

Ideal Conditions for the KING OF GRAPES

THE PASO ROBLES CAB COLLECTIVE PROVES THE POTENTIAL OF THE BLOSSOMING REGION

by Michelle Ball and Allyson Gorsuch /
principle photography by Jeremy Ball

HALFWAY BETWEEN Los Angeles and San Francisco, the once rural ranching town of Paso Robles has transformed into a distinguished wine region. The area has gained greater recognition with each vintage, the wines popping up on wine lists and in retail shops across the country. What better way for buyers and sommeliers to explore Paso Robles wine country than a three-day immersive experience? This is the third year for our Paso Robles CAB Camp, hosted by the Paso Robles CAB Collective and co-sponsored by *The Somm Journal*.

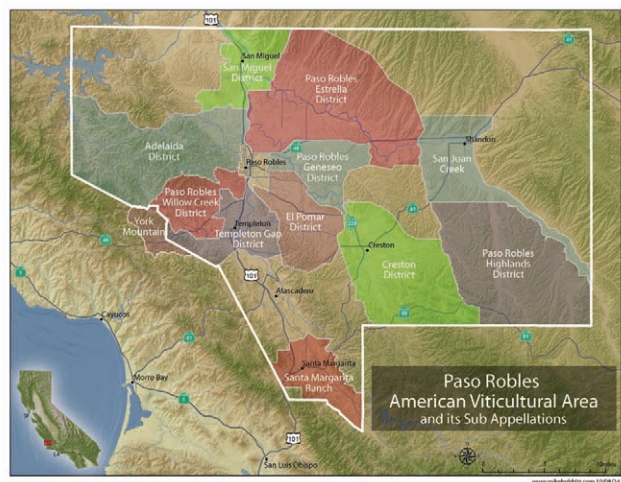
The region's abundant sunshine, maritime influence and enormous diurnal temperature swings create an ideal climate for the Bordeaux varieties grown here. Combined with the vast array of soil types throughout, alkaline calcareous shale and alluvial clay to sandy loam soils, these late-ripening varieties fully



Numerous wineries joined together to showcase their passionate winemaking and resulting wines to a distinguished group of wine buyers.



As seen from
The Farm Winery's
Cardinal Vineyard, the
calcareous limestone soils, also
found in Bordeaux, France, and
Coonawarra, Australia, make the
Adelaida District sure to rise
to international acclaim for
Cabernet Sauvignon.



The 11 sub-regions of Paso Robles encompass three heat zones and differ by maritime influence and soil composition.

mature while maintaining acidity and building softer tannins. “All those things come together here to help create ‘What is Paso!’,” explained Chris Taranto, Communications Director with the Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance, during our Introduction to the Paso Robles AVA seminar.

In addition to the AVA’s unique terroir, the influx of talented winemakers who have congregated here over the last two decades have propelled the region’s success. Like many regions in California, the Paso Robles wine story has a grassroots beginning. “When I came down here, I was the only university trained enologist in the county,” disclosed winemaker Gary Eberle, who first came to the region in 1973.



Gary Eberle helped draft the Paso Robles AVA, and his 1980 Cabernet Sauvignon was the first wine with Paso Robles on the label.

“Today, we have winemakers coming here who not only have their degree in enology, they have six, seven, ten, twelve years of experience working in wineries in Napa, Sonoma, Santa Barbara. They have the science, they have the art, and that’s why you’ve seen, I’d say in the last ten years, a sort of saltation and jump in the quality of wine in Paso.”

In order to explore all that Paso Robles offers, the attendees divided into smaller groups with different itineraries—each of us experiencing separate wineries and sub-regions. For years, people have referred to the West and the East Sides of Paso Robles, the West Side with more of a maritime effect and calcareous soils and the East Side more arid, warmer and with sandier soils. In order to encapsulate the variances within the sizable AVA, 11 sub-regions became official in 2014, encompassing three heat zones and differing by maritime influence and soil composition. We explored the differences in the wines from these areas over our three informative days.

ADELAIDA DISTRICT:

A Curious—and Splendid—Combination of Climate and Soil

The group spent a great deal of time in the Adelaida District as it is the most unique in its makeup. “We have a site I like to call a rare phenomenon: the soils of Bordeaux and the warmth of Napa,” proclaimed Daniel Daou, winemaker and proprietor of DAOU Vineyards & Winery. “I believe that Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon will disrupt the wine world in the next ten years.”

Adelaida Vineyards & Winery, Adelaida District

Our winery visits commenced with the aptly named vineyard and winery, established by Dr. Stanley Hoffman in 1964. As the morning mist turned to a steady drizzle, winemaker Jeremy Weintraub led us on a tour through the winery. Formerly at Seavey Vineyard in Napa Valley, Weintraub was initially brought on board as Adelaida’s Cabernet Sauvignon consultant before taking on a full-time position as winemaker in 2013. Weintraub is experimenting with a combination of concrete and oak fermenters. “The more I started tasting out of concrete, the more I started liking it,” he shared.

We sat down for a comparative tasting of their Cabernet Sauvignon bottlings. The 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon was the highlight for the group—vibrant black fruit laced with all-spice, cedar and velvety tannins; the wine was clearly still a baby. We also tasted the current Cabernet Sauvignon releases, the Signature Series, which are 100 percent from old vines, and the Viking Vineyard, which includes newer clones. “I think the color is great on the newer clones, but I happen to really like what the older plants are doing,” admitted Weintraub. The troupe seemed to agree as the older vines seemed to bring a silkier, rounder mouthfeel while the newer clones were tighter, more angular, but with great aging potential.



“I like to have my intellectual side inform my decision-making, but I want to listen to the grapes,” illuminated Jeremy Weintraub, winemaker for Adelaida Vineyards.

Halter Ranch Vineyard, Adelaida District

An estate of 2000 acres, Halter Ranch Vineyard has 281 acres of vineyards, the rest of the rest of the land yielded to nature, including oak woodlands. Ten miles from the ocean as the crow flies, the white calcareous clay yields a high pH and has a high capacity for water. “We don’t need well-drained soils because we don’t get enough rain here. We’re not in Bordeaux,” said winemaker Kevin Sass, as he smiled.

The flagship Bordeaux blend, named for a grand oak tree on the property, the Halter Ranch 2014 Ancestor exhibited purple flowers, chocolate, really ripe fruit but with a red fruit underlying that incited the acidity for a clean finish. The team has decidedly lowered their oak use in recent years. “We want the oak to create a cradle without



The 1989 Cabernet Sauvignon, from the Estrella Vineyard, made by former winemaker John Munch, highlighted the age-worthy potential of Paso Robles Cabernets. The nose showed the age of the wine far more than the palate, which was lively in flavor and texture while still maintaining firm tannin structure.



The sleek new label for Adelaida, the 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon pictured here, reflects the regal nature of the wine.

becoming a marinade,” explained assistant winemaker Molly Lonborg.

The modern gravity-flow production facility alongside the historic Victorian home on the property creates a nice counterbalance. With a focus on sustainability and quality, the winemaking team exuded pride and happiness with their undertaking.

Parrish Family Vineyard, Adelaida District

Grower and winemaker David Parrish explained that Parrish Family Vineyard has a long growing history dating back to 1927 when his grandfather, viticulturist Earl Henderson, planted 540 acres of vines in Atascadero. When Parrish graduated from the University of California, Davis,

he worked on an experimental trellising project which launched his career installing vineyards all over the world.

Parrish’s home ranch vineyard in the Creston District was planted in 1995. His experience with those vines facilitated his approach to their more recent planting in the Adelaida District, which sits on calcareous soils and is planted primarily to Cabernet Sauvignon. One key change was “breaking up the blocks so nothing is harvested together,” explained Parrish. “Before you had longer rows and some parts just weren’t ripe enough.” The 30-acre vineyard was mapped using infrared technology and divided into 16 different blocks based on soils, aspect and sun exposure.

The 2016 Sauvignon Blanc was the first vintage for the new property; it was tart and a refreshing preparation to the reds later in the day. We also tried a barrel sample of the 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon—inky, blackberry and quite tannic, which is typical for this sub-AVA and the young age of the wine. When asked what makes Paso Robles special for Cabernet Sauvignon, Parrish said, “I think it’s the terroir; it’s the soil with high calcium content and great weather—cool nights, warm days. It really is the terroir.”

JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery, Adelaida District

Justin Baldwin established JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery in 1981 when there were just eight wineries in the area. Blending is the backbone of the winemaking philosophy at JUSTIN; they farm 900 acres of vineyards and purchase from up

to 25 growers throughout the Paso Robles AVA. Fermenting and barrel-aging the lots separately gives them great flexibility in creating their final wines, many of which have found cult followings and must deliver a similarly styled, quality wine annually.

Isoceles, the winery’s flagship wine, is so named for its blend of the three noblest Bordeaux varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. The 2014 Isoceles displayed red currant, cassis, purple plum and graphite; “wow” acidity; oak still sitting on top but easy to see integrating; grippy tannins.

Calcareous Vineyard, Adelaida District

Located one mile west of the city of Paso Robles, the 442-acre estate is planted on solid calcareous soils at roughly 1,800 feet in elevation. Lloyd Messer and his daughter, Dana Brown, worked with local winemaker John Munch to find the ideal property and bottled their first wine in 1999. Messer passed away suddenly in 2006 before the winery and tasting room were built. His daughters, Dana and Ericka, continue to carry out his vision for the property.

The Cabernet Sauvignons from the estate were opaque and concentrated with fruit-driven cassis and black plum flavors, yet the highlight for our group was the 2010 York Mountain AVA Cabernet Sauvignon from the Carver Vineyard located eight miles west, just outside the Paso Robles AVA. The older vintage was quite vibrant and displayed classic Cabernet Sauvignon characteristics with a dark, silky texture and meaty, smoked venison notes.



The Parrish Family Vineyard Clone 6 Cabernet Sauvignon demonstrates Paso Robles terroir.

EXPLORING THE DIVERSITY OF THE PASO ROBLES SUB-REGIONS

Cass Vineyard & Winery, Geneseo District

Although the estate winery is known primarily as a Rhône house, nearly half of the 146-acre vineyard is planted to Cabernet Sauvignon. We tasted through an impressive lineup of wines. Winemaker Sterling Kragten finished off the tasting with the 2013 Malbec. Only one acre of Malbec is planted and is traditionally used in blending with their Cabernet Sauvignon and in Bordeaux-style blends. However, when tasting the single-varietal lots, Kragten saw something different and did not see the point in blending the wine. "I thought it was better to ask for forgiveness than permission," Kragten told us, "so I put it in some nicer barrels, stuck it in the back of the cellar, and didn't tell anyone." After two and a half years, the 300 cases were bottled. "Since then, they've [the owners] been very appreciative that I did it, since it's done really well," he laughed.



Cass 2013 Malbec: Dark and brooding with juicy blueberry, blackberry characteristics hints of sarsaparilla and violets.

Robert Hall Winery, Geneseo District

Winemaker Don Brady of Robert Hall Winery, who has been with the winery since 2001, led us on a tour of the barrel room built into the hillside, and we tasted a 2014–2016 vertical of their Cavern Select Cabernet Sauvignon. Having worked with the estate fruit for 15 years, Brady noted that the environmental pressures on the vineyard due to the drought made the 2015 vintage especially difficult. While 2014 and 2016 tasted riper and rounder, 2015 showed definitive structure, stronger tannins and more herbal components.

Sextant Wines, El Pomar District

Sextant, named for a nautical tool, was formed in 2004 as a choice by long-time grape growers to begin to make their own wine. The Stoller family owns Sunridge Nurseries and experiments with many different clones of multiple varieties. In fact, we tasted a variety entirely new to me—Caladoc, a Grenache-Malbec cross that was surprising in its fruit-to-structure ratio—and it was delicious.

The 2014 Kamal Cabernet Sauvignon stood out as a highlight. Sourced from the best blocks of their El Pomar Vineyard, the opulent wine includes all five Bordeaux varieties, leading with chocolate and black and purple fruit, the oak adding a sweetness and a plush palate.

Treana Winery, Templeton Gap

Hope Family Wines owns Treana, located in the Templeton Gap, although they source from 50 growers in order to make the wines. They believe that blending the different appellations produces a well-balanced wine, and in order to demonstrate the success of their outlook, Treana provided samples of three sub-regions for our small group of sommeliers to taste and blend.

We tasted Estrella District Cabernet Sauvignon, Creston District Cabernet Sauvignon and El Pomar District Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah individually, noting the subtle variances, before creating our own blends. We finished by tasting the 2014 Treana Red, the Syrah adding a unique, spicy element to the Bordeaux flavor profile.



The Treana Cabernet Sauvignon is sourced from three separate Paso Robles sub-AVAs.

Head of a growing family-owned enterprise, Austin Hope lives on the vineyard in the Templeton Gap and produces five wine labels: Liberty School, Austin Hope, Candor, Troublemaker and Treana. He enjoys experimenting and constantly plays with new winemaking techniques.



Doug Filipponi, co-owner of Ancient Peaks Winery, hosted us at the Oyster Ridge event venue for our final dinner. He is pictured here with Meridith May, Publisher and Editorial Director of The Somm Journal.

Ancient Peaks Winery, Santa Margarita Ranch

Doug Filipponi, Rob Rossi and Karl Wittstrom own Ancient Peaks Winery, named for the Santa Lucia Mountains looming above the ranch. The vineyards lie in Santa Margarita Ranch, the southernmost and coolest sub-AVA of Paso Robles. Robert Mondavi actually planted the Margarita Vineyard in 1999, and the trio acquired it in 2005, believing the vineyard to be something special. With a long growing season and five different soil types within the ancient sea bed, the Margarita Vineyard is the only vineyard in the vicinity.

"Let's overdeliver quality for the money because we can. It's something that we are very proud of," stated director of winemaking Mike Sinor. The entire lineup of wines come in at pointedly reasonable price-points. We, as a whole group, were able to taste them during our final dinner, held at Ancient Peaks' event venue, Oyster Ridge, following a thrilling zip-lining adventure located on the Santa Margarita Ranch.

A Stellar New Facility from Storied

SAN ANTONIO WINERY

The Riboli family of San Antonio Winery is now in their fourth generation of winemaking. This year, the Riboli family is celebrating the 100-year anniversary of San Antonio Winery, which was established in Los Angeles in 1917. Over the years, the family has expanded its sources throughout California, including Napa Valley, Monterey County and Paso Robles. Having sourced fruit from Paso Robles since the 1980s, the Ribolis made a major commitment in developing five estate vineyards and constructing a new, state-of-the-art winemaking facility in the region—all in the last five years. Their long-term vision: to finally have full control over every aspect of the winemaking process from the vineyard to the bottle.

Anthony Riboli, fourth generation and the first formally trained winemaker in the family, hosted the sommeliers for our final luncheon and led a tour of the new 90,000-square-foot winery. "We designed the facility for flexibility," explained Riboli as we walked through the tank room. The efficient space allows for a small team to operate a vast number of lots, from small, open-top fermenters to tanks that hold everything from five- to 35-ton lots. Each tank has a pump-over system built in, along with both heating and cooling capabilities, allowing the winery to produce a wide variety of wines at many different price points.



Fred Dame, MS, and San Antonio Winery's Anthony Riboli.



The Riboli family's decades of experience working with vineyards throughout Paso Robles helped determine the ideal sites for their future estate wines. "Now, this is a beautiful, shiny facility, but I'll be very honest, we know the vineyards are what makes great wine. This is just continuing that and making sure we don't screw it up," explained Riboli.

In addition to its winemaking efficiency, the facility aims to ensure conservation of the region's most precious resource: water. All winery waste water is treated and used for landscaping and vineyard irrigation. Nothing is wasted. "We're a part of the community here, and it's about how to continue to make Paso great," shares Riboli. The family is also adding a new roof solar array which will produce 85+% of the winery's electrical power.

The sommeliers tasted barrel samples from the first vintage made at the new facility and the new Stefano Vineyard site: 2016 Malbec and 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon. The young wines showed great potential despite their primary state. The Malbec was quite lush with blue and purple fruit, hints of tar and balancing acidity on the finish.



San Simeon Stormwatch, from San Antonio Winery, utilizes all five Bordeaux varieties.

Stand-out Seminars—with a Side of Competition



David Toste Ruivo, General Manager of Arroyo Chop House in Pasadena, created the judges' favorite blend in our competition among the sommeliers and won the \$250 prize awarded by The Somm Journal.

"I'm a true believer in Paso Robles," shared Fred Dame, MS, introducing our first seminar: "It's an historic place but really in its naissance for what it's going to be." We had three seminars to survey the Paso Robles wine in detail, one comparing Cabernet Sauvignon, one exploring Malbec and one considering the five Bordeaux varieties and how well they blend—ending with a science experiment of our own as the sommeliers and wine buyers used beakers to compose their own blends, crowning an ultimate winner and awarding a \$250 prize for their refined palate.

Each panel consisted of five winemakers to guide us through their individual thoughts and approaches toward production and toward the region as a whole. Jason Diefenderfer from Treana Winery, Alan Kinne from Allegretto Vineyards & Wines, Kevin Willenborg from Vina Robles Vineyards & Winery, Jim Madsen from The Farm Winery and Jeremy Weintraub from Adelaida Vineyards & Winery led the discussion about Cabernet Sauvignon. Some estate wines and some blended wines, we narrowed down the general impressions of the grape in three of the sub-regions. Willenborg summed it up best, explaining, "Adelaida District lends heightened phenolics, Creston District yields softer tannins and El Pomar District, lying closer to the Templeton Gap, gives classic cas-



DAOU Vineyards & Winery Soul of a Lion.



The winemaker panelists for our seminar on Cabernet Sauvignon included Kevin Willenborg from Vina Robles Vineyards & Winery, Jason Diefenderfer of Treana Winery, Fred Dame, MS, Alan Kinne from Allegretto Vineyards & Wines, Jim Madsen of The Farm Winery and Jeremy Weintraub from Adelaida Vineyards & Winery.



*A deliberating judge,
Fred Dame, MS.*

Roger Nicolas of RN Estate Vineyard & Wines and Don Brady of Robert Hall Winery all agreed that Malbec ripens well in the region and can stand alone but also adds fantastic color; plush fruit and a tannic characteristic to their blends.

Our final seminar provided us with a wine from each of the Bordeaux varieties. Mike Sinor from Ancient Peaks Winery championed his 2015 Merlot; Anthony Riboli presented the Opaque 2011 Malbec; Chris Rougeot talked about the Opolo Vineyards 2012 Petit Verdot; Chateau Margene showed its 2013 Signature Series Cabernet Franc; and Daniel Daou represented his DAOU Vineyards & Winery 2014 Soul of the Lion Cabernet Sauvignon. "We're looking for a food-friendly wine; we want a wine that can be drunk now but can improve for the next five to eight years," explained Rougeot. Riboli expounded, "These wines have bright fruit, ready to drink, but still have structure." The dialogue also confirmed that part of the reason that Paso Robles is so special is that the region is able to achieve ripeness every year. "The whole philosophy here is still developing, but we're not at the mercy of nature like Bordeaux," quipped Dame.

Now well-versed in the wines and their attributes, the sommeliers took on the challenge of blending the five wines in front of us. They each created their own blend, created a quick label with a name for the wine and submitted it to the panel for judging—a little good-natured rivalry always goes a long way amid sommeliers.

David Toste Ruivo, General Manager of Arroyo Chop House in Pasadena, created the judges' favorite blend in our competition and won the \$250 prize awarded by *The Somm Journal*. He responded, "Thank you for such a generous gift. This was such a wonderful experience. I created the blend from the amazing wineries showcased today based on my favorite varietals. I love Cabernet Franc, and Chateau Margene's Cab Franc (50%) was my favorite of the five, hence it being my leading grape in The Technique, Saucier Blend. I finished the blend off with DAOU's Cabernet Sauvignon (30%), to help balance the Cab Franc, Ancient Peaks' Merlot (18%), because it's such an unappreciated grape, yet so good, and Opolo's Petit Verdot (2%) for the wonderful nose! I came to this camp with intention to expand my wine list with Paso Robles wines. I'm excited to see what's in store for us in the future as Paso Robles evolves!"

sis and Bordeaux-esque characteristics." Madsen spoke of his Cardinal Vineyard and how the old vines and remarkably low yields deliver a concentrated and structured wine. Acidity a fluid topic, Weintraub suggested, "These wines have so much vivacity in the mouth—that's the bright acid."

"Malbec has a future here in Paso Robles, not only as a varietal wine but, more importantly, as a blender," remarked Christian Tietje from Rotta Winery, as he delivered the takeaway message from the Malbec discussion. He, along with Sterling Kragten of Cass Vineyard & Winery, Patrick Muran of Niner Wine Estates,



"Cabernet Sauvignon—it is the king of grapes," declared Daniel Daou, proprietor and winemaker for DAOU Vineyards & Winery.



Dining in downtown Paso Robles: A memorable evening at Thomas Hill Organics, hosted by many of Paso Robles elite wineries including Daniel Daou of DAOU Vineyards & Winery, Cynthia Lohr from J.Lohr Vineyards & Wines, Nancy and Craig Stoller of Sextant Wines, Don Brady from Robert Hall Winery, Anthony Riboli from San Antonio Winery and Matt Merrill of Pomar Junction Vineyard & Winery.



J. Lohr 2014 Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon, part of the winery's Vineyard Series of wines.

Allegretto Vineyard Resort

"Everything here has a purpose," Doug Ayres explained as he led our group of sommeliers on a tour of the Allegretto Vineyard Resort, our home base for the next few days. Ayres is the visionary behind the new Paso Robles luxury property, located just east of Highway 101. The resort sits at the base of a natural slope surrounded by an eight-acre estate vineyard and 200 Italian olive trees.

Ayres's personal journey led him to build Allegretto with the intent to inspire creativity and cultivate joy. The art, in part from Ayres's personal collection, and the property's architectural features blend eastern and western cultures in a mix of pure harmony. There are many natural wonders including a cross-section of a giant sequoia tree often referred to as the "heartbeat" of the resort.

Ayres resides locally at his Willow Creek Vineyard, planted entirely to 17 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon. Winemaker Alan Kinne introduced our group of sommeliers to the new lineup of Allegretto wines: 2014 Viognier, 2013 Tannat, 2013 Zinfandel and 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon.



"Everything here has a purpose," Doug Ayres explained of his comfortable yet inspired Allegretto Vineyard Resort.



THE 2017 PASO ROBLES CAB COLLECTIVE ATTENDEES:

Chris McLean, Director of Restaurants, JW Marriott Desert Springs Resort & Spa, Palm Desert, CA

Christopher Barragan, Sommelier, Flemings, Woodland Hills, CA

Dan Gurga, La Jolla Beach & Tennis Club, La Jolla, CA

David Toste Ruivo, General Manager, Arroyo Chop House, Pasadena, CA

Fred Fedail, Buyer, Gerlach's Liquor, Pasadena, CA

Jesus Evangelista, Beverage Manager, Montage, Beverly Hills, CA

Marcus Voglrieder, Nobu, Malibu, CA

Michael Baldonado, Buyer, Four Seasons-Market Street, San Francisco, CA

Nanette Rapuzzi, Sommelier and Manager, Bacara Resort Bistro, Santa Barbara, CA

Nicole Ippolito, Peninsula Club, Charlotte, NC

Rob Thompson, Manager, Arroyo Chop House, Pasadena, CA

Tim Wallace, Owner, Wine Vault, Charlotte, NC

David Milligan, Vendome, Toluca Lake, CA

Edwin Mamigonian, Mi Place, Pasadena, CA

Simon Shamoun, Tarzana Wine & Spirits, Tarzana, CA

Wendy Keefer, Cellar Experience, Charleston, SC

Scott Evans, Henry Wine Group, Benicia, CA

Robin Puricelli, Dolphin Bay Resort & Spa, Pismo Beach, CA

Laurie Sutton, Malibu Beach Inn, Malibu, CA

"We have a site I like to call a rare phenomenon: the soils of Bordeaux and the warmth of Napa."

*proclaimed **Daniel Daou**, winemaker and proprietor of DAOU Vineyards & Winery.*