

FOOD & WINE

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wine made simple

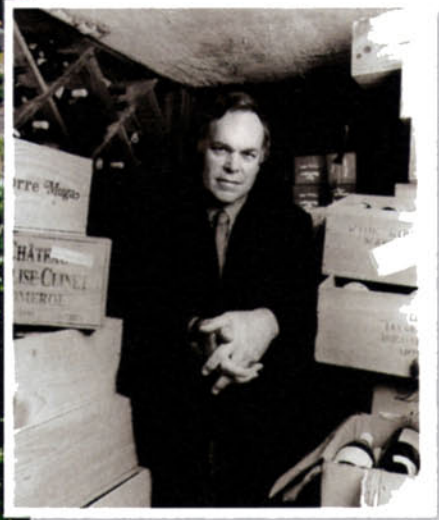
7 easy rules for pairing

*plus 67
wine-friendly
recipes*

Spicy pork &
tomatillo stew—delicious
with a Syrah blend

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11 superstar wines
(and their *bargain twins*)



Robert M. Parker, Jr., ABOVE, is a keen champion of the wines produced in the limestone-soil vineyards of California's Paso Robles region.

The Promise of Paso Robles

Esteemed critic *Robert M. Parker, Jr.*, believes the Paso Robles area of the Central Coast shows some of the greatest potential in all of California. Here, he reports on the wineries that astonish him.

BACK IN 1990, THERE were fewer than 20 wineries in and around Paso Robles, a farming community midway between San Francisco and Los Angeles. Most of the wines produced there were rustic, highly tannic and alcoholic, with little charm or finesse. Today there are more than 170 wineries in Paso Robles, and the area is going through a metamorphosis. There are now a half-dozen or so properties producing wines that are revelations of elegance, finesse, complexity and

flavor concentration. In fact, each year I spend around 10 days there tasting, and each year the quality improves. Major progress has largely come not from makers of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot, but from a group of producers often referred to as the Rhône Rangers, specializing in grape varietals of the Rhône Valley of France.

The greatest headway has been made west of Highway 101, where most of the top vineyards are located. These are hillside vineyards planted in limestone soils of various eleva-

tions, but almost all are within 10 to 15 miles of the Pacific Ocean. These limestone soils, prevalent in many of France's finest vineyards, seem to encourage wines of great intensity as well as elegance.

Paso Robles remains a work in progress, but I believe the region already shows some of the most striking potential in all of California. The following are the six leading Paso pioneers.

Robert M. Parker, Jr., is the world's top wine critic, the publisher of the Wine Advocate and a longtime F&W contributing editor.

REPORT central coast

The modest
L'Aventure produces
impressive Cabernet.



L'Aventure Winery

Winemaker Stephan Asseo has become a superstar, producing remarkable Cabernet Sauvignon.

fORMER ST-ÉMILION resident and winemaker Stephan Asseo gave up Bordeaux and moved to the hill-sides outside of Paso Robles.

And in just a few years, he has become a superstar, producing remarkable Cabernet Sauvignon that seems to have more in common with a great vintage of Mouton Rothschild from Pauillac than any other Cabernet I have tasted from California. This is the single best Paso Robles Cabernet and competes with the best Napa Valley Cabernets. Asseo also produces an intriguing Grenache-Syrah-Mourvèdre blend, Côte-à-Côte, that's a dead ringer for a top-notch Southern Rhône wine. Prices are relatively steep, generally running between \$45 and \$80 a bottle.

.....{ **BUYING GUIDE** }.....

parker's paso picks

2005 L'Aventure Côte-à-Côte (\$75) A blend of Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre, the Côte-à-Côte is a dead ringer for a top Southern Rhône, with California-style ripeness and power.