



International Wine Cellar

the consumer's passport to fine wine



This joint venture of Château de Beaucastel and their American importer Robert Haas was founded in 1989. There are now 90 acres under vine on this property of 170 acres, with clonal selections from the Southern Rhône Valley used in all vineyards planted since 1994. It took a while for the team here to figure out that the climate of Paso Robles was a lot different than that of Châteauneuf du Pape, and that dry autumns in the Paso Robles area made it possible to let the fruit hang much longer on the vines. Today, the estate is harvesting their fruit riper than ever before, not least due to the recent string of warm years. And yet the wines are clear, bright and delineated, as refined as wine gets in this part of the world. In fact, it occurs to me that these are some of the very few California wines that can beat France at its own game. They have the breadth, classically dry flavors and suavity of the best French wines, while delivering the sweetness of fruit that comes from California sunshine. I tasted with general manager Jason Haas and Neil Collins, who has been in charge of winemaking here since 1997, the year Tablas Creek began vinifying in their own facility. Don't miss this estate's uncommonly fine white wines from Rhône Valley grapes.

2003 Tablas Creek Vineyard Côtes de Tablas Blanc Paso Robles 88 (45% viognier, 32% marsanne, 16% grenache blanc and 7% roussanne) Medium yellow. Exotic herbs, clove, menthol and minerals on the nose. Sweet fruit flavors are nicely firm by lively acids and complicated by spring flowers, menthol, honey and fresh herbs. Supple, persistent wine made to drink young. The grenache blanc contributes acidity, while the roussanne add minerals and earth tones, says Jason Haas.

2003 Tablas Creek Vineyard Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc 89 (68% roussanne, 27% grenache blanc and 5% viognier) Bright medium yellow. Explosive aromas of peach, lemon drop and minerals. At once fat and juicy, with firm-edged peach flavor showing very good grip and persistence. This offers lovely restraint and shape. About half of this roussanne was barrel-fermented.

2003 Tablas Creek Vineyard Roussanne 90(+?) Full yellow. Complex nose melds pineapple, ripe pit fruits, gunflint and honey, all lifted by oak spice and an herbal/peppery nuance. Bright but tight, even austere. This is ultimately richer and denser than the Esprit, with a purer varietal character, but today it's dominated by its structure. Finishes very rich and very long, with a firm mineral spine and some oakiness.

2002 Tablas Creek Vineyard Côtes de Tablas Blanc Paso Robles 89 (a blend of 46% grenache, 21% syrah, 21% mourvèdre and 12% counoise) Full medium red. Explosive cherry liqueur and spice aromas, complicated by licorice and leather. Ripe but quite dry in the mouth; with aromatic fruit and spice flavors. Big and broad on the back end, finishing with spicy, peppery tannins and a saline note.

2002 Tablas Creek Vineyard Esprit de Beaucastel Paso Robles 91 (57% mourvèdre, 27% syrah, 10% grenache and 6% counoise) Moderately saturated, bright medium ruby. Aromas of black cherry, minerals, tree bark and forest floor. A step up in concentration from the Côtes de Tablas; sweet, dense and spicy, showcasing the very ripe, rich mourvèdre. Finishes complex, dry and saline, with a savory persistence.

2002 Tablas Creek Vineyard Panoplie Paso Robles 93 (the California version of Beaucastel's Hommage à Jacques Perrin, according to Jason Haas; 80% mourvèdre, 13% grenache and 7% counoise) Full deep red-ruby. Superripe, liqueur-like aromas of cherry, blueberry, minerals, flowers, nuts and Christmas spices. Quite silky on entry, then intensely flavored and sweet in the middle palate without any impression of excess weight. Wonderfully pure and vibrant for such a broad wine. Finishes with a fine dusting of tannins and superb persistence. What a treat to taste mourvèdre of this quality from California.

2003 Tablas Creek Vineyard Mourvèdre Paso Robles 90 (100% mourvèdre; 14.3% alcohol) Good dark red. Spicy red cherry, plum, leather, gunflint, chocolate, forest floor and earth on the nose. Supple and easygoing; plump but not heavy. Juicy flavors of spices, leather, iron, tree bark and forest floor. Firm tannins and lively acids give this lovely lift. Tablas Creek introduced this varietal bottling, according to Haas, to give people a point of reference for mourvèdre in this area.

2003 Tablas Creek Vineyard Syrah Paso Robles 88(+?) Bright medium ruby. Aromas of blackberry, black plum, pepper and licorice; a bit less forthcoming today than the mourvèdre. Quite suave on entry, then very closed in the middle, even a bit youthfully disjointed. The wine's fruit is currently suppressed, and the dominant flavors are saline and spicy. This appears to rely more on its acids than its tannins for structure. Pure but not yet expressive. In fact, today this is the least convincing of these 2003 reds.

2003 Tablas Creek Vineyard Esprit de Beaucastel Paso Robles 92 (50% mourvèdre, 27% syrah, 16% grenache and 7% counoise) Medium-deep red. Perfumed aromas of black cherry liqueur, forest floor scents and meat. Impressively silky and suave on entry, then sweet and supple in the middle, with no sense of excess weight. Compared to the 2002, this is a more fruit-driven blend, offering notes of black cherry, raspberry, iron, licorice and spices. Long, mounting finish features smooth tannins. At 14.8% this is high in alcohol for a wine from Tablas Creek yet quite moderate for a Rhône blend from this neighborhood.

2003 Tablas Creek Vineyard Panoplie Paso Robles 94 (69% mourvèdre, 21% grenache, 7% syrah and 3% counoise) Good dark red. Superripe but vibrant aromas of cherry, raspberry, leather, espresso and flowers; deep and three-dimensional on the nose. Sweet, lush and large-scaled with powerful red fruit and spice flavors complicated by torrefaction notes of mocha and chocolate that winemaker Neil Collins says are from the mourvèdre (the wine was aged mostly in old demi-muids). With aeration, this showed captivating leather and forest floor nuances that reminded me of Southern France. Finishes with lush tannins and outstanding persistence.

2003 Tablas Creek Vineyard Vin de Paille Paso Robles (half bottle) 92 (50% viognier and 25% each grenache blanc and marsanne; from grapes dried on straw beds in a greenhouse, and barrel-fermented in new oak) Deep yellow-gold. Rather carnal aromas of exotic peach, apricot, roasted nuts and honey. Hugely fat and sweet in the mouth, with just enough acidity to maintain its balance. The firm finish, with its hint of minerality, comes as a very pleasant surprise. This is 12.7% alcohol with 163 grams/liter of residual sugar.

2003 Tablas Creek Vineyard Vin de Paille Quintessence Paso Robles (half bottle) 94 (100% roussanne; 9.1% alcohol and 233 g/l r.s.) Medium-deep yellow-gold. High-toned, nectar-like aromas of peachy fruit salad, lifted by lively acids. Hugely sweet and unctuous, with penetrating, somewhat carnal stone fruit and toasted grain flavors. As thick and nectar-like as this is, it also boasts refreshing treble notes. The fruit builds impressively on the extremely long, somewhat saline finish. This represents a single barrel of the estate's most powerful, intense roussanne, according to Haas. I would expect this to last for a long time in bottle.

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