

"Jason Haas and his Tablas Creek team continue methodically to expand their portfolio "as we keep exploring what the potential is here for pretty much any Mediterranean variety. We're still generations away from figuring out what's ideal for these soils, so we have to start somewhere," he added. Haas and winemaker Neil Collins are especially excited by the potential for their young field-blend vineyard, which is planted on original rootstock. The wine from these vines, called En Gobelet, is a blend of head-trained mourvèdre, tannat and grenache that has thus far been made only in 2007 and 2009. (I scored the '07 92 points two years ago and a barrel sample of the 2009 I tasted in September looked extremely promising. In fact, it was one of the best young wines I tasted on my trip.) Collins believes that the '09 whites "have a fat, textural quality that's a lot like the southern Rhône; they'll drink well young but should live on their depth and concentration." As for the new set of red wines, he told me that he really likes 2008 "because it's a vintage where variety and site shine clearly, whereas 2007 was more about the heat of the vintage. The best 2008s have intensity without weight, which is sort of the ideal for a wine as far as we're concerned." Haas pointed out that in 2008 all the varietal wines are 100% made from the variety on the label.

2009 Vermentino Pale yellow. Smoky pear and pit fruits on the nose, with complicating notes of herbs and dried flowers. In a southern Italian style, with deep peach and pear flavors and a touch of bitter herbs. Packs a punch but doesn't come off heavy, finishing with good spicy cut and lingering sappiness. **89**

2009 Côtes de Tablas Blanc (45% viognier, 28% roussanne, 20% marsanne and 7% grenache blanc) Bright gold. Ripe orchard fruit and orange aromas are complemented by suggestions of honeysuckle and white pepper. Lush, honeyed and broad, offering juicy pit fruit flavors and a brighter note of lemon curd. Smooth, dry and focused, with good finishing clarity and chewy persistence. **89**

2009 Bergeron (100% roussanne) Light gold. Restrained aromas of pineapple, citrus pith and white flowers, plus a subtle herbal nuance. Tight, understated and firm on the palate, with lively flavors of pear, green apple and flowers. Very dry but surprisingly ripe, with firm underlying minerality and strong acidity contributing to this wine's clarity. Very firm acidity adds definition to the long finish. I really like this style. **90**

2009 Grenache Blanc Yellow-gold. Pungent, high-pitched aromas of peach, lime, flinty minerals and botanicals. Creamy, pliant and suave, with strong spicy lift to the candied lime and mineral flavors, with intriguing inner-mouth perfume. A building floral quality lingers on the long, fleshy finish of this layered and surprisingly lithe wine. **90**

2009 Roussanne Bright gold. Aromas of dried pineapple, citrus pith, honey and exotic flowers. Deep, juicy and quite dry, but with a dense, chewy texture to the slightly tart-edged orchard and tropical fruit flavors. This firm but broad and powerful wine finishes with very good length and a hint of bitter lemon. **91**

2009 Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc (62% roussanne, 26% grenache blanc and 12% picpoul) Vivid gold. Pungent, mineral and herb-accented aromas of dried pit fruits, mango, honey and lemon curd. A smoky note comes up with air, along with a hint of anise. Then dusty, dry and sappy on the palate, with impressive intensity to the flavors of ripe orchard fruits, citrus peel and licorice. Finishes firm-edged and stony, with excellent persistence. A serious, soil-driven white wine that was raised in all neutral oak. **92**

2009 Antithesis (100% chardonnay) Yellow-gold. Subdued but pure nose offers white peach, apple, baking spices and green almond. Gently spicy and bright, with a light touch and solid grip to the concentrated pit and orchard fruit flavors. Rich but dry, with a minerally reserve and very good finishing clarity. This 100-case-production wine disappears almost instantly, Haas told me. **90**

2009 Rosé (46% mourvèdre, 39% grenache and 15% counoise) Medium pink. Aromas of dried redcurrant, cherry, anise and blonde tobacco. Juicy and energetic, with a firm spine and good cut to the slightly bitter red fruit flavors. The finish is dry, firm and nicely persistent. This possesses very good definition and substance, with a more serious character than most pink wines. **88**

2008 Côtes de Tablas (42% grenache, 21% syrah, 20% counoise and 17% mourvèdre) Vivid red. Expressive nose offers redcurrant, raspberry, potpourri and smoky herbs. Quite sweet and supple, with very good density to its red fruit, floral and spice flavors. Shows a silky but taut structure and leaves suave floral and spice notes behind on a lengthy, energetic finish. This, along with the 2006, is the best version of this bottling I've tasted. **91**

2008 Grenache Bright red. Musky, complex aromas of raspberry, smoked meat, rose oil and smoky herbs. Sweet and fleshy, offering fully ripe red fruit flavors and an exotic note of candied flowers. Impressive mid-palate density and sexy, very ripe fruit here (15.5% alcohol); this will repay short-term aging. **91**

2008 Mourvèdre Inky ruby. Sexy dark berries and cola on the nose, with notes of violet and licorice adding complexity. Very fruity, with more clarity and less gaminess than most French versions of the variety, offering sweet blackberry and mulberry flavors and a touch of woodsmoke. Distinctly rich but there's good energy here as well. The finish is sweet, broad and very long. **91**

2008 Syrah Vivid red. Medicinal cherry, licorice and a smoky nuance on the nose and palate. Dense and smooth in texture, with the medicinal and licorice qualities carrying through in the mouth. There's very good chewy depth and intensity here, but this classically dry wine deserves patience. Finishes with very smooth tannins, a whiplash of powerful cherry and dark berry flavors and a hint of exotic flowers. **91(+?)**

2008 Esprit de Beaucastel (38% mourvèdre, 30% grenache, 26% syrah and 6% counoise) Bright red. Enticing aromas of raspberry, potpourri, licorice and fresh herbs. Lush, broad and sweet but structured, with an exotic candied fruit quality giving this dense, well-constituted wine plenty of early sex appeal. Finishes sweet and spicy, with a fine dusting of tannins and outstanding length. This is already delicious but has the balance to age. **93**

2008 Esprit de Beaucastel Panoplie (54% mourvèdre, 29% grenache and 17% syrah) Ruby-red. A drop-dead, complex bouquet displays red and dark berry preserves, incense, rose oil and Asian spices. Sappy, expansive and pure, with deeply concentrated but lively raspberry and mulberry flavors, along with a strong floral pastille quality. Blends power with vibrancy smoothly and finishes with resonating floral, spice and red fruit notes. **94**

2008 Tannat Opaque violet. Ripe aromas of cherry compote, cassia, hashish and truffle, with a suggestion of singed plum. Nothing shy about this big boy, which offers flavors of dark fruits, black pepper, fresh herbs and tobacco leaf, plus a whiff of violet. Finishes with dusty tannins and very good length, repeating the floral note. This would be great with grilled, smoky lamb. **91"**