



International Wine Cellar

the consumer's passport to fine wine

L'Aventure. 2005 Optimus Paso Robles (\$45; a blend of 51% syrah, 44% cabernet sauvignon and 5% petit verdot): Dark purple. Dark cherry and licorice on the nose, with subtle spice and underbrush qualities adding interest. Lush, creamy dark berry flavors possess display impressive weight but also good energy and focus, with slow-mounting tannins adding shape. Finishes with impressive sweet persistence and a gentle tannic bite. Owner/winemaker Stéphan Asseo likes the touch of austerity that petit verdot adds to the blend. 90. 2005 Côte à Côte Paso Robles (\$75; 34% grenache, 33% syrah and 33% mourvèdre): Inky violet. Powerful, syrah-dominated bouquet offers cassis, bitter cherry, flowers and cracked pepper. Firm dark fruit flavors open to reveal sweet blackberry and plum, with slow-mounting spiciness. Wound up tight right now but there's clearly excellent material here. Finishes with a palate-staining cherry pit quality and superb persistence. 92(+?). 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate Grown Paso Robles (\$60): Dark purple. Explosively perfumed nose offers a room-filling bouquet of blackcurrant, dark cherry, printer's ink and dried flowers. Mouthfilling dark fruit flavors are surprisingly restrained, with no excess ripeness or hard tannins. Seems sweet but Asseo assured me that this has less than two grams per liter of residual sugar, meaning that it is literally dry. The finish echoes the bitter cherry quality and shows excellent depth and thrust. 93. 2005 Estate Cuvée Paso Robles (\$75; 52% syrah, 40% cabernet sauvignon and 8% petit verdot): Opaque purple. Intensely perfumed aromas of dark berries, flowers and minerals, with a strong mocha undertone. Spicy cassis and blackberry flavors are sharpened by graphite and cracked pepper, picking up dark chocolate and licorice on the close. Leaves a vibrant, spicy impression on the long, juicy finish. This put on weight and gained sweetness with air; I'd give it at least five years of cellar time. Asseo mentioned that he is not following the current trend of experimenting with extended barrel aging for syrah (a practice most commonly associated with Guigal for their top Côte-Rôties). "In the northern Rhône they need to soften their syrah, but we don't need to do that in Paso Robles," he told me. 93(+?).