

# The International Wine Review

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## Report #62 Paso Robles: Cabernet Sauvignon & Other Bordeaux Varieties from the CAB Collective

### Introduction



Daou Vineyard in the Adelaida Hills

Paso Robles has rapidly emerged as one of California's best regions for growing Cabernet Sauvignon and other Bordeaux varieties. In our previous report on the wines of Paso Robles, we noted the rapid growth in plantings of Bordeaux varieties, much of it destined for producers of low-priced wines outside the region. But what we didn't anticipate was how quickly Paso Robles producers would raise their game in terms of super premium wines that compare favorably with Napa wines costing double the price. The Paso Robles Cabernet Collective (see box) has played a vital role in this transformation.

Paso's growth and development as a premier wine region has been due to its favorable and highly diverse growing conditions. Its special endowments include calcareous soils, the high altitudes of the Santa Lucia Coastal Range and the cool Pacific fog and wind flowing over the Templeton Gap. Equally significant is the great diversity of its growing conditions, which the TTB formally recognized after our last report with the approval of 11 new sub-AVAs in 2014. Thus, many of the wines of Paso Robles are today being produced with the addition of the names

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of the new AVAs on the label (e.g., Adelaida, Creston, Willow Creek).

Paso's growth and development as a premier wine region has also been made possible by an influx of talented winemakers. In the 1970s Gary Eberle, who developed the Estrella (now Meridian) winery, was the only winemaker holding a degree in enology. Since then a new generation of talented winemakers have taken the reins of the region's wineries. Trained at UC Davis, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, and other enology programs from France to Australia, they have introduced new standards of excellence and innovation that have enabled Paso to produce outstanding wines. In parallel, several new investors established both small and large wineries committed to these new standards.



The Paso Robles CAB (Cabernet and Bordeaux) Collective was formed in 2012 to promote the region's potential as a producer of Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux varieties. The founding members included Paso's top producers such as Daou, J. Lohr, Justin, Adelaida, Eberle, Vina Robles and Chateau

Margene. Working together, they formed a collegial network of industry professionals organized to learn from and assist each other in viticulture, production, marketing and sales. Today, the CAB Collective works with consumers, trade and the media to promote Paso Robles' Cabernet and Bordeaux wines.

Progress in developing Cabernet Sauvignon and other Bordeaux varieties in Paso Robles is revealed most of all in the extraordinary high quality of many new super premium wines. These wines, both single varietals and proprietary blends, are equivalent in quality to the best of Napa Valley yet exhibit the distinctive characteristics and diversity of the Paso Robles region. They represent the best of the region's vineyards and wine winemaking.

In what follows, we briefly review the history of viticulture and winemaking in Paso Robles, with special focus on Bordeaux varieties. Then we explore the terroir of Paso Robles, looking in some detail at the new sub-AVAs recently approved by the TTB. Next, we take a look at

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the growth of winegrowing in Paso Robles with particular emphasis on the rapidly increasing plantings of Cabernet Sauvignon and the diverse clones of that variety. Finally, we assess the Cabernet Sauvignon single varietal and blends and take a light look into the future of wines in Paso Robles.

## **Paso Robles' Wine History**

Paso Robles' wine history begins with the Franciscan friars in the 18th century followed by European immigrants planting Zinfandel and other varieties in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The modern era started in the 1960s and 70s with the beginning of commercial vineyards and wineries, and by the 1980s and 90s new plantings and new wineries exploded in numbers ushering in a Rhone Ranger rush. The new century has seen continued growth, especially in the number of quality-oriented family and boutique wineries, but, also, in large scale investments like Halter Ranch and the Riboli family's new winery and vineyards. The new century also shows the continued ascendancy of the Bordeaux varieties, which now represent almost two-thirds of all the red varieties planted in Paso Robles.

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