

Josh Reynolds

Stephan Asseo described 2009 as "a vintage where you could make a show beast, an exaggerated wine, if you wanted to. But you really couldn't do that in 2010, and that's probably a good thing if the winemaker wasn't able to manage the ripeness of '09." Added Asseo: "If you could get elegance to go along with the power in '09 you made a really great wine." Asseo has long maintained that while he is enamored of the power that wines can attain in Paso Robles, he wants his wines "to be big and rich, which is what happens here naturally, but also to have complexity. Big for its own sake isn't very interesting." He told me that "if you can get red fruit in Paso you're doing well. It isn't easy."

2011 Estate Cuvee Blanc Paso Robles (\$45) (51% roussanne and 49% grenache blanc): Pale gold. A highly aromatic bouquet evokes lemongrass, melon, smoky minerals and anise, plus a hint of white pepper. Sappy and precise, offering mineral-laced orange and honeydew flavors given grip by a bitter quinine element. The finish is refreshingly spicy and very persistent, leaving mineral and citrus notes behind. Asseo thinks that both roussanne and grenache blanc can "drive minerality" if they're planted in the right place. **91**

2010 Optimus Paso Robles (\$45) (55% syrah, 27% cabernet sauvignon and 18% petit verdot; 15.8% alcohol): Inky purple. Ripe dark berry and cherry aromas are complicated by musky underbrush and anise. Round, juicy blackberry and cassis flavors stain the palate, with juicy acidity providing verve. Becomes spicier and more vibrant on the gently tannic finish, with the dark berry and anise notes repeating. **92**

2010 La Suite Paso Robles (\$75) (43% grenache, 40% mourvedre and 17% syrah): Bright ruby. Sexy aromas of raspberry, Asian spices and lavender, with notes of cola, saffras and anise building with air. Deeply pitched red berry flavors show unlikely finesse, with zesty minerality adding spine and focus. Tannins come on late and are nicely woven into the wine's sappy fruit. An impressively energetic blend in the style of the vintage, finishing with strong cut and spicy persistence. **93**

2010 Cote A Cote Estate Paso Robles (\$85) (42% grenache, 34% syrah and 24% mourvedre; 16.1% alcohol): Opaque ruby. Strikingly complex, smoke-accented bouquet evokes blackberry, cherry, cracked pepper and potpourri. Sappy, palate-staining dark berry compote flavors are given a tangy edge by an exotic orange pith quality and exhibit refreshingly peppery, spicy cut. The floral note repeats strongly on the finish, which is sweet, broad and very persistent.

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2010 Cuvee Chloe Paso Robles (\$85) (70% syrah and 30% grenache, from a north-facing slope; 16.3% alcohol): Glass-staining purple. Deeply pitched aromas and flavors of cherry, cassis and candied violet. Velvety and expansive, offering sweet dark fruit compote flavors and an intense spicy quality that adds lift. Finishes spicy and very long, with excellent clarity, supple tannins and lingering sweetness. **93**

2010 Estate Cuvee Paso Robles (\$85) (42% syrah, 42% cabernet sauvignon and 16% petit verdot; 15.7% alcohol): Dark purple. Explosively perfumed bouquet of cherry-cola, dark berries, pipe tobacco and potpourri. Spicy, deep blackberry, cassis and violet pastille flavors are complicated by suave vanilla and allspice nuances. Gains weight with but maintains clarity on the impressively long, juicy, subtly tannic finish, leaving behind a sexy floral quality.

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