PASO ROBLES WINE COUNTRY
GEOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW

distinct. different.

Paso Robles Wine Country is centrally located between San Francisco and Los Angeles along California's Central Coast. As California's fastest growing wine region and largest geographic appellation, the territory encompasses more than 26,000 vineyard acres and more than 180 wineries. With a greater day-to-night temperature swing than any other appellation in California, distinct microclimates, diverse soils and a long growing season, Paso Robles is a unique wine region blessed with optimal growing conditions for producing premium and ultra premium wines. More than 40 wine grape varieties are grown in Paso Robles, ranging from Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, to Syrah, Viognier and Roussanne, to Zinfandel, the area's heritage wine varietal.

LOCATION

Paso Robles Wine Country is situated along U.S. Highway 101 in the center of California's Central Coast, halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

PASO ROBLES VITICULTURAL AREA

Established in 1983, and expanded in 1997 then again in 2009, the Paso Robles American Viticultural Area (AVA) is a large, diverse appellation located within northern San Luis Obispo County, comprised of a number of distinctive grape growing regions generally characterized by rolling hills east of the Salinas River and steeper hillsides, cut by small canyons, west of the Salinas River.

The Paso Robles AVA's western boundary is just six miles from the Pacific Ocean. The appellation lies on the inland side of the Santa Lucia coastal mountains in San Luis Obispo County, and roughly forms a rectangle 35 miles from east to west, and 25 miles from north to south. It extends from the Monterey County border to the north, to the Cuesta Grade below Santa Margarita to the south, and from the Santa Lucia Mountains to the west, to the Cholame Hills to the east.

The appellation comprises 614,000 acres of which more than 26,000 acres are in wine grape vines. It is the fastest growing and largest by far of three AVAs in San Luis Obispo County, and the main reason that the county ranks behind only Napa, Sonoma and Monterey counties in planted acreage among the state's coastal growing areas.

TOPOGRAPHY

The Paso Robles AVA is a land of diversity and contrast that encompasses river bottoms to rolling hills and flat lands to mountains. The major geographical features of the area are the Santa Lucia Range, the Salinas River Valley and the Templeton Gap.

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SOILS

California's Central Coast is geologically different from other California wine growing regions. Unlike others with deep, rich fertile valley soils, over 45 soil series are found in the Paso Robles AVA. These are primarily bedrock derived soils from weathered granite, older marine sedimentary rocks, volcanic rocks and younger marine sedimentary rocks of the Miocene age Monterey Formation featuring calcareous shales, sandstone or mudstone. Soil diversity is the norm and a vineyard block may commonly contain several different soil types.

What is really unique about Paso Robles AVA soils is the predominance of desirable calcareous soils found throughout the region and the high soil pH values of 7.4 to 8.6 that are not typical of California's other viticultural areas. Due to geologic uplift, calcareous shale is plentiful in Paso Robles' west-side hills, where dense clay-based soils combine with relatively plentiful rainfall to make it possible for some vines to be dry-farmed without supplemental irrigation. More granular forms of broken down calcareous shale is found on the eastern hills and valley of the AVA. On both sides of the Salinas River, gently rolling hills are covered with sandy, loamy soils. In the watershed areas, particularly the Estrella River plain, loam and clay are overlain with sand.

CLIMATE

The proximity of the Pacific Ocean, orientation of numerous canyons and valleys, and varying elevations produce many different distinct microclimates in the Paso Robles AVA.

The area benefits from the largest swing between high daytime and low nighttime temperatures of any region in California as a result of the cool marine air that flows east through the Templeton Gap and south along the Salinas River Valley from the Monterey Bay. The region's summer is characterized by warm, clear days, generally unencumbered by clouds, fog or severe winds. Daytime high temperatures in the summer typically fall between 85 and 105 degrees Fahrenheit, but nighttime low temperatures usually can drop by 40 to 50 degrees, cooled by a marine layer that moves over the region in the mid to late afternoon. This diurnal fluctuation is considered a key by winemakers and wine grape growers to attain the intense varietal character displayed in wine grapes from the area.

September, October and the first half of November are typically rain-free and warm, giving Paso Robles vines the advantage of time to produce fully mature fruit, while the overnight cooling keeps the grapes' acid chemistry in balance. The first rainfall of the season is typically about two weeks later than Napa or Sonoma, and a month later than Mendocino, giving winemakers the luxury of waiting for optimal ripeness. Winter temperatures tend to dip into the low twenties in the cooler regions, with most vineyards becoming fully dormant by mid-December. Frost is a potential threat through mid-May, especially following a northern weather system.

RAINFALL

The rainfall of the region, like its climate and soils, varies greatly depending on the vineyard's proximity to the Pacific Ocean and the Templeton Gap. Average annual rainfall for the City of Paso Robles is 15.5 inches, but rainfall ranges from eight inches in the eastern portions of the AVA to as much as 45 inches on the far western ridges. The first rains typically arrive in early-to-mid November, with the heaviest amounts usually occurring January through March. These rain totals are typically dominated by relatively few, but substantial, Pacific storms that can contribute several inches of rain in just a few days.

ELEVATION

The City of Paso Robles rests at 740 feet above sea level. Paso Robles vineyards east of the Salinas River range from 700 to 1,200 feet in elevation while those to the west range from 850 to 2,000 feet.

GROWING SEASON

Due to cool nights, warm days, and typically late rains, Paso Robles vines tend to have a longer growing season and grapes have more hang time compared to other wine regions, resulting in fully mature fruit whose acid chemistry is kept in balance through the area's overnight cooling.