles was a Central Coast pit stop along the way to Napa Valley, producing the finest Cabernet Sauvignon in America. In the last two columns, we have made our case, the result of a recent press tour, that Paso Robles has developed into a deservedly fine wine country with a historic downtown, excellent restaurants, many within the wineries themselves, and most recently in our latest Top Ten Tastes. Four wines from Paso were honored with a Top Ten designation.

In Part one and two, we have explored Allegretto, DAOU, Hidden Oak and Turley. This third and final edition, we'll pass the wineglass to Justin, Opolo, Niner, Cass and Riboli, a circle of wineries starting from the west end and winding up at the northeast of Paso ... the Central Coast Wine Country of California.

Justin Vineyards & Winery was the first Paso winery I wrote about, shortly after I began this column in 2005. Isosceles (\$70), a pioneer Bordeaux blend wine had been in launch mode since the '80s. Founder Justin Baldwin had the reputation of making wines of bold and charismatic character. His foundation Cabernet Sauvignon (\$25) replicated his admiration for the Cab side of French Bordeaux blend wine making.

Justin was a “doubleheader” day for Rico, my tech director, and I the third day out. We had dinner at the Restaurant at Justin, a gente dining room with an exquisite five course Prix Fixe dinner highlighting Premium Reserve Isosceles, meriting Justin with an Award of Excellence from Wine Spectator.

An earlier stop at Justin in the morning had us learning the winery’s story from Wine Educator Jim Gerakaris. He emphasized that Justin prides itself on every berry being hand-picked, hand-sorted and going through “small batch fermentation” to bring out the best character in the wines. Gerakaris emphasized that the recent Fiji water purchase of Justin was “a great acquisition that has strengthened the brand, especially in the area of environmental responsibility.” Learn more at justinwine.com.

Opolo Vineyards has been a frequent name to readers of this column due to its legendary Mountain Zinfandel (\$29), one of the most “zinfu” of them all.

Sandy Montgomery, tasting room manager for Opolo, and Wine Educator Stefan Hoggins, introduced us to the new release 2017. If you go for “bigger is better” with your Zin, you’re in with this one. A full dose of black cherry, plum and spice, surrounds bold tannins and balanced acidity. Make sure you plan for lunch at Opolo. Their pizzas are heavenly, baked in a high quality outdoor oven with fresh dough and fire-roasted cheeses. Visit opolowine.com.

Niner Wine Estates is totally committed to sustainability and environmental practices for the long term health of the vineyards. Most of its properties are Sustainability in Practice certified, and also LEED Certified in Energy and Environmental Design by the Green Building Council for high performance green buildings. Both winemakers Patrick Muran and Molly Bohlman share their talents for varietal superiority. Patrick’s skills are in Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Sangiovese and Red blends. Molly makes Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Rosé and Sauvignon Blanc from the Edna Valley, south of Paso. It’s this teamwork and communication, with wine grapes responsibly grown and processed, that are the marks of a champion at Niner Wine Estates. Learn more at ninerwine.com.

Cass Vineyards & Winery

Tasting through the new release wines at Cass is like being in the middle of a Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade of flavors with celebrity MC, partner and co-owner, Ted Plemons. Ted's a dear friend from his Paso Robles and Family Winemaker trade show days, and he's the face of the Vintage Ted and Rockin' Ted Cass labels. He went through the entire lineup of nine wines plus some very cool vintage library wines that only a chosen few get to taste.

Cass only does estate wines. Rhone style French is their signature. Greats like Viognier, Grenache, Mourvedre, and the ever so medal-winner, the 2015 Backbone Syrah, which hit double gold again this year! And the beat goes on as Cass has broken ground on a Plemons designed B&B guest project called Geneseo Inn. At the newly constructed Barrel Room Events Center, guests can experience Cass farm and food education, leisure and events involvement. Executive Chef Mike Learned, take a bow, for preparation of a delicious three course dinner exclusive to our group at the center. Keep up with the further adventures of Ted and Cass at casswines.com.

Riboli Family Wines concluded our A-rated tour of Paso Robles, located next door to the Allegretto resort. Riboli recently celebrated its 100th anniversary, having founded its first winery, San Antonio, in downtown Los Angeles. Paso is a wine tasting, bistro and events center. All labels are offered including: Riboli Family, San Antonio, San Simeon, Maddelena, Stella Rosa, Opaque and Windstream. The food on the bistro side is traditional, homemade style Italian food, like luscious four layer Maddalena Lasagna and a hearty meatball sandwich. Our Grand Slam wine choice was the San Simeon Stormwatch, a true expression of Paso Robles wine blends (\$70).

For more on Riboli, visit riboliwines.com.

Grazie, to the entire entourage of wineries and personalities that make up the Paso Robles experience. It was one we will never forget. For the latest news on Paso Robles wineries, learn more at pasowine.com and pasoroblescab.com.

Wine Bytes

- Ranch 45, the new café/butchery in Solana Beach is hosting a Wines of Oregon dinner on from 6:30 to 9:30 Aug. 6. Cost is \$95 per person for three courses of menu specialties and wines such as Pinot Gris, Rose' and Estate Cuvee. Call (858) 461-0092 for details.

- Gianni Buonomo in the Ocean Beach District of San Diego is having a Blaufrankisch Appreciation Party from 6:30 to 9:30 Aug. 10. “Blau” as locals call the Austrian red varietal, will be celebrating the 2015 vintage. A special sit-down party menu is planned for \$55, \$45 for club members. Includes one glass of wine and optional bottles of “Blau” for \$25 each. Details at gbvintners.com.
- The MED in the La Valencia Hotel in La Jolla has two wine dinners in August. Ridge Vineyards will be featured at 6 p.m. Aug. 8 with new Executive Chef Timothy Ralphs creating a five-course tasting menu paired with top wines from Ridge. Price is \$125 per person. Details at LaValencia.com.
- At 6 p.m. Aug. 15, A Taste of Italy at Giardino will include five top Italian wines and original courses by Giardino. The multi course dinner with wine is just \$60 per person Details at giardinოსd.com.