



PASO ROBLES AMERICAN VITICULTURAL AREA

Culture

Visitors to the rural and unassuming country roads of the Paso Robles American Viticultural Area (AVA) are often delighted to discover the local wines. In this area of family-owned wineries, growing and creating wines of impressive character and depth is a way of life. The small town casualness and quiet sense of community impart an approachability uncommon to many wine tasting regions. The camaraderie among local wineries and wine growers is evident, and it is not uncommon for one tasting room to direct their visitors to other tasting rooms in the area. Visitors enjoy the lack of congestion while enjoying fine wines over a picnic lunch in the various winery picnic grounds.

Area

Encompassing 650,000 acres within the California Central Coast AVA, the Paso Robles AVA stretches north from the Monterey County line to south of the town of Santa Margarita. East to west, the appellation extends from the Kern County line to the inland side of the San Lucia Mountains, just west of Paso Robles.

History

Although many consider the Paso Robles appellation a newly emerging wine region, the winegrowing roots of the area date back to the late 1700s. Over the course of the past two centuries, the acreage of wine grapes has flourished in this region, growing from approximately 40 acres of grapevines in 1873, to over 200 acres in 1952, and reaching well over 20,000 acres in 2002.

Wine grapes were first introduced to the Paso Robles region in 1797 by Spanish Conquistadors and Franciscan missionaries. The Padres of the Mission San Miguel were the first to cultivate wine grapes. Mission San Miguel is located about eight miles north of the city of Paso Robles, not far from the Castoro Cellars winery. Today, visitors to the Mission can view ancient fermentation vats and other winegrowing artifacts.

Commercial winemaking officially began in the region in 1882 with the establishment of Ascension Winery. As the popularity of wines grew, so did the Paso Robles wine region. By the early 1920s, many other wineries had appeared on the scene.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Dr. Stanley Hoffman, under the direction of the renowned viticulturist, André Tchelistcheff, planted some of the region's first Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, and Chardonnay. Soon after, in 1977, the largest winery in the area and the Alma Mater of Niels Udsen and Tom Myers,

Estrella River Winery, was established. By 1983, the Paso Robles area became an official American Viticultural Appellation.

Climate and Soil

Paso Robles' climate is considered semi-arid, with low humidity and low rainfall. Perhaps the most significant climate factor of the Paso Robles AVA is the unique combination of hot days and cool nights. Located just over 20 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean, the daily high temperatures are contrasted by cooling, coastal breezes that flow over the Coastal Range in the evenings, leading to temperature variations of up to 50 degrees in a single day. This variation results in very ripe fruit, without any loss of acidity. Coupled with soil and topographic variations, the climate creates an ideal growing environment, especially for hardier red grape varieties, as it brings out the large fruit component and ripe characters that dominate Paso Robles' wines.

Unique to the rest of the Paso Robles AVA is the Templeton Gap, which plays a key role in the flavor profile of Castoro's Zinfandels. Nearly all of Castoro's Zinfandel vineyards are located within the Templeton Gap, where cool, marine air is funneled through the Coastal Range, allowing for daily temperatures well below the rest of the region. The topography is rolling and the soil is generally decomposed shale of shallow thickness. High acid is important to the Castoro style of Zinfandel and acids are maintained in the Templeton Gap location. This, along with the vineyard training, rolling topography, and decomposed shale soil, is determinate of the character of Castoro's Zinfandels.

The soils of the Paso Robles region are very diverse, ranging from sedimentary soils and a mixture of clay, sand and silt on the east side of the AVA, to igneous and metamorphic soils on the western side. The soils are typically limiting to the grapes, which is ideal for developing smaller, more intense fruit. The richer soils of the region are often made limiting by restricting water and nutrient quantities.

Primary Varieties

Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Merlot, and Zinfandel represent approximately 76% of the planted acreage within the Paso Robles AVA. Other red varieties include Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc and other whites grapes consist of Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc, Muscat, and Sémillon. Rhône varieties have increased significantly within the past decade, as the region has become increasingly recognized for its Petite Sirah, Syrah, Viognier, Valdiguie, Grenache, and Mourvèdre, to name a few.