



Now is a great time to be a Rhone Ranger fan and the number of outstanding wines available is impressive. The diversity is also something and whether you like the full bodied, richly fruited and base note driven wines from Paso Robles or the more fragrant and often raspberry and floral scented wines from Santa Barbara, there's no shortage of exciting wines to choose from.

This report focuses on Rhone Ranger producers in California and the notes are on wines tasted in the past 6 months. During this period I was able to take two tasting trips through the region and held numerous blind tastings at home.

Recent Paso Robles Vintages

The 2009 harvest is just now finishing up and the season had a cool spring with some late frost as well as a relatively cool early summer. July saw scorching temps as did September, forcing some producers to pick in a hurry. Those who waited had to deal with a monster storm that came through the region on October 13th and 14th, dumping over 9 inches of rain on the region. That's

a significant amount of water. The storm was forecast well ahead of time so it will be interesting to see how this affects the quality of the final wines. Most vintners say quality is high on the grapes that have come in. 2008 was a difficult vintage with late frost in the spring and then an early freeze in October followed by solid weather after that. The few barrels I was able to taste had notably fresher acidity and edgy palates.

Regarding recent vintages that actually have wine in bottle, 2007 is without a doubt at the top of the list. Almost every vintner commented on the excellence of the vintage and the wines display beautiful fruit with fresh, crisp profiles. The vintage was dry with moderate temps and great weather during harvest. Yields were down 25% or more from both '06 and '05. 2006 was also an excellent vintage but the wines lack the freshness and purity of 2007. This vintage had a rainy winter and then a cool spring that was followed by solid weather all the way through harvest. You can still find a number of 2005s on the shelf and this was an outstanding vintage with the wines showing lots of ripeness but also solid underlying structure. The vintage had ideal weather with harvest starting later than normal, allowing additional hang time for the grapes.

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L'Aventure

These wines are made by Stephan Asseo and he originally moved to Paso Robles from Bordeaux due to his desire to blend both Syrah and Cabernet. Like Tablas Creek from further north, these wines have a distinct structure and density on the palate that you don't find readily in other wines of the region. The estates Roussanne is one of the top whites in this report and the '07 Côte-à-Côte was nothing short of stunning.

Website: www.aventurewine.com

2008 L'Aventure Roussanne	White	92
2007 L'Aventure Estate Cuvée	Red	95
2007 L'Aventure Côte-à-Côte	Red	96
2006 L'Aventure Côte-à-Côte	Red	94
2006 L'Aventure Optimus	Red	92

2008 L'Aventure Roussanne (USA, California, Central Coast, Paso Robles) \$35

A top white from the region, the 2008 L'Aventure Roussanne offers superb richness, purity and depth to the fruit paired with a rich, precise texture. Clean and very long on the finish, drink this outstanding white over the next year. (92 pts.)

2007 L'Aventure Estate Cuvée (USA, California, Central Coast, Paso Robles) **\$85**

A blend of 49% Syrah, 37% Cabernet and 14% Petit Verdot, the 2007 L'Aventure Estate Cuvée is a blockbuster with cassis and blackberry fruit, spice, lead pencil and earthy aromatics, perfect structure and a killer, smooth, precise texture. There's no shortage of length on the finish and this is a stunning wine. **(95 pts.)**

2007 L'Aventure Côte-à-Côte (USA, California, Central Coast, Paso Robles) **\$85**

A blend of 40% Grenache, 40% Mourvèdre and 20% Syrah, the 2007 L'Aventure Côte-à-Côte is a drop dead gorgeous wine that offers deep, rich aromatics of black cherry and assorted dark fruits, meat, spice, herbs and earth. The palate is full bodied with perfect structure, an awesome pure, precise texture and a blockbuster finish. I'm a huge fan and this is one of the top wines in this report. Drink over the next 10 to 15 years. **(96 pts.)**

2006 L'Aventure Côte-à-Côte (USA, California, Central Coast, Paso Robles) **\$85**

Almost Bordeaux like given its structure and richness, the 2006 L'Aventure Côte-à-Côte exhibits impressive aromatics of cassis, blackberry, graphite and flowers that are supported by subtle oak nuances. It's full bodied in the mouth with low acidity, rich, decadent fruit and a very long finish. This should age beautifully for 10 to 12 years. **(94 pts.)**

2006 L'Aventure Optimus (USA, California, Central Coast, Paso Robles) **\$45**

The 2006 L'Aventure Optimus is a blend of 50% Cabernet, 45% Syrah and 5% Petit Verdot offers up lots of graphite, meaty dark fruits, herbs and tobacco. Medium bodied in the mouth, the wine shows beautiful purity, texture and length. **(92 pts.)**