

JEB DUNNUCK

Located in the heart of the appellation, just off highway 46, Stephan Asseo's l'Aventure Winery is unquestionably in the top 3-4 estates in Paso Robles. While he made just a handful of cuvees in the past, today he releases upwards of eight cuvees in each vintage. In addition, he's just completed construction on a new cave/winery, and he continues to fine tune the style here, experimenting with amphora and larger barrels, with the goal of getting more elegance and purity into his wines. Looking at the wines reviewed here, the 2015s are certainly rock solid, and show tighter, elegant, and structured personalities. His 2016s are a step up over the 2015s and will be the first vintage completely made in the new cellar. They offer broad, sumptuous profiles, yet with no loss of purity or precision.

2015 Cote a Cote – 93+

The 2015 Cote a Cote checks in as 60% Grenache, 30% Mourvèdre and 10% Syrah that was brought up in 60% barrels and 40% in concrete and amphora. It offers lots of minerality as well as classic notes of black raspberries, spring flowers, crushed rocks and violets. It has plenty of grippy tannin and is going to benefit from a year or three of bottle age, but it has the vintage's elegant, fresh character.

2015 Chloe – 97

One of my favorites in the lineup is the 2015 Cuvée Chloe, which is a co-fermented blend of 66% Syrah and 34% Grenache. The Syrah for this cuvée always comes from the Mcvey Block, which is a cooler, north facing parcel, and the Grenache from an old vine, south facing, warmer slope. Seeing plenty of whole cluster and aging in barrel, it's reminiscent of a 2010 Chateauneuf du Pape (despite the high Syrah content) and sports a deep purple color as well as sensational notes of blackberries and currants fruits intermixed with melted licorice, graphite/lead pencil, violets and tons of chalky minerality. This is a big, concentrated, beautifully balanced 2015 that needs 2-3 years of bottle age. It will have two decades of overall longevity. 2020-2035.

2015 Les Demoiselles – 95+

The 2015 Cuvée Les Demoiselles is a 60/40 split of Mourvèdre and Syrah, all from estate vineyards, that was brought up in barrel. This inky colored beauty offers fabulous notes of blackberries, peppery herbs, violets and hints of wet gravel. It's fresh and focused, which is very much in the style of the vintage, yet has a stacked mid-palate, ripe tannin and serious length. Drink it anytime over the coming 10-15 years.

2015 Estate Cuvee – 95

The 2015 Estate Cuvée is terrific, and certainly one of the wines of the vintage. Made from 55% Syrah, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon and 10% Petit Verdot, its deep ruby color is followed by classy notes of cassis, lead pencil shavings, crushed rocks and charcoal, and it's a fresh, elegant, beautifully textured 2015 that should put on a touch of mid-palate depth with a year or three of cellaring. It will keep for a decade or more.

2015 For Her – 98

The 2015 For Her is like the Cuvée Chloe with its black and blue fruits, graphite and violet aromas and flavors, yet it has an incredible floral, peach and marmalade character (no doubt from its Viognier component), and its tannin is much more polished and elegant. Opening up with time in the glass, this sensational 2015 offers full-bodied richness, thrilling purity, no hard edges and building minerality and tannin on the finish. It's unquestionably up with the crème de la crème of the vintage, and while it will benefit from short term cellaring. The blend in 2015 is 50% Syrah (from Stephan's Hilltop block), 32% Mourvèdre, 10% Grenache and 8% Viognier.

2015 Optimus – 92

The entry level cuvée is the 2015 Optimus and in 2015 it's a blend of 60% Syrah, 21% Cabernet Sauvignon and 19% Petit Verdot. It's a pretty, elegant version of this cuvée that reveals a deep ruby color, notes of black raspberries, blackberries, violets, and leafy herbs, medium to full-bodied richness and a seamless, silky texture. Drink it over the coming 5-7 years.

2016 Sibling – (92-94)

The 2016 Sibling checks in as 45% Grenache, 36% Syrah and the balance Monastrell that was brought up in a 60/40 split of barrel and concrete tanks. Plums, blueberries, incense and ample peppery spice all give way to a full-bodied, nicely concentrated 2016 that has a terrific sense of elegance.

2016 Optimus – (93-95)

Starting with the 2016-barrel samples, the 2016 Optimus is the entry level cuvee of the estate and is always based on Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot. I suspect it's better than most estate top cuvee and looks to be huge success in 2016. Cassis, violets and peppery herbs all emerge from this surprisingly deep, rich, concentrated red that's going to deliver the goods right out of the gate.

2016 TBD – (94-96)

A new cuvee (which has yet to be named) inspired by the wines of Priorat, the 2016 Name TBD is a rough blend of 40% Grenache, 33% Cabernet Sauvignon and 27% Syrah that's still aging in a mix of French oak and amphora tanks. It has a terrific, Grenache driven bouquet of blackberries, blueberries, violets, and white chocolate to go with a full-bodied, sexy, seamless style on the palate. It's a big wine, no doubt, but it stays impeccably balanced and has terrific purity of fruit.

2016 For Her – (97-99)

One of the finest 2016s I was able to taste, the 2016 For Her is the same blend as the otherworldly 2014 and is 58% Syrah, 32% Monastrell and the rest Viognier that was all cofermented and aged 14 months in 55% new French oak. It offers a heavenly bouquet of violets, black and blue fruits, chalk, wood smoke and peppery herbs. Complex, layered and even nuanced at this young stage, it has full-bodied richness, the power and richness that's common in the vintage and a terrific finish.

2016 Estate Cuvee – (97-99)

Last of the 2016s from barrel, the 2016 Estate Cuvée is a classic blend of 52% Syrah, 32% Cabernet Sauvignon and 16% Petit Verdot that's brought up mostly in new French oak. It's glass staining purple color is followed by a full-bodied, unctuous, seriously concentrated red that has building structure, a huge mid-palate and terrific notes of crème de cassis, pencil lead, tobacco leaf and graphite. The Cabernet really shows and this bruiser (although it stays graceful and lively) is going to require short term cellaring.

2016 Les Demoiselles – (95-97)

The 2016 Cuvée Les Demoiselles is a 60/40 split of Mourvèdre and Syrah that's still aging in barrel. This inky colored beauty knocks it out of the park with its chalky, mineral-driven bouquet of blackberries, liquid violets and licorice. With building structure, full-bodied richness and a great finish, it's another big wine from Stephan that stays impeccably balanced and pure. It's going to need short term cellaring.

2016 Chloe – (94-96)

The 2016 Cuvee Chloe is another first-rate 2016 that's going to deliver the goods. A cofermented blend of Grenache and Syrah that's not racked until bottling, it sports an inky purple color as well as sensational notes of black fruits, wood smoke, chalky minerality and smoke meats. Big, rich, concentrated and tannic, yet with a wealth of material and awesome purity, give it 2-3 years of bottle age and enjoy through 2028.

2016 Cote a Cote – (93-95)

I was able to taste the 2016 Cote A Cote from multiple barrels and it checks in as 55% Grenache, 25% Mourvèdre and 20% Syrah that's still resting in French oak. Chalky minerality, violets, plums and hints of blueberries all emerge from this full-bodied, ripe, sexy red that shines for its polished tannin and terrific purity. It should drink nicely right out of the gate and keep for a decade.