

HISTORY

EARLY YEARS THROUGH 1980s



distinct. different.

Paso Robles was named for its local oak trees, El Paso de Robles, “The Pass of the Oaks.” The name was recorded in 1828 as a rancho where the padres of San Miguel sowed wheat, and the city was founded on the rancho in 1886 and incorporated in 1889. Today the city’s name is commonly shortened to Paso Robles.

The Paso Robles American Viticultural Appellation (AVA) is home to more than 180 wineries and 26,000 vineyard acres focusing on premium wine production. The distinct microclimates and diverse soils, combined with warm days and cool nights, make growing conditions ideal for producing more than 40 wine varietals from Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, to Syrah, Viognier and Roussanne, to Zinfandel, the area’s heritage wine variety.

EARLY YEARS

The greater Paso Robles region has a rich history of winemaking and wine grape growing that was introduced by the Franciscan Friars beginning circa 1790 at the Asistencia located on the Santa Margarita Ranch, an assistant chapel to Mission San Luis Obispo that still stands preserved today, and at Mission San Miguel, founded in 1797 by Father Lasuen, who succeeded Father Serra (1713-1784) as Presidente of the missions. In 1815 grapes were planted on 22 acres at the mission vineyards three miles north of Mission San Miguel (today’s Vineyard Canyon). The Padres produced wine for sacramental purposes and made brandy for export.

After Mexico secularized the California missions in the 1830s, the mission vineyards were abandoned until European immigrant farmers started to arrive in the mid 1850s following California’s statehood on September 9, 1850. The first to farm wine grapes was a Frenchman, Pierre Hypolite Dallidet, who arrived in San Luis Obispo in 1853, where he purchased land at what is now on the corner of Pacific and Toro Streets, planted a commercial seven acre vineyard and later added a winery. Eventually the vineyard grew to 16 acres and included some of the original mission plantings. More Europeans emigrated to the area, including Englishman Henry Ditmas, who began the area’s first vineyard with imported Zinfandel and Muscat grapes from France and Spain for his 560 acre Rancho Saucelito in nearby Arroyo Grande.

1880s TO 1920s

Commercial winemaking was introduced in the late 1870s when Indiana rancher Andrew York began planting vineyards on his 240-acre homestead. Within a few years, he found that the vines were yielding more than he could market, prompting him in 1882 to establish Ascension Winery, known today as York Mountain Winery. The family planted some of the area’s earliest Zinfandel vines, making Paso Robles famous for this variety. York initially sold his wines in San Luis Obispo and eventually as far away as San Francisco. Today, York Mountain Winery (located within the York Mountain AVA, adjacent to the Paso Robles AVA) remains the oldest winery in continuous operation in the county.

Following York’s early success in the wine business, immigrant farming families settled in the area. In 1884 the Ernst family arrived from Geneseo, Illinois, and over the next 20 years planted 25 varieties of wine grapes made into wines receiving wide acclaim. In 1886, Gerd Klintworth planted a vineyard in the Geneseo/Linne area and produced the first white wine in the region. In 1890, Frenchman Adolf Siot planted Zinfandel west of Templeton. In the 1920s, Italian families starting vineyards included Dusi, Martinelli, Busi, Vosti and Bianchi - many of which are still being farmed today by the families’ third and fourth generations.

1920s AND 1930s: ZINFANDEL

There was a flurry of viticultural activity in the early 1920s when several families immigrated to the area to establish family vineyards and wineries. The Dusi family purchased a vineyard in 1924; these old head-pruned Zinfandel vines are now owned and cultivated by their son, Benito. Frank Pesenti also planted Zinfandel on his property in 1923, with the guidance of their neighbor Siot, although the Pesenti Winery (now Turley Winery) was not bonded until 1934.

The Paso Robles wine region gained more notoriety when Ignace Paderewski, the famous Polish statesman and concert pianist, visited Paso Robles for the hot springs that brought relief to his ailing hands. He became enchanted with the area and purchased 2,000



acres. In the early 1920s, he planted Petite Sirah and Zinfandel on his Rancho San Ignacio vineyard in the Adelaida area. When Prohibition ended, Paderewski's wine was made at York Mountain Winery. The wines produced from grapes grown on Rancho San Ignacio went on to become award-winners and Paso Robles' reputation as a premier wine region grew.

Of any variety, Zinfandel had a strong influence on the early growth and development of the wine industry in Paso Robles. It remains a key wine varietal for several wineries, including, among others, Peachy Canyon Winery, Turley Wine Cellars, Tobin James Cellars, Norman Vineyards, Four Vines Winery, Castoro Cellars and Nadeau Family Vintners.

1960s AND 1970s: CABERNET SAUVIGNON, LARGE PLANTINGS

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw a new generation of vineyard pioneers in the Paso Robles area, bringing university training and financial resources for large plantings. Dr. Stanley Hoffman, under the guidance of U.C. Davis and legendary enologist André Tchelistcheff, planted some of the region's first Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay on his 1,200-acre ranch next to the old Paderewski Ranch in the hills of Adelaida, about five miles west of town. His Hoffman Mountain Ranch Winery (a portion now owned by Adelaida Cellars) was the first large-scale modern facility in the area and one that created a stir in international wine circles in the 1970s with his Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Cabernet Sauvignon remains the leading variety for the Paso Robles appellation, accounting for 38 percent of the region's planted wine grape acreage. Due to the intense varietal character of wine grapes grown in this diverse appellation, Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon wines consistently garner national and international acclaim, including, among others, J. Lohr Vineyards and Wines, Treana Winery, Adelaida Cellars and Chateau Margene.

New wine grape growers also began to cultivate the first large plantings on the east side of the Salinas River. Bob Young planted the area's first large scale commercial vineyard, now known as Rancho Dos Amigos on Shandon Heights. Herman Schwartz, managing partner for a group of investors, planted the 500-acre Rancho Tierra Rejada in 1973 (purchased in 2006 it is now known as Shimmin Canyon Vineyard). From 1973 to 1977 Gary Eberle and Cliff Giacobine planted 700 acres, including the first modern commercial acreage of Syrah in the state and established Estrella River Winery, the largest winery in the area (purchased in 1988 by Nestle/Beringer).

1980s: LARGE SCALE WINERIES

Recognizing the area's unique yet very diverse terroir, the 617,000-acre Paso Robles AVA and adjacent 6,400-acre York Mountain AVA were established in 1983.

Larger vineyards and wineries continued to be established in Paso Robles in the 1980s as growers recognized that favorable soil and climate conditions, combined with reasonably priced and available land, allowed them to grow high-quality wine grapes at more competitive price levels than was possible in other appellations. In 1988, J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines expanded into Paso Robles to focus on Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah and other red varietals. J. Lohr is the leading producer of Paso Robles AVA wines with an annual production of over 500,000 cases from over 2,000 acres of vineyards that it owns within the appellation. Meridian Vineyards, now owned by Fosters Wine Estates, was also established in 1988 and is one of the most widely nationally distributed brands based in Paso Robles.

Mid-size wineries were also established during this period. In 1982, Arciero Vineyards and EOS Estate Winery, now with over 700 acres and production at 160,000 cases, pioneered the planting of several premium Italian varietals, as well as substantial plantings of Zinfandel and Petite Sirah. Now owned by Sapphire Brands, EOS Estate Winery is one of many wineries reducing its carbon footprint in Paso Robles by becoming 100% solar powered. In 1983, Wild Horse Winery and Vineyards was established by Kenneth Volk. Now owned by Constellation Brands, it produces 150,000 cases with an average of 15 different varietal wines each year, including a number of heirloom varietals – the largest spectrum of varietal wines to be found in any tasting room in the area. Treana Winery, owned by the Hope family, was established in 1996 and now produces 300,000 cases between the Treana and Liberty School brands. Originally called Hope Farms, the family planted Cabernet Sauvignon in Paso Robles in 1978 and sourced their fruit to Napa.

WILD WEST FOOTNOTE

Paso Robles is sometimes referred to as the wild west of the California wine industry. Outlaws Frank & Jesse James' uncle Drury James was a co-founder of the town of El Paso de Robles and was part owner of the original hot springs hotel, as well as a co-owner of the famous La Panza Ranch 40 miles east of Paso Robles. After holding up a bank in Russellville, Kentucky, on March 20, 1868 the James boys worked their way to Paso Robles and stayed at the La Panza Ranch until December of 1869. Jesse visited his uncle at the hot springs to heal lung problems from his gunshot wounds under the alias "Howard". In 1882, Jesse was murdered by his friend Bob Ford in Missouri and Frank eventually turned himself in to serve three years in prison. Upon his release he lived a quiet, straight life often visiting his Aunt and Uncle in Paso Robles.



HISTORY

1990s TO PRESENT



1990s TO PRESENT: INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT, RHÔNES AND BORDEAUX

Gary Eberle planted Syrah in the mid 1970s, and provided plant material from that vineyard to many winemakers in the state, but Rhône varieties did not form an important part of Paso Robles' identity until 1989. That year, the Perrin family (of the Rhône Valley's Chateau de Beaucastel, revered producer of Chateauneuf-du-Pape) and their American importer Robert Haas established their international joint venture, Tablas Creek Vineyard, in the calcareous hills of the Adelaida region northwest of town. With 80 acres planted to the traditional varieties of Chateauneuf-du-Pape, Tablas Creek imported exclusive clonal material from the Rhône Valley, and made those clones available to other interested growers around the state.

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Since 1989, Paso Robles has seen an explosion of plantings of Rhône varieties. Now, in addition to the first Syrah plantings in California, it also has the largest acreage of Syrah, Viognier and Roussanne. Acres planted under Rhône varieties jumped from fewer than 100 acres in 1994 to more than 2,200 in 2006. During that time, at least 10 wineries focusing on Rhône varieties were established. The emerging Paso Robles Rhône movement received a boost in 1993 with Hospice du Rhône, the world's largest Rhône wine celebration. Paso Robles now plays host to more than 3,000 Rhône wine enthusiasts, international media and an A-list of Rhône producers from all over the world.

Since the early 1990s, Paso Robles wines have proven consistent gold medal winners and have been featured regularly in the top rankings of national and international wine reviews. A milestone in the worldwide recognition of Paso Robles Wine Country as a premier wine region came in 2000 when JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery's Bordeaux-style ISOSCELES was named one of the top 10 wines in the world by the Wine Spectator.

2000s: BOUTIQUE WINERIES, DOWNTOWN TASTING ROOMS, HOSPITALITY CENTERS

Since 2000, the number of bonded wineries in Paso Robles Wine Country has more than tripled from 50 to more than 180, mostly due to an influx of boutique and small family-owned vineyards and wineries. The appellation's burgeoning reputation has enticed well known Californian wineries from other wine regions, such as Firestone Vineyard (now owned by the Foley Wine Group) and Turley Wine Cellars, to make sizeable investments in Paso Robles, and also seduced a number of winemakers from France, Australia, South Africa and Switzerland eager to find New World applications for their winemaking skills.

The result is many young boutique wineries are quickly gaining recognition and a following for their innovative and proprietary Paso Robles blends of Bordeaux, Rhône and Zinfandel varieties, including, among many others, L'Aventure, Linne Calodo Cellars, Anglim Winery, Halter Ranch Vineyard, Midnight Cellars, Pipestone Vineyards, Villicana Winery and Wild Coyote. With the dramatic increase of small wineries has come a focus on downtown tasting rooms, including Anglim Winery, Arroyo Robles Winery, Clayhouse Vineyards, D'Anbino Vineyards & Cellars, Edward Sellers Vineyards & Wines, The Midlife Crisis Winery, Ortman Family Winery, Pianetta Winery and Vihuela Winery.

Several mid-to-larger size operations also have been building a hospitality focus for their showcase wineries. In addition to their tasting facility, Justin's complex includes the recently completed Isosceles Center, Just Inn and Deborah's Room. Others include the J. Lohr Wine Center, Robert Hall Winery Hospitality Center, Vina Robles Hospitality Center, Niner Wine Estates, Eagle Castle Winery, Firestone Vineyard and the caves at Eberle Winery. And the future looks bright with some of the most influential members of the wine press urging their readers to discover the wines from Paso Robles. In the June 30, 2005 issue of Wine Advocate, Robert M. Parker, Jr. asserts "there is no question that a decade from now, the top viticultural areas of Santa Barbara, Santa Rita Hills and the limestone hillsides west of Paso Robles will be as well-known as the glamorous vineyards of Napa Valley."

