

The Wine Advocate



The WINE ADVOCATE®

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L'AVENTURE	2002	CABERNET SAUVIGNON	PASO ROBLES	(\$60.00)	91+
L'AVENTURE	2002	COTE A COTE	PASO ROBLES	(\$65.00)	93
L'AVENTURE	2002	ESTATE CUVEE	PASO ROBLES	(\$75.00)	94+
L'AVENTURE	2001	ESTATE CUVEE	PASO ROBLES	(\$75.00)	91+
L'AVENTURE	2001	OPTIMUS	PASO ROBLES	(\$45.00)	94
L'AVENTURE	2002	SYRAH ESTATE	PASO ROBLES	(\$60.00)	94

These are not all technically Rhône Ranger blends since they include Bordeaux as well as Rhône varietals, but they are very impressive offerings from transplanted St.-Emilion Frenchman, Stéphane Asseo. The gorgeous **2001 Estate Cuvée** (50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Petit Verdot, and 20% Syrah) tips the scales at 15.8% alcohol. Its deep purple color is followed by a striking bouquet of *crème de cassis*, licorice, melted asphalt, and spice box. An original, distinctive, impressively made, and creatively blended, it is deep, layered, full-bodied, and offers a classic display of structure as well as fruit. Give it 2-3 years of bottle age, and drink it over the following 10-15 years. The **2001 Optimus** (a blend of 47% Cabernet Sauvignon, 45% Syrah, 5% Zinfandel, and 3% Petit Verdot with 15.4% alcohol) is a blockbuster. A dense purple color precedes the sumptuous perfume of blueberries, blackberries, acacia flowers, and licorice. The small percentages of Petit Verdot and Zinfandel along with the huge amount of Syrah give this wine much more up-front, accessible aromatic and flavor profiles. Drink this beautiful red now and over the next 10-12 years.

The 2002s were bottled about five weeks before I tasted them, so perhaps some allowance needs to be factored in these tasting notes. However, they are very impressive efforts, even though they may have been slightly closed.

The **2002 Estate Cuvée**, a blockbuster blend of 50% Syrah, 45% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 5% Petit Verdot, reveals a saturated purple color as well as a gorgeous nose of blackberries, blueberries, flowers, licorice, and a background note of toasty oak. Full-bodied yet elegant with vibrant acidity, superb definition, and a multilayered, concentrated mouthfeel, it can be drunk now or cellared for a decade. The **2002 Côte à Côte** is a blend of 60% estate Grenache and 40% estate Syrah. Abundant aromas of raspberries and kirsch jump from the glass of this deep ruby-colored 2002. In the mouth, this sexy, full-bodied red is dominated by Grenache with raspberry, kirsch, and licorice flavors powerfully presented. In spite of its lofty alcohol (16%), it seems incredibly fresh and cool-climate-like with a beautiful

texture and terrific length. Drink it over the next 7-8 years. the **2002 Syrah Estate** (100% Syrah from l'Aventure's hillside vineyard) reveals a denser, more saturated blue/purple color, great purity, intense flavors, and tremendous balance/harmony. While big-styled, it exhibits restraint as well as attractively integrated acidity, tannins, and wood. This long, youthful Syrah promises to drink well for 10+ years.

Lastly, while not a Rhône Ranger, the inky ruby/purple-colored **2002 Cabernet Sauvignon** (100% Cabernet Sauvignon) may be the finest Cabernet I have tasted from the Paso Robles area over the last few years. Still monolithic, but impressively rich, long, and spicy, with aromas of *crème de cassis*, tobacco, and earth, this tannic, medium to full-bodied, impeccably well-made Cabernet will drink well for 10-15 years. It is good to see Cabernet Sauvignon with this kind of freshness as well as concentration emerge from this area.