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Erin Brooks | 10/10/2019

30 YEARS OF TABLAS CREEK

2019 marks the 30th anniversary of Tablas Creek—Robert Haas and his partners from Château de Beaucastel purchased what became the Tablas Creek estate in 1989. This is also the first year that all 13 Châteauneuf-du-Pape varieties have been planted here, including 200 Muscardin buds that came in this year and will be grafted onto surplus Grenache Blanc vines. “Beaucastel has all 13 varieties,” says Jason Haas, “but that doesn’t mean they have much of the trace varieties. Sometimes there isn’t even enough to fill a fermentation tank, so those trace varieties get combined and co-fermented. We are the first in the world to plant these varieties with the aim of making varietal wines from them. I love that in a year when we’re celebrating such a big milestone—30 years—we’re also just beginning something so central to our original idea.”

Effects of the style-defining heat wave in 2017 echoed from appellation to appellation as I traveled up and down the California coast this year. Appellations across the state suffered by varying degrees, depending especially on location and proximity to the ocean. I’ll publish a fuller report on the specifics of the vintage in Paso later this year, but Haas is optimistic about the results at Tablas Creek. “2017 was kind of glorious,” he recalls. “That year, the drought broke. The vineyards were incredibly healthy and vigorous. The vines did two or three years’ worth of growing in one. We got that early September heat that kicked off harvest. Normally you ease into it like a bell curve. In 2017, it looked like a brick wall. The heat broke after the second week of September, and we returned to moderate temperatures throughout October. We bottled Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre and Counoise as varietals this year because they were all good enough. It was an outstanding vintage.” He also notes that Paso was not impacted by wildfires in 2017. “We had no fires and no smoke here,” he says. “That’s impacted critical reputation of the vintage in Napa and Sonoma, but none of that was an issue down here.”

I tasted these wines with Haas and winemaker Neil Collins at the estate this spring. I was pleased with the 2017s, which seemed fresher, less rustic and more approachable than vintages I’ve had in the past. With the proliferation of stem use along California’s Central Coast—sometimes successful but often not—I asked for their thoughts. “We don’t use too much whole cluster because these grapes have enough structure already,” Haas explained. “There are lots of producers in Paso using tons of whole bunches and they also tend to be the ones pushing ripeness.” This report also includes a few 2009s, an apt vintage to revisit after the drought-ridden 2014, 2015 and 2016 vintages. 2009 was a third consecutive year of drought, and frosts in April meant yields were very, very low. The challenges of the vintage are evident in some of these bottles, which are fully tertiary and should be drunk up. But the Esprit de Beaucastel and Panoplie blends are drinking beautifully, a nod to the potential for quality and ageability in Paso.



SCORES

2018	Clairette Blanche	White	(89 - 91)
2018	Côtes de Tablas Blanc	White	(90 - 92)
2018	Esprit de Tablas Blanc	White	(91 - 93)
2018	Grenache Blanc	White	(89 - 91)
2018	Marsanne	White	(89 - 91)
2018	Patelin de Tablas Blanc	White	(89 - 91)
2018	Picardan	White	(90 - 92)
2018	Picpoul Blanc	White	(89 - 91)
2018	Vermentino	White	90+
2018	Viognier	White	(90 - 92)
2018	Dianthus Rosé	Rosé	91
2018	Patelin de Tablas Rosé	Rosé	89
2017	Esprit de Tablas Blanc	White	92
2017	Roussanne	White	91
2017	Counoise	Red	89
2017	Côtes de Tablas	Red	92
2017	En Gobelet	Red	92
2017	Esprit de Tablas	Red	(92 - 94)
2017	Full Circle Pinot Noir	Red	91
2017	Grenache	Red	91
2017	Le Complice	Red	92
2017	Mourvèdre	Red	92
2017	Panoplie	Red	(93 - 95)
2017	Patelin de Tablas	Red	90+?
2017	Syrah	Red	92+
2016	Esprit de Tablas	Red	92
2016	Le Complice	Red	91
2016	Mourvèdre	Red	91
2016	Panoplie	Red	93+
2009	Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc	White	92
2009	Vermentino	White	92
2009	Côtes de Tablas	Red	89
2009	En Gobelet	Red	89
2009	Esprit de Beaucastel	Red	93
2009	Panoplie	Red	92

REVIEWS

Clairette Blanche 2018

(89 - 91) points

“This is the first vintage of Clairette Blanche from Tablas Creek. A barrel sample, the 2018 Clairette Blanche has a soft nose of lime pith, baker’s yeast, petrichor and white flowers with notes of beeswax and apple pie coming through with time. Light to medium-bodied, it’s perfumed in the mouth and very minerally, with tangy acidity and a long, gently textured finish. 50 cases are expected to be made.”

Côtes de Tablas Blanc 2018

(90 - 92) points

“A blended barrel sample, the 2018 Côtes de Tablas Blanc is made up of 40% Viognier, 35% Grenache Blanc, 20% Marsanne and 5% Roussanne. It’s super minerally on the nose to begin, with petrichor, gunflint and toasty notes, very slowly opening to citrus peel, fresh tree fruits, quince peel and baker’s yeast with spicy touches. Light to medium-bodied, it’s broad with fleshy fruits, juicy acidity and a long, floral-tinged finish. 1,800 cases are expected to be made.”

Esprit de Tablas Blanc 2018

(91 - 93) points

“A blended barrel sample, the 2018 Esprit Blanc de Tablas is made up of 66% Roussanne, 21% Grenache Blanc, 8% Picpoul Blanc, 3% Picardan and 2% Clairette Blanche. It has a pretty, floral nose with orange blossom, musk, elderflower and lemongrass over a stone fruit core plus orange peel, honeyed apples, toast, wet hay and creamy touches. Medium to full-bodied, it has a great core of perfumed fruits, juicy acidity and a long, textured, savory finish. 2,300 expected case production.”

Grenache Blanc 2018

(89 - 91) points

“The barrel sample of 2018 Grenache Blanc has a smoky, toasty nose with dried hay and mushroom to begin, opening out to pie crust, baked Red Delicious apples, petrichor, lime peel and white blossoms. It’s light to medium-bodied with a toasty fruit core, juicy acidity and good intensity on the finish. 1,175 cases are expected.”

Marsanne 2018

(89 - 91) points

“The barrel sample of 2018 Marsanne has a pretty nose of Golden Delicious apples, baker’s yeast, citrus peel and saline with dried acacia and chamomile hints and a crushed rock streak. It’s light to medium-bodied, very spicy and minerally with just enough freshness and a long, gently textured finish. 275 expected case production.”

Patelin de Tablas Blanc 2018

(89 - 91) points

“A blended barrel sample, the 2018 Patelin de Tablas Blanc is comprised of 48% Grenache Blanc, 22% Viognier, 13% Roussanne, 12% Marsanne and 5% Clairette Blanche. It opens with bruised apple and some wooly funk on the nose, fleshing out to quince, peach, honeycomb and beeswax with oodles of floral and mineral nuance. It’s medium-bodied and broad in the mouth with intense, honeyed fruits, just enough freshness and a long, classically bitter finish. 2,300 cases are expected to be made.”

Picardan 2018

(90 - 92) points

“A blended barrel sample, the 2018 Picardan has a gregarious nose of white pepper, musk and lemongrass with green melon, honey-dipped apples, dried orange peel and stone plus ripe peach and quince and a petrol notion. Medium-bodied, it’s broad and slightly oily in the mouth, with great intensity, juicy acidity and a long, intensely perfumed finish. 125 cases are expected to be made.”

Picpoul Blanc 2018

(89 - 91) points

“A barrel sample, the 2018 Picpoul Blanc has a soft nose with notes of mushroom and soil to begin, opening to pear, stone, baker’s yeast, citrus peel and citrus blossom with spicy touches. It’s light to medium-bodied with a core of fleshy, perfumed fruits, juicy acidity and a long, floral finish. 400 cases are expected to be made.”

Vermentino 2018

90+ points

“The 2018 Vermentino has a fresh nose with baker’s yeast, green apple and pear, acacia, stone and citrusy hints. Light to medium-bodied, it has intense, mineral-driven fruits with juicy acidity and a long, refreshing finish. 1,220 cases produced.”

Viognier 2018

(90 - 92) points

“A barrel sample, the 2018 Viognier gives up lychee, musk melon, white pepper and lemongrass on the nose, with oodles of honeysuckle perfume, crushed stone, white peach and warm citrus layers. Medium to full-bodied, it’s broad in the mouth with good freshness, finishing long with textbook Viognier bitterness. 375 cases are expected to be made.”

Dianthus Rosé 2018**91 points**

“A blend of 51% Mourvèdre, 39% Grenache and 10% Counoise, the 2018 Rosé Dianthus is pale to medium cherry-pink with blueberry and red cherry on the nose plus rhubarb, crushed stone, lemon pith and cantaloupe aromas. Light to medium-bodied, it’s more serious in the mouth with mineral-driven red fruits, juicy acidity and a long, textured finish. 1,500 cases produced.”

Patelin de Tablas Rosé 2018**89 points**

“A blend of 76% Grenache, 20% Mourvèdre and 4% Counoise, the 2018 Patelin de Tablas Rosé is pale to medium salmon-pink in color with scents of sliced strawberries, orange, green melon and red berries with savory and stony hints. Light to medium-bodied, it offers good intensity with a mineral streak, tangy acidity and a long, textured but refreshing finish. 2,690 cases produced.”

Esprit de Tablas Blanc 2017**92 points**

“The 2017 Esprit Blanc de Tablas is made up of 68% Roussanne, 17% Grenache Blanc, 7% Picpoul Blanc, 4% Picardan and 4% Clairette Blanche. The nose features honey-drizzled apples, lychee, orange peel and musk with warm hay, crushed stone, quince and pie crust notions. Medium to full-bodied with intense honeyed flavors in the mouth, it has great juicy acidity to counter and a long, gently textured finish. “This is the first vintage of the Esprit de Tablas Blanc to have Clairette and Picardin,” winemaker Jason Haas says, “because we wanted to include all the white grapes from Châteauneuf-du-Pape.” 2,250 cases produced.”

Roussanne 2017**91 points**

“The 2017 Roussanne is scented of honeycomb, elderflower, beeswax and stone with notions of dried lemon and orange peel, white pepper, musk melon and dried hay. It’s light to medium-bodied and perfumed in the mouth, with juicy acidity to counter the broad texture and a honey-accented finish. 1,050 cases produced.”

Counoise 2017**89 points**

“Pale to medium ruby, the 2017 Counoise opens with notes of sage and chocolate mint with Bing cherries, cranberries, wild blackberries, woodsmoke and warm earth. It’s light to medium-bodied with juicy red fruits and peppery touches, finishing long and berry-laced. Fun! 530 cases produced.”

Côtes de Tablas 2017**92 points**

“The 2017 Côtes de Tablas is made up of 53% Grenache, 25% Syrah, 12% Mourvèdre and 10% Counoise. It has a pale ruby color and aromas of Bing cherries, fresh cranberries and red licorice plus orange peel, dusty earth, garrigue, charcuterie and sage brush. It’s light to medium-bodied with bright berry fruits, juicy acidity and a firm, chalky frame, finishing long. 2,135 cases produced.”

En Gobelet 2017**92 points**

“The 2017 En Gobelet is made up of 38% Mourvèdre, 34% Grenache, 11% Syrah, 11% Tannat and 6% Counoise. Pale to medium ruby, it features scents of black cherry and blueberry, cranberry sauce, warm blackberries, cocoa, turned earth and dried herbs. It’s medium-bodied with intense, floral-tinged fruits segueing to chocolate notes, framed by grainy tannins and with great freshness on the very long finish. 820 cases produced.”

Esprit de Tablas 2017**(92 - 94) points**

“A barrel sample, the 2017 Esprit de Tablas is made up of 40% Mourvèdre, 35% Grenache, 20% Syrah and 5% Counoise. It’s pale to medium ruby with aromas of spiced cranberry sauce, red cherry preserves, warm blackberries, orange peel, blueberries and tree bark with accents of bitter chocolate, dusty earth and garrigue plus gobs of juicy red berry notions. It’s light to medium-bodied with great intensity, juicy acidity, grainy tannins and a very long finish. This has great potential! 4,090 cases are expected to be produced.”

Full Circle Pinot Noir 2017**91 points**

“The 2017 Full Circle Pinot Noir is pale to medium ruby with a very pretty perfume of fresh cranberries and red berries, cola, dried roses, tangerine peel and blueberries. The light to medium-bodied palate offers intense, earth-laced red fruits with juicy acidity and softly textured tannins, finishing long and spicy. 570 cases produced.”

Grenache 2017**91 points**

“The pale ruby colored 2017 Grenache features spiced red cherries, dried cranberries, dusty earth and orange peel aromas with garrigue, charcuterie, mint and oodles of floral notions. Light to medium-bodied with savory red fruits, it has juicy acidity and a soft, chalky frame, finishing long and spicy. 530 cases were made.”

Le Complice 2017**92 points**

“A blend of 67% Syrah, 21% Grenache and 12% Terret Noir, the medium ruby colored 2017 Le Complice has a spicy, perfumed nose of orange peel, dried rose petals, warm earth, peppered meats and garrigue with Bing cherries, rhubarb, cranberry and blackberries. In the mouth, it's medium to full-bodied with restrained fruits and oodles of savory nuances, with a firm frame of chewy tannins and good freshness, finishing long with herb-laced berries. 880 cases produced.”

Mourvèdre 2017**92 points**

“The pale to medium ruby colored 2017 Mourvèdre opens with blueberries, blackberries, black plum and cherry on the nose with graphite, dried herbs and lovely lilac and violet perfume. It's medium-bodied with a good core of broody fruit, a firm, grainy frame and good freshness on the long, earthy finish. 950 cases produced.”

Panoplie 2017**(93 - 95) points**

“A barrel sample, the 2017 Panoplie is made up of 69% Mourvèdre, 17% Grenache and 14% Syrah. It's medium ruby with Bing cherries, rhubarb, blackberries, bergamot, dried herbs, chocolate and sage brush. The medium-bodied palate features intense, garrigue-tinged fruits with a firm frame of grainy tannins and juicy freshness, finishing very long and full of flavor. 820 cases are expected to be made.”

Patelin de Tablas 2017**90+? points**

“Pale to medium ruby, the 2017 Patelin de Tablas is made up of 48% Syrah, 32% Grenache, 16% Mourvèdre and 4% Counoise. It opens with a touch of tarry reduction, slowly giving way to wild blackberries, black cherries, chargrill, potpourri and blue fruit hints with a spicy undercurrent. It's light to medium-bodied, intense and earthy with juicy acidity and a long, berry-laced finish. 3,580 cases produced.”

Syrah 2017**92+ points**

“The 2017 Syrah is the first 100% Syrah to be bottled by Tablas Creek since 2014. Medium ruby, it opens with roasted coffee bean, cocoa, dried rosemary, lavender and sage brush with spiced blackberries, blackcurrants, tapenade and grilled meats. Medium to full-bodied, the fruits are savory and restrained in the mouth, firmly framed by pleasantly chewy tannins and good freshness, finishing long. 420 cases produced.”

Esprit de Tablas 2016**92 points**

“The 2016 Esprit de Tablas is a blend of 46% Mourvèdre, 31% Syrah, 18% Grenache and 5% Counoise—winemaker Neil Collins says there's more Grenache than usual in the blend this vintage. Pale to medium ruby, it has a pretty nose of desiccated roses, fresh blueberries, black and red cherries, loamy earth, sage brush, tobacco leaves and charcuterie. It's light to medium-bodied with intense, earthy fruits, a firm frame and good juiciness on the long, spiced finish. 3,225 cases produced.”

Le Complice 2016**91 points**

“This is the first vintage of the Le Complice bottling, which is made up of 59% Syrah, 20% Grenache, 19% Terret Noir and 2% Roussanne, crafted to celebrate the Terret Noir grape. Medium ruby, the 2016 Le Complice offers aromas of dusty earth, garrigue, potpourri and charcuterie with blueberries, cranberry, rhubarb and warm red cherries. It's light to medium-bodied and silky with juicy red fruits and just enough freshness to lift the long, savory finish. 750 cases produced.”

Mourvèdre 2016**91 points**

“Pale to medium ruby, the 2016 Mourvèdre has a fresh, bright nose of Bing cherry, fresh cranberries and rhubarb with wild blackberries, dried herbs, citrus peel and dried flowers. The palate is light to medium-bodied with crunchy red fruits, finishing long, spicy and refreshing. 810 cases produced.”

Panoplie 2016**93+ points**

“The 2016 Panoplie, a blend of 66% Mourvèdre, 25% Syrah and 9% Grenache, is pale to medium ruby with aromas of warm black cherries, blackberries, graphite, pipe tobacco and autumn leaves with accents of red berries and citrus peel. Light to medium-bodied, it offers intense, savory/earthy fruits with a firm, grainy frame and good freshness, finishing long and spicy. 770 cases produced.”

Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc 2009**92 points**

“Due to the drought in 2009, Tablas Creek only bottled Roussanne and Grenache Blanc—no varietal Picpoul, Marsanne or Viognier was made. This 2009 Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc, a blend of 62% Roussanne, 26% Grenache Blanc and 12% Picpoul Blanc bottled under cork, has a pretty nose with honeycomb, beeswax, baked peaches and dried tropical fruit notions plus pie crust, dried mushroom, hay, baked quince and apples—what lovely layers! Medium to full-bodied, it’s broad in the mouth and savory, still with enough acidity to refresh and a very long, savory finish. This could age a bit more but is drinking well now. 1,825 cases were made.”

Vermentino 2009**92 points**

“2009 was a drought year and was affected by frost in April, so yields were very low. The 2009 Vermentino (bottled under screwcap) has a nose reminiscent of bottle-aged Riesling: petrol, smoke, gunflint and candle wax with lemon peel, baked quince and golden apple plus notes of dried hay, lime peel and pineapple. Medium-bodied, it’s still wonderfully fresh in the mouth, opening to notions of lime peel, lemongrass and dried pineapple with honeyed touches, broadly textured but with juicy acidity, finishing very long and nuanced. Wow! This is drinking beautifully right now! 420 cases were made.”

Côtes de Tablas 2009**89 points**

“The 2009 Côtes de Tablas is a blend of 43% Grenache, 24% Syrah, 18% Counoise and 15% Mourvèdre. Medium garnet, it’s just beginning to brown a bit at the rim and is fully tertiary on the nose with savory mushroom, baked blackberries, soy, old leather, bitter chocolate and dried herbs plus graphite nuances. Light to medium-bodied, it’s savory and tertiary in the mouth, hanging on to some red and black fruit flavors, with great juicy acidity and a soft frame of grainy tannins, finishing long on a chocolaty note. Drink up! 1,050 cases produced.”

En Gobelet 2009**89 points**

“The 2009 En Gobelet, the second ever bottling of this cuvée, is a blend of 56% Mourvedre, 23% Tannat and 21% Grenache. Medium ruby, it’s tertiary on the nose with old leather, hoisin, dried herbs and roast coffee with dried red fruits and briary hints at the core. Light to medium-bodied, it’s very savory and tertiary in the mouth, with lots of chocolate and coffee spice coming through, framed with chalky tannins and good freshness and finishing savory. Drink up. 600 cases were made.”

Esprit de Beaucastel 2009**93 points**

“The 2009 Esprit de Beaucastel is made up of 40% Mourvèdre, 28% Syrah, 27% Grenache and 5% Counoise. It has a medium ruby-garnet color and pretty nose of dried cherries, cranberries, dark chocolate, old leather and soy hints with dried herbs and coffee bean—this still has plenty of fruit and has just begun its ascent into tertiary character. The medium-bodied palate offers wonderful layers of savory fruits, with a firm frame of chalky tannins and good freshness, finishing very long. This still has plenty of time ahead but is drinking beautifully! 2,290 cases were made.”

Panoplie 2009**92 points**

“Pale to medium ruby-garnet, the 2009 Panoplie is a blend of 65% Mourvedre, 26% Grenache and 9% Syrah with scents of baked red and black cherry, peppercorn, old leather, dusty earth and dried herbs with cocoa powder, mushroom, orange peel and amaro hints. Light to medium-bodied, it’s still kicking, with some dried fruits and plenty of savory accents, framed by firm, grainy tannins and good freshness and finishing long and nuanced. This is drinking wonderfully now but can go a bit further. 560 cases were made.”

