



The International Wine Review

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Report # 33: The Wines of Paso Robles

Introduction



15 Million Year Old Oyster Shell 1

This summer we traveled to Paso Robles and spent a week visiting the diverse vineyards, talking with many talented winemakers, and tasting over 300 wines. We discovered that while the number of wineries has grown rapidly over the past couple of

decades, Paso Robles has long been known for producing high quality fruit. We found small, dry-farmed and head trained vineyards, both old and new, as well as large, irrigated vineyards, some producing grapes for markets outside the AVA. We found large fossilized oysters, flaky calcareous soil, and alluvial clay in the vineyards. We met with winemakers passionate about their work and whose talent is shown in their outstanding wines. In this report we relate what we learned about the terroir, the vineyards, the grapes, and the wines of Paso Robles.

Paso Robles is a diverse region comprising 26 thousand acres of vines in an AVA with a total area of 667 thousand acres, almost three times the size of the Napa Valley AVA. It has grown rapidly over the past three decades: vineyard acreage today is more than five times that when the AVA was created in 1983. Growing conditions vary widely depending on exposure to winds, topography, and distance from the ocean. Recognizing these differences, a petition to create 11 sub-AVAs was submitted to the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) in 2007; a ruling on this petition is expected soon.

Highly favorable growing conditions have contributed to the rapid growth of viticulture in Paso Robles. And, as the wines of the region have gained national recognition, the number of wineries has exploded from 17 at the time of

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the creation of the AVA to about 50 in 2000 and over 270 in 2012, an increase of over 400 percent in the last decade! Most of these wineries are small and family-owned and operated.

The diversity in growing conditions, winery size, and varieties make it difficult to succinctly describe Paso Robles wines. The task is made still more difficult by the fact that over half of all grapes are sold to producers outside the AVA, who mostly produce wines without a Paso Robles AVA designation. Producers within the AVA range from tiny, very high end, boutique wineries to large, commercial wineries producing a wide range of wines. While Paso Robles produces numerous single varietals wines, it is per-

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haps best known for its Bordeaux and Rhone red blends. Among single varietals, we were most impressed with Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, and Petite Sirah. While not generally known for its white wines, we were favorably impressed by the Rhone white blends.

As it has gained recognition for its wines, Paso Robles has become a lively tourist destination with fine restaurants and numerous, popular events like the Paso Robles Wine Festival, the Zinfandel Festival, Harvest Wine Weekend, and the Paderewski Festival. In this report, we review some of Paso Robles' best restaurants in addition to surveying its terroir, viticulture, and winemaking.

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