



LOAM —Baby

A Wine
Culture
Journal

PASO ROBLES ISSUE



HATERS

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Opening Letter

There has never been a more interesting time to visit Paso Robles. This sprawling, diverse region is in the midst of a renaissance across its 11 dynamic sub-appellations. Gone are the days of old, when Paso Robles could be reduced to a facile definition: A hot, dusty, cowboy town, with an east side and a west side, producing mostly big, overly-extracted wines.

Today Paso Robles is rightly recognized for what it is deep down: an exceptional, maritime-influenced appellation, capable of growing a much broader range of varieties. Noteworthy wines of refinement are now being produced not only from Bordeaux varieties, but also Italian and Rhone plantings. When I was consulting in Paso Robles many years ago, this region was known mostly for big Cabernet Sauvignons and Zinfandels. While working on this issue, I dined at a few of Paso's finer restaurants. One evening, I asked a couple seated near me what wine they enjoyed most while visiting Paso. Without hesitation, they both replied, "The Picpoul at Adelaida."

Times have changed.

The community of winemakers in Paso Robles is exploring this region's diversity with great gusto. It's still possible, and relatively affordable, to experiment with plantings (compared to the Napa Valley, for example, where land prices are so high that few are bold or fiscally adventurous enough to plant varieties that fall outside the Bordeaux paradigm). This is great news for the consumer, as you can try a great number of affordable varietal wines from Paso and decide what you like best.

The township of Paso Robles has evolved greatly, as well. In the "Things to Do in Paso Robles" section of this issue, I highlight several points of interest in this coastal, country town. Picturesque and easy to navigate by foot, the Paso town square includes a number of fine restaurants, a great little movie theatre, an old-fashioned sweets shop, the notorious Pine Street Saloon, boutiques and Studios on the Park, an interactive gallery space where visitors can view, as well as make, art. Central to all of this are two good hotels: The Paso Robles Inn, and the more high-end and romantic Hotel Cheval.

If you're planning to visit Paso Robles, try and set aside at least a full weekend; you'll want extra time for some relaxing drives through the astoundingly breathtaking Paso Robles countryside. While there, I pulled my car over more times than I can count, just to take in a raptor drifting high above a California-oak-dotted valley, or to watch cows graze off in the distance with the Pacific Ocean as their backdrop. If you love road trips, this is an appellation for you.

So, let's make this trip together...



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Wash away my troubles, wash away my pain
With the rain in Shambala

Wash away my sorrow, wash away my shame
With the rain in Shambala

Ah, ooh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah
Everyone is helpful, everyone is kind

On the road to Shambala

Everyone is lucky,
everyone is so kind

On the road to Shambala

Ah, ooh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

How does your light shine, in the halls
of Shambala

I can tell my sister
by the flowers in her eyes

On the road to Shambala

I can tell my brother

by the flowers in his eyes

On the road to Shambala

Ah, ooh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

How does your light shine,
in the halls of Shambala

Shambala,

Three Dog Night



What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been

Sometimes the light's all shinin' on me;

Other times I can barely see.

Latently it occurs to me what a long, strange trip it's been.

"Truckin'", Grateful Dead

About ten minutes into meeting John Munch for the first time, he tells me he's working on a novel. When I ask him what it's about, he replies, drolly, "It's the great American porn novel." I can't tell if he's joking or not, so I reply with a naïve and perhaps overly-enthusiastic, "Really?!!" He smiles sweetly and says, "No, it's about cockroach races." Flash forward several weeks later and I'm reading the first half of Munch's novel *From the Dark Side of the Sun: The Great Roach Race and Other Broken Pieces Sung in Twisted Tongue*, which will be completed later this year. Erudite and steeped in magical realism, his novel is based very, very loosely on his colorful life. Recently I read somewhere that the "Most Interesting Man in the World" – that Dos Equis guy – will be replaced with another spokesperson. Maybe it's already happened. They really ought to have at least considered John Munch.

Born in 1944 in Limón, Costa Rica, Munch spent the first 16 years of his life in Costa Rica and other Central American countries, tagging along with his parents while they worked the banana trade. "I was born within wedlock and was the last of three children, which is always a favorable position," Munch says. "I was just under two years of age when we moved to Guatemala, where I learned from a *brujo* how to handle snakes at a very young age. I also learned about the importance of not lighting off a string of firecrackers on the bedpost of my father's bed while he was napping, the problem being that he had taken to sleeping with a 45 pistol during a spell of national unrest leading up to the election of Jacobo Arbenz in 1950. Papa was very nervous at the time."

Shortly after the incident of the firecrackers, the Munch family moved to a banana port on the Caribbean coast of northern Panama. "I was six or seven when we moved, and I particularly enjoyed nightly fishing for shark from my bedroom window. My bedroom was on the second floor of a rambling place that sat within a cluster of coconut palms just a few feet in from the seawall, and to ensure that I would rise up when a shark had taken the bait, the end of the fishing rope was attached to my bed frame. Thus the bed would be yanked across the room by my catch, there to bang against the wall at the window's edge, thus waking me and the rest of the household in the process. I was too small to handle the weight of the big grey beasts, so I could do nothing more than run back and forth along the seawall until the sharks drowned themselves. I now feel sincere shame and remorse for the useless killing of so many lovely sharks, and to this day I will not enter the surf, even to where sea foam rises to ankle depth, nor will I fly over open water, for fear of all the bad shark karma that I carry... They are waiting for me. I know this to be true."

When his family immigrated to the United States, his parents enrolled him in a military academy in lieu of a traditional high school. "I was sent to a military academy in San Rafael, California where I discovered that neither uniforms nor discipline suited my nature," Munch says.

He was accepted at the prestigious University of California at Berkeley in 1962, where he studied feverishly for, well, about five weeks before dropping out and, as he says, "into a life of general riot and motorcycles. I more or less drifted in and out of various colleges while having a grand time doing antisocial things. Music was always a very important part of my life, and I more or less played guitar or bass in bands with a few good musicians, including Pig Pen (subsequently

of the Grateful Dead), and at some point in time I even formed a short lived group with John Dawson, later the founder of New Riders of the Purple Sage – itself a band that was more or less a subset of the Grateful Dead. It was a lucky thing that I'm not a very good musician, given that everyone I knew who played well found early death."



After unsuccessful stints at various community colleges, he made his way to Switzerland for what was supposed to be a brief trip. He ended up staying for four years, learning to do "mostly paralegal work", save for the year 1969, when he moved to Herault Department in the South of France and lived in the small village of Bouzigues. "We had a lovely place overlooking oyster beds. Every night for the year Andrée and I lived in that house, a strange little mouse would join us in bed. It felt like sleeping with a very small child, always having to be careful when rolling over. I suspect that the mouse has long since left this world. Pity."

By that time, Munch had met Andrée – "a lovely French lady," he says –with whom he travelled back to America and married in 1971. Once again, Munch tried his hand at academia and enrolled in Early West Saxon Poetry at San Francisco State. Alas, he never completed his education there but instead founded a millwork business and began renovating Victorian homes. "The Shannon-Kavanaugh House on Steiner Street in San Francisco is a delightful old place on which I had the grand fortune and opportunity of doing a good bit of the renovation and cabinet work." That led him to Paso Robles, where, after developing an interest in winemaking, he helped establish Adelaida Winery with current owners, the Van Steenwyk family, in 1981. At that time, he and his wife also started a little winery project called Le Cuvier. A decade later, Munch and his wife were in partnership at Adelaida with the Van Steenwyk family, and Le Cuvier was well on its way to becoming a well-respected (by discerning collectors at least), small but elite winery project on the Central Coast.

"Le Cuvier" as a name, Munch explains, came "from my wife's family in the Alps, where one of the kids would be sent to "le cuvier" to draw a bottle of her father's insipid mountain wines from the two or three barrels he made yearly. A "cuvier" is a tub/barrel, and by extension translates as the "barrel room", but is also a name for a room full of laundry scrub-tubs, so "the laundry" is equally valid. Still, it is better than "Chateau Munch", which lacks a certain level of elegance."

In the late '90s, Munch's life took a tragic turn, "Andrée very unexpectedly and sadly died in 1997," he says. "I sold my remaining interest in Adelaida Cellars shortly thereafter and continued Le Cuvier while consulting for a number of local wineries. In something like 2001, I entered into partnership with Mary Fox, who remains the financial side of Le Cuvier and who is largely responsible for keeping me 'on task', more or less."

Today, Munch spends his days working on his novel and fulfilling his role at Le Cuvier as Winemaker Emeritus. In 2013, he hired a full time winemaker, Clay Selkirk.

When I ask Selkirk where he was born, I expect him to tell me he's from Fargo, North Dakota. The flat cadence of his speech is followed by consistently earnest, polite and plainspoken conversation. He was born not far from Paso, in the small coastal town of Cayucos. His parents own Cayucos Cellars, where he cut his teeth learning to farm and make wine. He and Munch share identical philosophies when it comes to making wine, which is rare in the wine business. Oftentimes winemakers feel they must shelve their own creativity to meet the needs of ownership, but Selkirk's approach pretty much mirrors what Munch has been doing all along at Le Cuvier. Together they seem well-suited to making wines that are age-worthy, require patience and are not in the least bit trendy. At least not intentionally. While Munch has been fermenting his white wines on skins for 18 years, he just heard the term "Orange Wine" for the first time a few years ago. "By definition, these are Orange wines," he says, though they are not marketed as such by the winery.



Selkirk and Munch are both proponents of using 100% native yeast fermentations. "Our 100% native fermentations occur in two distinct phases and environments," says Selkirk. "The first, terroir-driven half of primary fermentation takes place in eight-foot in diameter, non-temperature controlled, open-top stainless steel tanks. During this initial stage, we allow the fruit, coming in directly from our dry farmed vineyards, to ferment utilizing the many wild (or indigenous) yeast and bacteria strains present on the grape skins – without any inoculations, SO₂, nutrient additions, or other additive influences. This fermentation is inherently terroir-driven and representative of the individual vineyard influences. By only fermenting small one-to-three-ton lots, in wide space-efficient tanks, we are also able to achieve desired color extraction in a much shorter period of time. This is due to greater direct skin-to-juice contact by virtue of increased liquid surface area."

"The second, winery-driven half of primary fermentation takes place in barrel," Selkirk continues. "On average, it takes five to six days for the yeast to bring the sugar from the at-harvest degrees brix measurement of between say 24 and 26 brix, down to between 13 and 15 brix. At this point – often being the most active point in primary fermentation – we drain and press the bubbling and boiling juice by gravity directly to barrel. This is where the fermenting wine is 'pushed' into our house style. All of our barrels carry what we like to call the Le Cuvier disease. Over the years, native yeast and bacteria colonies present in the winery have continued to grow and reside in our barrels. When exposed to the fermenting juice, these colonies become active and help to push the wine in the direction of our Le Cuvier style."

Selkirk and Munch believe that these native microorganisms – what Munch refers to as “the wild beasts” – along with their nearly two-year sur lees aging and 30 to 34 months total time spent in neutral oak, in tandem with 95% dry-farmed vineyards, play the largest role in what makes Le Cuvier wine... well, Le Cuvier wine.

“We really don’t do much as winemakers other than gently herd everything along, trying to let it go through the process as naturally as possible,” says Selkirk. Munch adds that “providing the right musical soundtrack to enhance this ideal environment appears to be our only useful contribution to the winemaking process.”



As we head out of the cellar and into Munch’s impressive wine library, he casually notes that many of the barrels still in use in the winery are from the 1980s. When he does buy barrels, he buys only neutral barrels, and prefers that they’ve at least seen five full vintages each before he adds them to his collection.

We spend the rest of the day sitting in Munch’s wine library surrounded by 9,000 bottles of library wines he has made. Munch’s 1998 Le Cuvier Chardonnay (the year he began fermenting his whites on their skins) is, at the risk of sounding hyperbolic, extraordinary. Aged in neutral oak barrels for five years (that is not a typo), it still retains great natural acidity and has a lovely saline and lanolin nose. Munch didn’t rack this wine for the first time until it had been in barrel for 24 months. He topped it off maybe three or four times a year while it was in barrel.

Next we open up a 1982 sparkling wine. Covered in dust and still under crown cap, this wine has undergone secondary fermentation but has not yet been riddled or disgorged. Pale in color and energetic, it is a spirited snapshot of Paso from a bygone era. Before wine “styles” were discussed and dissected, this wine was quietly existing and aging – a living archive of what Paso can do when a wine’s ageability is on the mind of its creator.

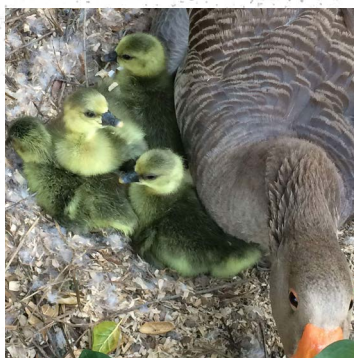
Munch’s 1998 Adelaida Pinot Noir is a fine, fine effort and proof that the Adelaida District’s combination of mostly calcareous soils and uber-dramatic diurnal temperature swings result in wines with potentially great natural acidity and fully mature flavors. It’s not unusual to experience 100-degree weather in Paso during a summer’s day, and 50-degree weather on that very same summer’s night.

We continue to taste through the decades, touching upon a wide array of varietal wines that Munch enjoys revisiting every so often because he enjoys the “shape-shifting that happens when you allow a wine to age,” he says. Varieties like Pentimento, Grenache, Syrah, Malbec, Petite Sirah, and Chardonnay, among others, through the prism of the distinctive Le Cuvier house style, pass through my lips as the hours unfold. Are they all brilliant? Not necessarily. When one takes risks in the cellar – with extended barrel aging and minimal intervention – there are bound to be a couple within one’s oeuvre that are a bit out of whack. Yet even the wines that seem a bit clunky or disjointed exhibit a charming, untamed character. It is this hallmark style that will signal to the visitor that these wines are about as far from manufactured wines as a consumer can get. Joining the Le Cuvier wine club allows one to purchase older library wines—a rare and wonderful opportunity.



As the day wraps up, I ask Munch if he can remember how he came upon his distinctive approach to making wines. “It was really from a lot of experimentation. Early on I kept trying different things. A lot of really good wines came about by accident or by making mistakes. I’d try something different, or do something wrong, and then I’d taste that wine and think, ‘Whoa! That’s interesting. I like that. I’m going to try that again!’”

Visiting the Royal Nonesuch Farm



I am running late for dinner at the Royal Nonesuch Farm, up on York Mountain in Paso, but I'm reluctant to drive any faster. The California oak trees lining both sides of the road touch when they meet up overhead, and the sky above my moon-roof is barely visible behind a rich, thick tapestry of grey-green lichen. So, uncharacteristically, I slow down, roll down the windows and take in the fragrances and vistas that carry me through the gloaming.

When I arrive at my destination, Anthony Yount, who established this farmstead with his wife, Hillary, is waiting for me outside their modest, two-story country house. To the left of us two lambs play chase in a grassy corral, while up ahead chicks peep and run about inside their plywood coop. "Those will be our layers," Yount says of the sweet little brown, yellow and golden chicks.

When I enter through their front door, I'm immediately inside the Yount household dining room, living room and kitchen – one large, contiguous room that makes up the bottom floor of their house. Hillary is holding their two-month-old daughter, Ramona, while at my feet their dogs, Pepper and Waylon, vie for attention. Later in the evening we will sit down together and break bread but for now Yount is anxious to show me his estate vineyard before we lose the light.

It was almost 80 degrees earlier in the day when I was walking around Paso's town square looking for a shady place to sit. Now the diurnal swings this region is known for are carrying in cold, bracing Pacific breezes, and I'm wishing I'd brought a sweater. We jump in his old, beat-up Defender Jeep and head out for the tour of their 25-acre farm. The Jeep makes a mighty effort, climbing to the top of their property where the "The Nobel Savage" resides – a small vineyard block of head-trained Grenache planted in sandy soils. Yount explains that this block is named for the literary concept of the Noble Savage, which posits that man is innately good and noble

when not corrupted by civilization. “So without rootstocks and trellises—when the vine is left to grow how it wants to grow—can there be a better expression of terroir?” he asks, rhetorically.

Yount and I have something in common: we are both obsessed with Grenache. “It has so many iterations,” Yount tells me. “You can go from Rayas to what Russell P. From is doing at Herman Story (a popular Paso Robles Rhone-inspired house). You couldn’t be further apart in approach, but both attempts are varietally correct and beautiful expressions.” The Jeep continues to snake through a tall blanket of wild mustard, thistle, grass and clover. At one point, Yount makes a hairpin turn near a vineyard row because he wants to double-back and show me a new bed of lupine that has recently started poking through springtime’s tall grasses. “At our property, we are not making decisions based upon aesthetics,” he tells me. “What matters to the vine, and what’s feasible for us – because money is an issue – is what’s really important. We don’t care about having a showpiece. Let’s just say we are five years into a 25-year start-up. We want biodiversity in the vineyard and at our farm. Time and money are always the constraints, but we want to develop a nearly self-sustaining farm. We’re going to plant an orchard, as well. And some olive trees. I’ve always wanted to cure olives.”



I ask the St. Louis native about his farm’s moniker, the fabulously old-timey Royal Nonesuch. “The Royal Nonesuch name is a nod to the Mississippi River, which I grew up on. It’s from Huckleberry Finn – my favorite novel – when Jim and Finn are going down the river and meet a couple of con artists claiming to be European royalty. It’s just a cool, fun name. Basically, it’s a reminder for us to not take ourselves too seriously. After all, we just make a fermented beverage.” I ask Yount how his St. Louis upbringing informed him as a man. “St. Louis – particularly the area I grew up in – had a lot of old families. I had kids in my class whose parents went to the same high school, had the same teachers, married their sweetheart and bought their parents’ house to raise their family. I saw a lot of my friends headed that way as well. My family was never part of that culture. We were a family with wings; my folks always pushed us to explore, travel, to get away.”

By the time we get back to the house, Yount’s due at the outdoor grill, where one of the chickens they raised is on the rotisserie. They also raise lamb, ducks, geese, chickens, and pigs and have a vegetable garden. The dinner rolls Yount prepares while the chicken browns outside are made with rendered pork lard from their pigs. The duck pâté we enjoy as an appetizer was made from their ducks. Much of our dinner is grown, harvested and prepared by this resourceful young couple.

While I bounce Ramona on my knee, I enjoy a glass of Yount's Kinero Grenache Blanc, a small-lot offering that is crisp, vibrant and lively. Made from entirely purchased fruit, the Kinero label is owned and operated by the Younts and is focused solely on white wines. The Royal Nonesuch wines will debut in 2017 and will be devoted to Rhone-inspired red wines. What Yount is perhaps known for, though, are the wines he has made for Denner Vineyards in the Willow Creek District of Paso Robles. Well-received by consumers and the wine media, they are delicious wines that offer generous aromatics and flavors, but are held together structurally with great minerality and texture – two virtues that Yount's wines are known for.

Hillary puts on some Leon Bridges while, gradually, the table is populated with a number of dishes for our dinner. Ramona is sleepy; she takes several little quasi-naps during dinner before she settles into a deep sleep at the table. While I serve myself, Yount and I start chatting:

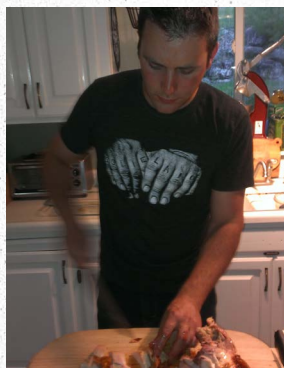
On being a new dad:

Having Ramona has helped me put life into a better perspective. You really start to sort out the things in life that are truly important to you versus those little things that are just superficial. I'd like to think that I've become calmer and more patient, but then again Hillary may disagree. And we didn't raise pigs this year; we just don't have time to chase them out of the garden now that we have Ramona. As you know, pigs are stronger and probably smarter than we are, and they kept breaking into our garden and eating everything. One time last year I came home from work only to find one wearing a tomato cage. Somehow it had gotten all four legs through this thing, and the four pointy ends were sticking out from its head like a crown. It took me damn near an hour to wrestle the cage off the pig, and obviously that was the end of our tomatoes for the year. So we're taking a year off, working through the pork in our freezer, giving me another year to reinforce the pig pastures.



On being inspired by his father:

From a very young age my old man worked on a farm in Troy, Ohio. I think he always wanted to be a farmer, but never had enough money to buy land. He instilled a lot of his passion for farming in me. My folks rented this piece of property in out-state Missouri that our landlords ran cattle on. Once I was old enough I would go up there in the summers to help them buck bales. They did everything right – I mean they were raising grass-fed meat before grass-fed meat was cool (and this was Missouri, so it's at least 10 years behind the rest of the country). But they never were able to make more on their beef because it wasn't marketed well. I think those experiences led me to steer clear of commodity agriculture.



On not being formally educated in winemaking or viticulture:

I have a double major in Ag Business (concentration in finance) and Wine Business. I've never really felt insecure about not having an enology degree. This community is so inclusive that I have always found help from one of my peers when my knowledge of science ran out. I am also hoping that this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, but most of my favorite wines were made by non-classically trained winemakers.

On the make-up of the Royal Nonesuch Farm:

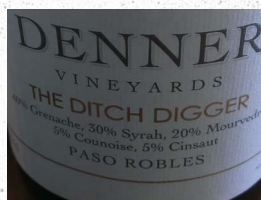
We mostly raise animals for our own consumption. We really like knowing where our food comes from – plus we think it just tastes better. Last year we raised six pigs, four lambs, 50 chickens and 25 ducks. We sell a few of each to help pay for the endeavor, but it's clearly not a profit center for us. We also keep chickens for eggs and have had geese as guard animals...and eggs. We have finally replanted our garden after the pig fiasco and hope to be eating out of that by late spring. The vineyard is planted to five acres of Grenache, one acre of Syrah, one acre of Mourvèdre and a half acre of Clairette.

On the wines of the Royal Nonesuch Farm:

I hope that the wines are not only an expression of this incredible place, but also an expression of us. They will take influence from the wines we are drinking and loving, and showcase our love of experimentation in the vineyard and the cellar. I want them to be an adventure, differing year to year, evolving over time, always surprising, intriguing and hedonistic.

On pursuing the purest expression of Grenache possible at Denner Vineyards, where he works closely with vineyard manager, Aron Nevarez:

One of the issues we discuss often is tannin in Grenache. Both of us are big proponents of whole cluster fermentation, but with that can come some aggressive tannins. We are always discussing techniques and methods of trying to decrease the tannins we are extracting into the wines, while still getting all the flavors and complexity we like. One of the major changes we've made in the



vineyard is converting the Grenache to a more sprawled canopy. All of our new plantings of Grenache are being trained as bush vines, both here in Willow Creek and at our new Adelaida District planting. He's currently working on a pruning trial that he thinks will help decrease tannins in the stems. We're always evaluating tannins in seeds, stems and skins to make the best possible picking decision. This is nothing fancy, just chewing them up to see how aggressive they are. Then we discuss the right amount of stems and the appropriate extraction methods to make the best wines we can. And I love the freshness we get from aging Grenache in concrete. It showcases more of the fruit and keeps the palate very lively. It doesn't get the softness or polish you find from aging in barrels, but there's something viscerally thrilling about aging Grenache in concrete.

On whole-cluster fermentations:

When Aron and I make our picking decisions, stem ripeness is one of the most important factors we consider, knowing that we are always trying to use as much of the whole-clusters as we can. Sometimes the stems are ripe before the sugar is, and other times it's the other way around. Varieties like Cinsaut and Counoise have always tasted riper at lower sugars, so we pick them when they taste good; they make great blenders that we use mostly to add freshness to some of the heavier grapes. I think we're able to avoid the typical negative attributes of stemminess because Aron is always focused on vine-balance. If you let the vines do what they want to do, and don't throw a bunch of fertilizers at them, they will ripen evenly.

On why he uses the word "feral", rather than "native" when he talks about why he doesn't inoculate with lab cultures at harvest time:

I use the term feral as opposed to native because I'm not convinced the yeasts that actually get our ferments dry are "native". What are they native to, anyways? Feral just seems much more realistic, plus I think it represents my winemaking style more accurately. We use feral yeasts because I think they make more interesting and complex wines.

On why they tread with their feet during harvest time at Denner Vineyards:

We foot tread all of our whole cluster lots to try to minimize any air pockets between clusters, and to limit the amount of carbonic maceration that occurs. I love the whole cluster character, but don't necessarily want a full carbonic wine. Each whole cluster ferment will get foot stomped three to four times over the course of cold soak and fermentation since they're impossible to punch down early on.

On allowing other producers to vineyard-designate with the Denner Vineyards name:

We really like to sell fruit to people who we think are going to do something fun with it – something different than we do. When we find the right people, there's never a worry about a vineyard designate; they make great wines and we want the Denner Vineyard name on their bottle if they choose to do that. Our current clients include Villa Creek, Nicora, Clos Solene and Deovlet.

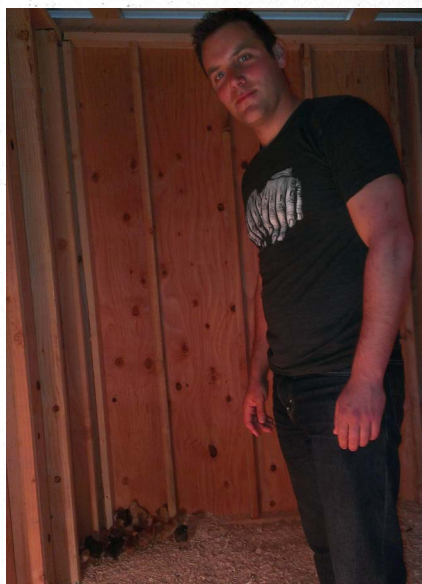
On the Sunflower, a mechanized piece of vineyard equipment:

The Sunflower is a wonderful piece of equipment. It tills the ground underneath vine rows, and keeps the grass and weeds down where we can't mow. Aron uses it to incorporate the organic compost he uses as fertilizer – the only fertilizer used on the property – as well as a few passes

in the winter and spring to incorporate those natural grasses and weeds into the soil. It keeps the vines happy and eliminates a lot of hand hoeing, letting our crews focus on more important vineyard tasks.

Upon being asked how fruit from the Willow Creek District differs from that of the Adelaida District:

I think this is a question I'll still be trying to answer 20 years from now - if they keep me around that long. The division of the AVAs in Paso was very intelligently laid out, and our two vineyards are very different. I expect very different chemistry and flavors in the fruit. I think we'll find some varieties do better in Willow and others in Adelaida. I'm just excited to work with all of it.



Of Cabernet, Crochet and A Washboard

When I'm interviewing winemakers, it's not unusual for them to ask, "So who are you going to see next?" When I replied to one Paso winemaker that I was going to head over to Rangeland next to see winemaker Paul Hinschberger, he responded, "Oh! Tell him I say 'Hi'! He crocheted me this really nice beanie. I wear it in the vineyard when it's cold." I hadn't expected to hear that. I'm embarrassed to say that I may have been doing a little subconscious gender-profiling. Typically, when one hears that a man is a good farmer, winemaker and Jack-of-all-trades – descriptors that I had heard others use to describe Hinschberger – one doesn't suspect that he also has the inclination to crochet gifts for his circle of friends. But Hinschberger, which I will come to learn, is no ordinary guy.

"I started crocheting when I was 18 years old," he tells me, "just out of high school. I've always enjoyed the idea of being a 'renaissance man' if you will—being 'manly' in certain ways, but then also having traits that are not at all what people think of as being traditionally 'manly'. I guess I enjoy bending and playing with societal norms in that way." Hinschberger also admits that he may have started crocheting as a means to attract women, but that, sadly, didn't work in his favor. "I must have secretly thought I could capitalize on my sensitivity in hopes that women might be more attracted to me. I think most girls just thought it was weird. In the end I didn't really care because beanies always made really great Christmas presents for friends and family. I was finally able to find a woman who not only found it weird, but actually thought it was sexy that I crochet – which is great for me since I now have someone appreciative to shower with hats and scarves every winter." He adds that crocheting fulfills his "'inner-grandma'. There is something very soothing about snuggling on the couch in the wintertime with a blanket and hot cocoa crocheting a beanie. Obviously I don't crochet much in the summer because my hands get too sweaty, which doesn't let the needle slide through stitches as well."



I'm trying to picture Hinschberger's hands guiding crochet needles through yards of yarn while he's driving us around a sprawling, diverse polyculture – The Adelaida Springs Ranch. Owned and operated by the Foshay family, this 1,500-acre ranch is mostly wild oak woodland. A 40-acre estate vineyard is dedicated to the production of their family wine project, Rangeland, which Hinschberger helms.

We pass a few pastures along the way, dotted with grazing Angus cattle and sheep. Their livestock are bred naturally at the ranch and are free to graze and roam freely for their entire lives until they are harvested for meat. The Foshay's sell their beef and lamb direct-to-consumers and to a few retail shops in Paso Robles. Their herd of 200 or so Dorper sheep mow the vineyard rows, keeping the vineyard blocks neat and tidy, and lessening the need for herbicides and pesticides. I ask Hinschberger about his role as winemaker at such a diverse ranch. "For the most

part, when I am doing work at the ranch, I am just another ranch hand. I shovel manure out of the barn stalls, herd grazing sheep from one vineyard block to another, or even sort and brand cattle – cowboy stuff that I’ve had to figure out how to do as I go. Really, I just help out with whatever needs to happen for that day, even if it has nothing to do with wine directly. This kind of job feels pretty normal to me. I used to work as the head maintenance man at a YMCA camp in Idaho for eight summers, and I’ll tell you, that camp always had something wrong with it or broken or needing to be jerry-rigged. I was the guy fixing pipes and plunging toilets; I love doing all that grunt work, and I often feel a sense of nostalgia for that camp when I am working out at the ranch and doing odd jobs. Whatever needs to get done, I am down to do it.”

Hinschberger pulls his car over and we check on two newborn baby lambs that he’s helped deliver. They are inside a barn that smells of oat hay and wooden shavings. The lambs run to us when we near their pen. They’re eager for a little company, so we hold them and pet them for a time before heading back out. Across the way, a handsome, rather intimidating bull stands alone in a field covered with thick grasses, vetch, clover and wild rye. He takes a deep, strong breath, as if he’s mildly irritated with us, and then burrows his front right hoof into the pasture a few times, like he’s going to charge. After a few seconds though, he appears to have grown bored with us and instead stares off into the distance while chewing his cud and shooing flies off his back with his tail...talented guy.

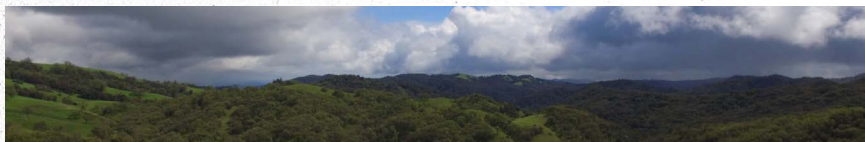


Having grown up on a ranch myself, I can pretty much tell that this is a great, ideal site for these animals. The cattle and sheep we see throughout the afternoon appear to be content, well-fed and calm. I wonder if the site is just as well-suited to wine grapes, and Hinschberger explains it this way: “Every single winemaker in the world will tell you that they have a really incredible site. They’ll tell you about how their special location lends itself to growing quality grapes in magical ways. And they’re not lying. I do think every vineyard has something unique to offer that other vineyards do not. I’m just not one to say that one site is ‘better’ than another because it’s not. It’s just different. There are several attributes that I think make our vineyard (and wine) unique and delicious. Like most of the west side of Paso Robles, we have primarily limestone soil, which retains a lot of natural acid and gives the wine strength and zest at the same time. However, about 35% of our 40-acre vineyard is on sandstone soil, which provides a more supple mouth-feel and a darker fruit profile. This combination allows for better flavor diversity, and has great blending potential. On top of that, our vineyard is at the furthest reaches of the Paso Robles AVA, at an elevation of 1700 feet, facing the Santa Lucia mountain range, with the coast just on the other side. Weather-wise, we have a lot of coastal influence which means that compared to the city of Paso Robles, we get almost twice the rainfall, we are typically a full 10 degrees cooler on really hot days, and we rarely have to worry about freezing temperatures.”

Indeed, Hinchberger's wines, in particular his Cabernet Sauvignons – very fine efforts – showcase great texture and well-managed, fine-grain tannins, which hold up and enliven a core of dark blue fruit. They walk a tight rope between power and finesse, and are serious, well-structured wines. I found myself nostalgic when tasting his Zinfandels out of barrel; they reminded me of old Ridge Zinfandels from way back when – charming elegant wines that had about them a rusticity, but also a refinement. Hinchberger's strength seems to be in taming the texture of a young wine so that the imbibers can enjoy it in its youth.

As we round up our tour of the ranch, we pass by the lovely Foshay home, a private family residence that opens its doors to visitors who have made a prior appointment to visit Adelaida Springs Ranch. "They have a little room they've converted into a tasting room," Hinchberger explains. "Visitors love the idea of going into someone's home to taste wines." And, indeed, visitors can do even more than that here. The Foshay's offer occasional "Rangeland Field Days", wherein visitors can have an extensive tour of the ranch, including visits with the animals, a BBQ lunch featuring their grass-fed, free-range beef, a tasting of Rangeland wines and a live music performance...all for about \$50.00 a person, well worth it for a day out in the country, with lots of fresh air, great wines and delicious food.

About a week after our initial meeting, Hinchberger invites me to his house so that I can meet Marin Smith, his fiancée, and once again taste through a few Rangeland wines. The two lovebirds met about nine months ago, but Hinchberger wasted no time proposing to the young singer/songwriter and poet. "The first time she sang and played guitar, I told her I thought maybe I was falling in love with her." Smith giggles and says, "It was a little awkward. He was trying to tell me he loved me, but we'd only known each other for a short while, so he was nervous." They will wed at their homestead in Paso Robles this summer, under a stand of oak trees. The reception will be in their backyard and will include about 150 family and friends. I often say that the family who plays together, stays together. I grew up in a household of artists; my father is a professional guitar player and my mom is a poet. When I was a kid, they'd often sing in the car during family road trips, so I have a soft spot in my heart for couples and families who play music together.



As the sun sets and the sky darkens around us, Hirschberger and Smith sit across from each other and start to play “Whiskey Mountain”, one of Smith’s original compositions. She’s strumming the guitar and singing in a voice reminiscent of Gillian Welch, while he’s playing a washboard draped flat on his lap like a slide guitar. Hirschberger taught himself to play washboard and had one custom-built for him in Seattle. On his left hand he wears a glove he made himself, with bottle caps sewn onto the fingertips so that he can tap rhythms onto his board. With his right hand, he drags an old silver knife across the metal ridges in time with Smith’s strumming. Occasionally, the knife strikes a little metal dish on the washboard, adding a bell-like wistfulness to the beat. While they play, I dangle my feet from a kitchen stool, growing more nostalgic by the moment. When I start to feel positively sentimental, I excuse myself to leave. I’m a little embarrassed by how emotional I’ve become, watching this young couple play a simple song together. They walk me outside and wish me a safe drive. Once inside my car, I crank up some folk music, open up my moon-roof and hit the 101, eager to get home, make my wife a late dinner, and then pick up the accordion and dive into a little live music of my own.



Building towards A Legacy: A Visit to Tablas Creek

Jason Haas and I are standing knee-deep in cover crop atop a hillside vineyard block, quietly observing the Tablas Creek estate vineyard unfolding all around us. The eponymously-named Tablas Creek is at our backs, the creek bed winding through a narrow of old oak trees. Haas bends over and grabs a handful of wild pea greens and begins to eat them. Never being one to turn down a free meal, I do the same and soon we're eating tender, slightly bitter young pea stalks, leaves and shoots straight from Mother Nature's salad bar. I don't think twice about eating them right from the ground. These estate soils never see herbicides or pesticides, for this pristine estate is farmed entirely biodynamically, and it shows in the vibrancy and health of the plants, vineyards and the various animals that work the vineyards and contribute to the biodynamic farm model.



It's nearly impossible to understand the history and potential of Paso Robles without visiting the storied Tablas Creek Vineyard. Robert Haas, a well-respected importer and founder of Vineyard Brands and the legendary Perrin family of France's Château de Beaucastel, formed a partnership in 1985 with the intent of producing wines similar to those of Châteauneuf-du-Pape in the New World. The two families searched California, from the Sierra Foothills to south of Santa Barbara County, for the ideal site, and in 1989 purchased 120-acres in the Las Tablas district of west Paso Robles. There they found a nearly perfect match to Châteauneuf-du-Pape – an ideal climate, prevalent limestone soils and untamed terrain. The two families then imported traditional varieties from the Perrin's estate: Roussanne, Viognier, Marsanne, Grenache Blanc, Mourvèdre, Grenache Noir, Syrah, and Counoise. After a three-year period of diligent testing by the USDA, the cuttings were propagated and grafted at the Tablas Creek on-site nursery and used to plant the estate vineyard.

The resulting wines have had staggering success, penetrating the on-and off-premise markets and reaching a wildly diverse audience; it's rare to see sommeliers and blue collar wine drinkers (myself included), gravitate towards the same wines, but Tablas Creek has accomplished this unusual feat. During a morning of extensive tasting, I sit down with Haas and we chat about this American brand, which is well on its way to becoming an American legacy.

RH Drexel: *Tablas Creek has been around for a while now. How have you managed to stay current with the trade and consumer all these years?*

Jason Haas: I think there are two ways to answer this, which aren't mutually exclusive. I think it's really difficult in making and marketing wine to try to chase the market. The lag time in terms of getting good grapevines into the ground and into production means that if you're reacting to what you see in the market, you're always behind the curve. Luckily, wine is a great example of a product where long-tail marketing is well suited. We don't need to appeal to a big swath of the wine drinking public in order to sell the 25,000 cases of wine we make each year. So I believe in being consistent and patient in the style that you make, and doing everything you can to tell your story so the type of people who are likely to like what you're doing find you. All that said, I think it's really important to get out into the markets and listen. There's a real risk of suffering from ivory tower syndrome as a winery, where the only people you talk to are the people who've sought you out to tell you what a great job you're doing. It's a lot more valuable and informative to go out and do events around the country, to work with your distributors, to tell your story and notice what people's reactions are. I don't think that should encourage you to change your own style, but I do think it gives you really valuable data on whether you're connecting with your potential audience and what's working well, or not.

RHD: *Consumers seem to be way ahead of the curve when it comes to Paso's relevancy, compared to the trade, especially the sommelier culture. I often have to roll my eyes when I'm in a sitting down with somms and other buyers who are dismissive when I talk about Paso wines. There's this sense that they don't realize Paso, like most regions, has evolved over time. They still think it's some old fashioned place making super big wines. Tablas Creek may be the exception to that, in that you've really been able to penetrate the on-premise sector. Can you talk about why you think that is?*

JH: I totally agree with this! I remember a tasting that I did with a group of other Paso Robles producers down in the LA area maybe a decade ago. The event was at a retailer, and he was surprised that he'd had to add extra seats to his space. Of course, all the wineries had reached out to their consumer lists, and when he asked in his introduction how many people had been to Paso, nearly every hand in the room went up. He himself hadn't visited in a decade, and commented to us afterwards that he realized at that event he was falling behind his customer base. As for why this happens, I'm not sure. It's certainly possible to make huge wines here (and I think, for lots of reasons, if you're going to make huge wines, doing it here is a really good idea because the cold nights and the limestone soils mean you can do so and still have some acidity and minerality). We've never fit that well into that stereotype, and I think we've been pretty consistent in our style from the beginning, so maybe that's why we've been a little more visible in restaurants. But I do think that some of our diversity in Paso isn't well recognized. I guess that's our next goal!



RHD: *Let's talk Biodynamics! My own experience as a consumer is that many of the wines that are made following the biodynamic calendar have about them a great energy and brightness. Of course, this probably can't be scientifically proven. It's just my experience as a consumer. What is your sense of how a wine farmed biodynamically might differ from a more conventionally-farmed wine? And how do you talk about biodynamics to your average visitor without it sounding "too out there" or outlandish?*

JH: Yeah, we struggle with this. I try to set us aside from the more touchy-feely parts of biodynamics by focusing on the things that make sense to me: promoting biodiversity, making sure soils are alive and healthy, encouraging the many beneficial organisms that do the work that "modern" farming has replaced with chemicals, and making as self-sustaining a farm unit as possible so that we give ourselves every chance of producing wines that reflect our place. As for how the wines differ, I agree with you that there's a vibrancy from so many biodynamically farmed wines, but whether it has to do with the farming, or whether those grape growers are just spending more time in their vineyards and are therefore more responsive to other things, or whether it's some stylistic correlation between those who farm biodynamically and those who like more energetic styles... I think that's hard to tease out. It's likely some combination of all three, I'd guess.

RHD: *I really enjoy your Patelin de Tablas wines. They offer great value. Can you speak honestly about why you launched that brand? Oftentimes in the wine business, brands like this are launched to form another pipeline through which declassified juice might flow. I'd love to hear you speak about this line from a business perspective. Personally, I think is fun and delicious.*



JH: Sure! We're pretty open about stuff like this. It was really a response to the frost- and drought-reduced 2009 vintage. We'd worked hard over the years to build up both the direct sale and wholesale sides of our business, and by that time were selling about half of our 18,000 case production through each channel. Enter 2009, where we only made about 12,000 cases of wine. Because direct sales are better margin and tend to skew toward the high end of your portfolio while the wholesale sales tend to skew toward the cheaper end of your portfolio, the half of our wine that we sold direct accounted for (and still, today, accounts for) about 80% of our revenue. So, when we were faced with this painfully short crop, we made the decision to protect our direct sales and let almost the whole shortfall of production fall on the wholesale side. You don't make a lot of friends telling a wholesaler, "Well, thanks for doing so well and selling 1000 cases of wine last year. This year we can only give you 250 cases. Oh, and next year we'll be back up to normal production, and we'll want you to sell 1000 cases again even though we haven't given

you enough inventory to maintain most of your placements.” I think you can maybe get away with that once. But if you do it repeatedly, you get the reputation as an unreliable supplier, and I understand why. Whose wines is the distributor rep going to work on? Yours? Or the wines of another producer in their book who didn’t short them the year before and lose their glass pour to a competitor?

We looked at buying more land, but decided that wouldn’t solve the problem; it would just mean that the swings between productive years and unproductive years would be all the greater. So I decided that we needed to find some way of augmenting our estate production with non-estate grapes that we could buy more of in years when we were short here at the vineyard, and less of in years when our production was plentiful. We were coming out of the recession, and there were lots of good vineyards that we knew were looking for buyers for their grapes, so the timing seemed right. After that, it was just logistics: finding the right vineyards (we focused on those that had our clones in the ground), coming up with a name (it was my dad who suggested Patelin, which is French slang for neighborhood, but with a definite country implication) and getting the pricing and messaging right. I really like what it’s been able to give us: a wine that restaurants can pour by the glass, to introduce us to new potential customers, a point of entry for the category of California Rhônes, and a product we can keep in production and really let our distributors sink their teeth into. And I think we’ve all been proud of the quality that we’ve been able to make. We weren’t sure; we’d never worked with non-estate fruit before. But we’re happy with how it’s worked out.



RHD: *Fans of Tablas Creek seem pretty loyal. And folks I’ve spoken to who visit the winery or are regular customers love their experience there. What about your hospitality program are you most proud of and what can visitors expect to see when they visit?*

JH: We decided early on that we would try to bring people inside the process. I’ve never understood mystique marketing, maybe because I myself tend to be turned off by the implication that I can’t be trusted to understand the details. And I know that in the early days, when I was going out and trying to sell the wines in a market that didn’t have a category to put them in and didn’t know much about the region, I decided that the best chance I had of succeeding was to demystify and to teach. So we try to carry that through here. We break up the tasting room into a bunch of smaller bars to make sure that we give guests a personal experience. We take people out on tours every day, and try to point out that everything – from the grapevine nursery, to the organic vineyard with our own mixed flock, to the winemaking – happens here. We try to share a lot of real information – not just marketing – through our blog and social media, and I think people appreciate that. And I try to bring that on the road, and do interesting seminars and hands-on stuff whenever I can. But mostly I am proudest of the team of people that we’ve put together here, and I’m confident that whoever they see when they visit, it will be someone warm, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic.

RHD: *The wine business model is a complicated one. There's the vineyard side of things, the cellar side, the administrative side, the compliance side, the wholesale side, the hospitality side, etc.... Which pieces do you most enjoy? Which ones are the most challenging?*

JH: I like the variety. I'm not likely to be doing the same thing one day as I was doing the day before. I love diving into the winemaking pieces when I have the chance, mostly during blending in the spring. I really enjoy getting out on the road, though I don't do it as much as I used to because the business is more complicated, and I feel like things can spiral away if I'm gone too much. And I find the business pieces fascinating; I've always liked business (economics was one of my majors in college) and think that people often forget or overlook that a winery is first and foremost a business. But I think that the piece I enjoy most, wherever I'm doing it, is telling the story. I try to get out and speak to classes several times a year. I love presenting to groups that come out to the winery. And I feel like the writing that I do on the blog is a chance to tell the story to people who I may never have even met.

In terms of what is the most challenging, I think it would have to be the wholesale pieces. It's a powerful channel, and I am grateful for all the dedicated people we have out there helping get our wines in front of consumers who might never have dreamed of coming to see us in Paso Robles. But the natural challenge of playing telephone with a marketing message from us, that then travels to a national marketing agent, then to wholesalers, to restaurants or retailers, and finally to consumers – it's amazing we get that part right! And then there's the challenge of trying to get attention for your wines in an incredibly crowded marketplace, and the crazy laws that wholesalers have pushed through to protect their slice of the pie. It seems like it's in the wholesale realm where I feel like I'm banging my head against the wall.

RHD: *Your blog has received quite a bit of attention. Do you enjoy writing? What other creative outlets do you have?*

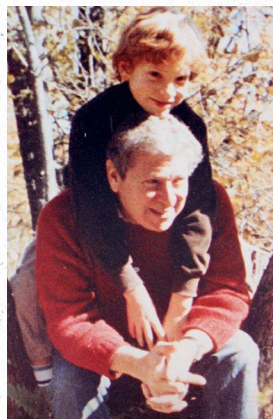
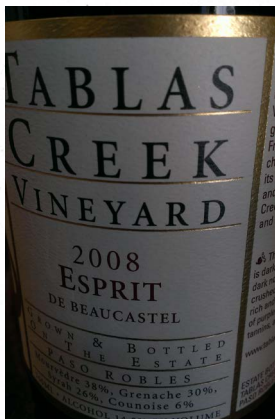
JH: I do enjoy writing. I think you have to enjoy writing to be successful with a blog. Otherwise, if it feels like work and you'll find other things to do with your time. I taught writing all through graduate school, and enjoy the craft of putting words and sentences together, even beyond the value that I think it provides to Tablas Creek. As far as other creative outlets, I spend a lot of time outside taking pictures. Studio art was my other major in college, and while I don't really have time (OK, I don't make time) to draw or paint at this stage in my life, photography is so easy and quick (and cheap) thanks to digital technology that it's a very simple creative outlet.

RHD: *What about being in Paso Robles is special to you?*

JH: Most people's view of California wine country is a summer or fall view, with golden hillsides, deep blue skies, and the only green coming from oak trees and the vines themselves. My favorite time of year here is in the winter, when the hillsides are all green; there can be clouds and rainy days, and the nights are cold. I think that comes from growing up in New England. We don't have winter here in any classical sense – more like a five-month-long spring that starts in December and lasts through April. That's my favorite time of year. But I think that only sort of answers your question. Paso is a collection of people, lots of them young families, a community where doors really are open and people really do look out for each other. If there's one snapshot that encapsulates what I love about this place, it's the family concerts in the park on summer evenings, with kids running around in packs and parents gathered around picnic blankets, all of which have great bottles of wine on them.

RHD: *I noticed a number of photos in your tasting room, of you coaching baseball. What other things do you enjoy doing when you're not devoting time to Tablas Creek?*

JH: My wife Meghan and I have two boys, Eli (10) and Sebastian (8) so a big chunk of my non-work time is spent doing stuff with them. I've coached both boys in basketball and baseball. We try to get out to the beach fairly regularly. I played Ultimate Frisbee competitively in college, graduate school, and at the club level for several years after, and I still try to get out and play a couple of times a month. I'll go for runs with the dog a few mornings a week. I love board games, and think I've passed that along to both boys. Meghan and I used to travel more than we do now, but slowed that down when our boys were little because we didn't really want to travel with them and didn't want to leave them behind either. The boys are now at ages where it's fun to travel with them rather than something to be endured, and they both love interesting food. We took them to England last summer, and had a blast. We're taking them to France this summer. It will be good to get them into the Rhône Valley a bit and show them the amazing operation our Perrin partners have there!



My Paso Robles Is...

Each time I visit a wine region I'm not that familiar with, I go about trying to uncover it's character – that nearly undefinable something that makes a place uniquely its own. When I visited Paso, it was hard for me to nail down just what this region is all about. It's in a dynamic state of flux, with new money coming in to build showpiece wineries, while old families try and hold on to their farming legacies. While there, I hung out with cowboys, surfers, pot heads and rich people. About two weeks in, though, I started to hear the people of Paso talk about this region's one over-arching virtue, the one connective thread that pulls this community together: neighborliness.

Winemakers with whom I met borrowed equipment from each other frequently. Others helped their colleagues by babysitting or housesitting. At Herman Story a veritable community of young winemakers – all working for Russell P. From – eat lunch together at a communal table nearly every day. It was beautiful to observe the fabric of togetherness that binds this region to its people. So I reached out to a number of winemakers I'd met and asked them to tell me, in their own words, what living in Paso Robles is like for them.



Chris Kiranbay / Owner and Winemaker of Saint K Wines, Employee of Russell P. From at Herman Story:

Paso is the Rhone Mecca of America. It's sunshine, and soil and water. Wait, there's no water here... that's everywhere else. It's honest hardworking people. It's tradition and perseverance. It's a small pond and we're all big fish. It's invention. It's doing things your way...and making your own way. It's both humble and prideful. It's safe (south of 24th St.). It's hole-in-the-wall *taquerias*. Most of all, it's given me a second chance at life, and taken me from being an outsider and made me a local.

I like to think of us here at Herman Story like the 2004 Red Sox. They called them "A Bunch of Idiots" because they all came from other teams where maybe they didn't play so well, but once you

put them together they could build a cathedral... meaning, we all come from different backgrounds – the hippie from Orange County, former drug addicts, high school dropouts, misfits, etc. But Russell has allowed us to be ourselves and express ourselves through these wines, and also kept us employed doing what we love.

Adriana Neal / Owner, Seven Oxen Estate Wines:

My Paso is a place of surreal physical beauty and world class winemaking, with a down-to-earth, laid back Central Coast vibe. It's a cultural and generational melting pot made up of people who are willing and eager to share their knowledge and experience with friends and newcomers.



Joe Barton / Owner and Winemaker at Grey Wolf and Barton Family Wines; Partner, Co-founder and Distiller of Krobar Distillers:

My Paso is opportunity! Paso is has always been an open pallet for anyone to paint the picture they want. – to be the vintner, distiller, farmer, or anything you want to be. Rules were left at the door.

Youth was served at times, but age was given a chance to be reborn. My father and I had very different reasons to be here, but we were both given the chance to chase our dreams. Paso is the place where dreams do still happen, and that opportunity is there for everyone who is willing to take a chance.



Richard Hartenberger / Owner and Winemaker, Midnight Cellars:



My Paso is a place where people from a wide variety of backgrounds have come together to create the most exciting wine region in the United States. Twenty years ago there were 30 or so wineries and no one had even heard of us. Over the past 20 years the number of wineries has increased ten-fold, as has the quality level and variety of offerings. Being a still-developing region has afforded all of the winemakers a certain freedom to create whatever wines they want, without the boundaries of tradition to limit them. Paso Robles is now producing an amazing array of varietal wines, as well as all kinds of blends – from traditional to never before seen. It has been amazing transformation and I am proud to have been a part of it! A lot of people like to

categorize Paso as “Napa 25 years ago”. I disagree. Paso Robles is a whole lot more fun than Napa ever was, and will continue to develop into “the” wine country to visit!

Jordan Fiorentini / Winemaker, Epoch Wines:

To live in Paso was a choice for me; I chose to move here from Northern California, but I have to say I didn't have any idea how great of a community we had adopted. I feel like we won the lottery by moving here. It's an inspiring place to grow grapes and make meaningful wine, raise a family, have friends and be a part of a caring community. Paso is embracing, intensely beautiful (in 45 minutes you can be in Cambria in the pines, freezing, overlooking the Pacific, and then sun-drenched in a vineyard overlooking rolling farmland). And it is home. I wake up every day in a hurry for what greatness the day might hold, whether a work or weekend day. Those of us who get to live here and make wine are truly spoiled. Of course I want the world to know how awesome this place is and how great our wines are, but I also want to hide this special gem and keep it to myself...ourselves.



Amy Jean Butler / Owner and Winemaker, Rancho Cellars:

Paso Robles is, at its heart, a small town. Neighbors are friendly. Cars stop to let you cross the street. It is unique, however, in the way that so much of it is tied up in the wine industry, and how that industry has allowed the town to prosper.

Its population swells at the weekends with wine enthusiasts that enliven the downtown and keep the restaurants busy. The wine industry here is different, though. Having worked and lived in Napa Valley prior to moving here 14 years ago, I see that the small town attitudes of Paso Robles (and its close neighbor, Templeton) persist throughout the rural, wine country community. Tasting room staff are enthusiastic wine lovers and recommend their favorites to visitors. Winemakers share ideas and call on one another's palates for affirmation and support. Most of all, what stands out in Paso Robles is the people's connection to each other – and to the land – that provides the basis for the amazing wine we make here.



Brian Terrizzi / Co-Owner and Winemaker at Giornata Wines, Winemaker at Broadside Wines:



Paso is a place with amazing young energy. It still seems like anything is possible here, and we are helping to write the story that's still early on. The amazing diversity of soil and climate make for interesting wine, and being in the center from both San Francisco on Los Angeles makes for a wide array of interesting visitors. There is a great sense of community here, and we don't have to deal with the congestion or the pressure that some of our colleagues seem to up north. People are very friendly here, and Paso is a happy and fun place to be.

Stephanie Terrizzi / Co-Owner and Viticulturalist at Giornata Wines, Consulting Viticulturalist for Broadside Wines and other Paso wine projects:

Paso is a viticulturalist's paradise. The complex soils change from one rolling hill to the next. My favorite characteristics are the high pH and clay, dotted with volcanic rocks and veins of calcareous rock running through the hills. I love the element of surprise from discovering whale or oyster fossils poking out of the

earth, coming face to face with a wild pig while fixing an irrigation leak, or watching a red tailed hawk fly off with a rattlesnake above where I am working. Who knows what I will see in my outdoor office tomorrow.

Cameron Stoffel / Owner and Winemaker for Ultima Tulie, Employee of Russell P. From and Herman Story:



Paso is this amazing place where you don't have to have a recognizable last name or a massive bank account to get a chance to make some really amazing wine. All you need is a good head on your shoulders, a dream, and a willingness to work your ass off. Paso is family, people look out for each other here. None of this would be possible without the support of family.

Xavier Arnaudin / Co-Founder and Winemaker of Union Sacré Wines, and Assistant Winemaker at Sans Liege:

Paso reminds me of being a kid in France watching western movies. These were the movies my grandparents were watching when I was 10 and there were just four channels, and we had a black and white TV with no remote. The only day we got to watch movies was on Tuesday night because we had Wednesday off from school until we were 12. "Tuesday is ok" is a saying in France (a lot like the TGIF here).



But because there's only four channels, there's not much choice on what to watch. Channel 3 was the western movies. There were six of us in the house because my grandparents spent the night so they could watch me on Wednesday. My grandpa sat in a hard chair because she had a bad back, and my grandpa sat on a chair, too – even though he could have sat on the sofa – because he loved her so much. Those movies still taste so good to me; that's America to me. The good, the bad and the ugly, etc.... Years later I came to Paso. The first thing it reminds me of is the wild, wild west from those old movies. It's one part fantasy, one part reality. Paso is the classic California from those films. Something is happening here; something will be happening there; there are cowboys, villains, hard-working people... There is industry, whiskey, wine and women. There is a sense that something more is possible. There is some sense of justice, too, like if you work super hard to make something really, really good – not just good tasting and not just good selling, but really, really good – then you will succeed, and everything else will fall away.

Philip Muzzy / Co-founder and Creative Director of Union Sacré Wines, Employee of Russell P. From and Herman Story:

Jesus, Xavier. I mean really, what else is there to say? I agree with all of that. I think the only thing I'd add is that Paso isn't whole unto itself in my mind. It will be in like 50 or 100 years or so, but the whole place is still so, so young it doesn't even know what it could be. It's like a toddler learning grammar for the first time, there are rules floating around and some level of experience, but what it is now is not anything nearly as rich and varied and strong as what it may become. So right now for me Paso is just part of the Central Coast and part of a broader American experience. We have this ancient practice of winemaking and winegrowing that is really pretty much brand new here. Yeah, I know that there have been wine vineyards planted in



California for as long as there have been Europeans here, but that's not really part of this history. That's more like me saying I have relatives that fought in the Revolutionary War. I really think the wine experience in America is pretty strange. So much of it up 'til now seems to have been this weird, nearly Lomax-ian struggle to capture and display authenticity, and then this equally bizarre Crumb-ian penchant we all have to hoard and collect. It's all so antiquated and silly now. I think we're at a cusp of a transition right now as far as what wine is, what meals are, what recreation is, what hobbies are, what work is, etc.... and there's something here in Paso that has captured a tiny portion of these broader, bubbling questions. In short, Paso is young. The people in wine here are all young (even if they are 80 years old, they are young somehow; it's weird). Heck, even the ground is relatively geologically young. So what is Paso to me? I guess it's a giant exuberant question mark.

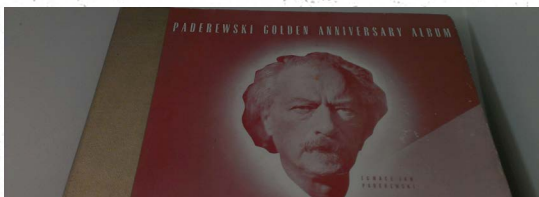
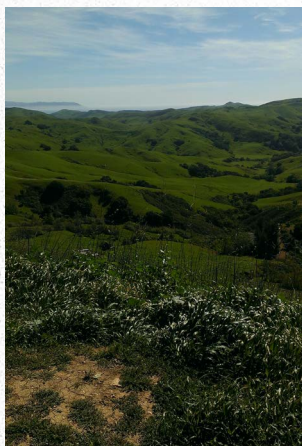
THE NUMBERS GAME



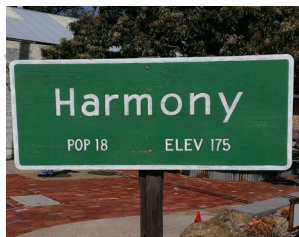
Things to Do in Paso Robles....

If you're planning a trip to Paso Robles, try and set aside three or four days for your excursion. While working on this issue, I spent a month in Paso Robles, and came up with a little tour that you might like to take.

Just off of Hwy. 101 (or Pacific Coast Hwy. 1, if you're traveling in from the ocean side) you'll find **Hwy. 46 West**. Taking this road is a great way to begin your Paso Robles explorations. Just off of Hwy. 46 West, you'll find a whole host of wonderful wineries to visit, including **J. Dusi**, **L'Aventure**, **Castoro**, **Grey Wolf** and **Barton Family**, **Four Lanterns**, **Cypher**, and **Epoch**, a great winery on **York Mountain Road**, just off of the 46. History buffs will love Epoch, where delicious wines and history are offered up with equal enthusiasm. The brilliant Polish composer, **Paderewski**, who once upon a time filled up Madison Square Garden and Carnegie Hall, and who has a star on Hollywood Blvd., called this site home, and one can view some of his personal items, including a rare album, at the Epoch tasting room.



In the mood for distilled spirits? At Grey Wolf and Barton Family Wines, you'll also get a chance to taste through a great spirits portfolio by **Kobar Distillers** – terrific gin, bitters and rye whiskey, not to mention a whole host of other spirits. **Tooth and Nail**, a castle-like winery, might look cheesy from the outside, but it's modern and fun on the inside and the wines are terrific, not to mention their artistic labels, which are very appealing. Going west, this highway will eventually dead end at Hwy. 1, where a short jaunt south will lead you to the town of **Harmony**, population 18. This is a great little town if you're looking for unusual gifts for your family and friends back home. There's a glass blowing studio, a pottery store and a small wedding chapel.



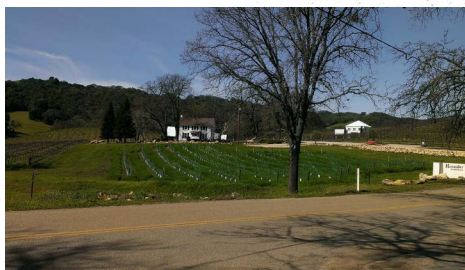
Back up on Hwy. 46 West, consider driving North-bound on **Vineyard Drive**, an arrestingly gorgeous country lane that breezes past some of my favorite Paso Robles wineries, including **Oso Libre**, where visitors can observe alpacas and Angus herds while tasting wine; **Thacher**; **Brecon**; and **Whalebone**. Looking for great olive oil? On Vineyard Drive, you'll run into the **Pasolivo Olive Oil Company**, a lovely little business smack dab in the middle of a remote little valley.



Vineyard Drive dead ends at **Adelaida Road**, where you'll find a wealth of great vineyards, including **Tablas Creek** and **Rangeland** on one end, and **Adelaida**, **Lone Madrone**, **Halter Ranch**, **Wild Coyote**, **McPrice Meyers**, **Bodega de Edgar** and **Le Cuvier** on the other. As is the case with all the pretty country lanes in Paso Robles, you'll want to slow down, roll down the windows, put on some good music and enjoy the drive.

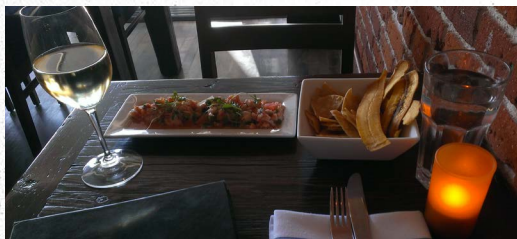


Eventually, Adelaida Road descends into downtown Paso Robles, where you'll run into **Spring Street**. Turn right on that street and head towards downtown Paso Robles. There, you'll discover plenty of hotels to choose from, if you've not already booked a room. Looking for something inexpensive? There are plenty of hotel and motel chains providing competitive rates in the Paso Robles area, including **Best Western**, **Holiday Inn** and **La Quinta**. If you'd prefer something quainter, several wineries, including **Summerwood**, **Opolo**, **Hammer Sky**, **Wild Coyote Estate** and **Denner**, operate Bed & Breakfast Inns on their respective estates. **The Paso Robles Inn** and **Hotel Cheval** are terrific, and both are walking distance from Paso's charming town square.



Take some time to explore the picturesque and peaceful Paso Robles town square. Amazingly, there are about six excellent restaurants in this little country town, all off of the town square. If you're a discerning food lover and want to eat at a special place, check out **Artisan**, where contemporary American farm-to-table fare is elevated to new, Central Coast heights. **Thomas Hill Organics** has a fun menu, which includes freshly shucked Morro Bay oysters and one of the better duck breasts I've had in a while.

My favorite meal in Paso was taken at **La Cosecha**. Their Paella is terrific and they have a dynamic wine list, which combines top offerings not only from Paso but from around the world. It's a short but thoughtful list that merits some attention. **Il Cortile** is another winner, and the service there is some of the best you'll get in Paso. Old school diners will get a kick out of **Bistro Laurent**. For just over 10 bucks, you can order a delicious Parisian style "Croque Monsieur" with pomme frites and still have some money left over for a good wine-by-the-glass, of which they have various solid selections. **Villa Creek** is a favorite with locals and when I went in, I saw a number of winemakers eating lunch there and shooting the breeze.



Looking for a place to have an after-dinner drink? If you're feeling courageous, check out the **Pine Street Saloon**. I'd been warned by several winemakers that it's not the ideal place for a woman to drink alone. It's not uncommon, they told me, for fisticuffs to happen there – men against men and women against women – but I drank a whiskey there and survived. I highly recommend it if you, like me, like to get to know a town by visiting its dive bars.



I'm a bit of an evening stroller when I travel. Following dinner out, I like to walk a town's residential streets, just to taste a slice of that town's character. In Paso, I loved walking up and down the residential neighborhoods that buttress the town square. One evening, I walked past Paso's lovely little Fire Department, a saddle shop and the local farmer's market. If it's a walking town you're looking for, it's hard to beat Paso.

Before you leave the town square, make sure to check out **Powell's Sweet Shoppe**, a splendid little old-fashioned candy store not too far from the town square's charming gazebo; **Studios on the Park**, an interactive gallery space; and the **Paso Park Cinemas**, which offers up a great selection of current releases. If you have a little extra time, walk out to **Herman Story Winery** on Paso Robles Street. It's hard to find, but it's worth seeking out. Owner Russell P. From has created a collegiate little community inside his winery and allows many of his employees to make their own wines there. It's a veritable petri dish of talent that includes some of Paso's most promising up-and-comers, including **Saint K**, **Ultima Tulie** and **Union Sacré** Wines.

For a more industrial, albeit delicious glimpse of the Paso wine scene, check out **Tin City**, which is off of **Marquita Drive**, not far from the 101. Though Tin City may appear to be industrial, the wines you'll find there are some of Paso's most exceptional. Elegant, sophisticated offerings can

be found at **Giornata** and **Broadside**. **Cordant**, **Nelle** and **Field Recordings** also produce lovely, food-friendly wines. If you're looking for more power, yet balance, **Levo**, **Clos Solène**, **Desparada** and **Jacob Taft** offer terrific tastings, often hosted by the owners or winemakers themselves.



After you've checked out Tin City, consider heading out to **Hwy. 46 East**. Some of Paso's better known wineries, including **Robert Hall**, **Vina Robles**, **Tobin James** and **Clayhouse** can be found off of this highway. This side of Paso is more expansive and flat, but it's fun to explore. If you're traveling by RV or van, the **Wine Country RV Park** is a good place to camp out. Die-hard golfers may want to check out the **Hunter Ranch Golf Course**. It's an 18-hole course with an unassuming grill that serves up breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Before you plan your trip to Paso Robles, consider downloading the free **PasoWineApp**, and get great free information on all this special region has to offer. I also highly recommend writing to the Paso

Robles Wine Country Alliance (www.pasowine.com) where you can request a useful, well thought-out map of the entire region and learn more about its singular 11 sub-appellations. If you're a bit of a wine nerd like me, you'll want to read up on them a bit before planning your trip. They are: **Adelaida**, **Creston**, **El Pomar**, **Estrella**, **Geneseo**, **Highlands**, **Willow Creek**, **San Juan Creek**, **San Miguel**, **Santa Margarita**, and the **Templeton Gap**. If during your trip to Paso, you feel the need for some solitude, check out **Mission San Miguel**, in nearby San Miguel, one of California's larger and more beautiful missions.



Setting Paso to Music: The Playlists of Winemaker Tyler Russell

When I first meet winemaker Tyler Russell of Nelle and Cordant Wines, he reminds me of a young Grizzly Adams as played by Dan Haggerty when he was in his swarthy prime. He's somewhat quiet by nature, but when he does speak, he's thoughtful and intelligent. He tends to keep to himself, though he's eager to praise fellow winemakers when the conversation turns to wines that inspire him. Russell's beautiful wines are housed in an unassuming, warehouse-like building towards the back of Tin City, Paso's burgeoning winery neighborhood, located just off of Hwy. 101. His Nelle brand is named after his mother, and it's her handwriting that makes up the brand's logo.

His devotion to music is apparent, as he carefully selects a soundtrack to accompany the extensive tasting we'll be doing together later that afternoon. We listen only to vinyl – albums that he handles with great care, despite his large, gnarled hands. It's the same light and careful touch he applies to both his Nelle and Cordant wines – some of the best, most energetic wines I taste while working on this issue.

I meet up with Russell a few times, and during each visit music becomes the focus of our conversation. Russell explains that, "without music, making wine would not be nearly as fun. A winery that functions without music is one without a soul. Some of my best memories associated with the places I have worked and the roads I travel would not be complete without a sound track."

For this issue of Loam Baby, I asked Russell if he'd put together various playlists inspired by his favorite districts in Paso Robles. I have since then re-created these playlists for myself, purchasing the songs on-line and then burning them to CDs for my car. Russell's soundtrack does indeed enhance one's visit to Paso Robles, and I highly recommend that you, dear Reader, give these a spin when you plan your trip to Paso.

Willow Creek

Willow Creek was the first sub-AVA that I worked in, at Dover Canyon. There I worked under local legend Dan Panico, aka Dover Dan. This dude is one of a kind. He is a Paso Robles winemaking O.G. "Family Man" by Fleetwood Mac reminds me of my time there. Every time I would get in his truck to run errands for the winery, that song would come on. Before all of this I wasn't the biggest Fleetwood Mac fan. Now I am. Bill Wilson's "Pay Day Give Away" is a great driving song. The kind of song you like to listen to when nobody is in the truck, so you can sing at the top of your lungs. Willow Creek Road is the perfect road for that. "Helvetia" was shown to me by Mark Adams of Ledge Vineyards one night while having a good time at his place off of Vineyard Drive. It was a great night of drinking and what not. We ended the night blasting this record at 3:30 AM. He gave me a copy, and it has been in heavy rotation since. The song by Handsome Boy Modeling School goes out to one of my besties, Curtis Cardonzo Hascall of Shale Oak. I worked the 2006 Harvest with him at Norman Winery. I borrowed this CD from him and never gave it back. I love Mr. Cardonzo. The last three songs represent what I listened to the most when I came to Paso in 2006. If you were to get in my truck on the way to Dover Canyon, this is what you would have listened to as well.

Fleetwood Mac – "Family Man"
Bill Wilson – "Pay Day Give Away"
Helvetia – "See Saw Sow"
Handsome Boy Modeling School – "If It Wasn't for You..."
The Mars Volta – "Tetragrammaton"
Mr. Bungle – "Goodbye Sober Day"
Talking Heads – "Clean Break"





Templeton Gap

My fondest memories that relate to music are connected to my time working at Zenaida Cellars. There I worked under Eric Ogorsolka. It was 2008 - 2011. He taught me a great deal and introduced me to a lot of music. His iPod was always on. Son Volt was on quite a bit. Great alt-country sound. I still listen to it and it always reminds me of him. He was always a White Stripes fan. I thought I was too cool for them at the time, but it turns out I'm not and I've become a fan myself. Yaz was funny because it was kind of random as part of the rotation. I think it was more nostalgic for him. I picture him boogieing down at his Junior High dance to this. It became a bit of an inside joke between us. About this time I really got into Bossa Nova, and Aguas de Marco by Jobim is one of my all-time favorite songs. I was also married during my time there. My wedding reception was there at Zenaida. "This Must Be the Place", by the Talking Heads, was the song we had our first dance to. That song is very special to me. Queens of the Stone Age reminds me of cleaning up at the end of the day during harvest. Eric would take off and I would put them on and that would keep me going through the night.

Son Volt – "Windfall"

The White Stripes – "Blue Orchid"

Yaz – "Situation"

Antonio Carlos Jobim – "Aguas de Marco"

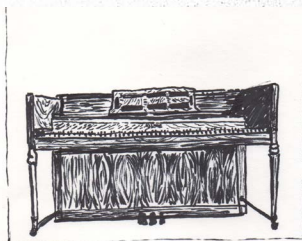
Queens of the Stone Age – "This Lullaby"

The Black Keys – "Goodbye Babylon"

Cat Powers – "Love and Communication"

Talking Heads – "This Must Be the Place (Naive Melody)"

Michael Jackson – "Thriller"



Adelaida District

I've spent a great amount of time in this region. This list could go on and on. I worked at Minassian-Young under Dave Young. Dave is a big Pavement fan and exposed me to them. They are now without question one of my favorite bands. These two songs particularly remind me of my time there. Deerhunter and The Flaming Lips were also frequently on at that time. Silver Jews was also introduced to me by Dave. While working at Minassian-Young, I also lived on the property, which is out in the country. That's where John Prine's Spanish Pipedream comes in. I then worked at Calcareous with Jason Joyce. I could make a playlist dedicated just to him if I had to. His has a wealth of musical knowledge. During harvest, after all the hospitality folks would leave, we'd listen to A\$AP Rocky and sort fruit. Pretty awesome. Tall Tales was a band

he booked for a festival weekend. They are real good, and am still in contact with some of the people in that band. El Aguacatero would play on the Spanish radio station which the Cellar Master, Nacho, would put on in the morning. When this song would come on, we'd all sing along. While there I started the Wu-Tang Wednesday tradition. Self explanatory.

Pavement – “You Are A Light”
Pavement – “Range Life”
Silver Jews – “Frontier Index”
Flaming Lips – “The W.A.N.D”
A\$AP Rocky – “Get Lit”
Tall Tales and the Silver Linings – “Salty Dog”
Los Originales de San Juan – “El Aguacatero”
Deerhunter – “Basement Scene”
Wu-Tang Clan – “Triumph”
John Prine – “Spanish Pipedream.”



Tin City

Tin City isn't an AVA, but this is where I make my wine...along with a few other young guys and gals. It is becoming quite the destination and for good reason. Needless to say, a lot of music is listened to here. This list represents what has been in the rotation most recently. Adrian Youngue is all time, making great soul music today. “Something About April” is classic. Pharoah Sanders reminds me of a night with Bret Urness (Winemaker/Owner of Levo Wines) where he wanted a jazz lesson. Of course, Pharoah Sanders was a part of that night. And “Japan” was his favorite song of the night. I have to include Ol' Dirty Bastard. He's so legendary that I had a stencil made of his face to mark my macro bins. Little Wings – a band that started in San Luis Obispo years ago and is now based in LA – is great, and their most recent album is spinning quite a bit at the winery. Tribe Called Quest. Don't really need to explain why that album is important. Possibly the greatest hip hop album ever. It is played regularly as well.

PRhyme – “Courtesy”
Little Wings – “By Now”
Pavement – “Feed 'Em to the 5 Lions (Linden)”
Marty Robbins – “Master's Call”
Kendrick Lamar – “What's a Dollar Worth”
Tribe Called Quest – “Low End Theory”
Adrian Youngue – “Something About April”
Pharoah Sanders – “Japan”
Ol' Dirty Bastard – “The Stomp”

8 Days A Week: A Week in the Life of Cellar Hand Nico Fritz

Winemakers and winery owners get a lot of ink in the wine media. Their titles sound romantic and spark the imagination of readers, with images of tables, well-appointed with world-class wines and great food; lovely vineyards; wineries and refined vineyard homes; dusty cellars full of mysterious, special wines. Cellar workers, like Sous Chefs, are rarely heard from but work diligently in the background, providing winemakers with invaluable labor, and oftentimes, guidance.

Recently, I asked Cellar Hand Nico Fritz, of Paso's Tooth and Nail Winery, if she would share a week's-long work diary with Loam Baby. Herewith, in Nico's own words, is what an ordinary week is like for a hardworking Cellar Hand.



Monday:

5:00 AM: First alarm goes off. I stumble out of bed, put coffee on, and go back to sleep for another half an hour. At 5:30, I'm up. Pull on army pants, wife beater, throw hair back in a ponytail, drink coffee, and make fresh squeezed orange juice. Out the door by 6:30. Start time in the cellar is normally 7:30, and I have about a forty-minute commute to work... when traffic behaves. I'm habitually about fifteen to twenty minutes early to work every day, but I don't care. I will not adjust my time to sleep in. I would rather be early than late any day. And besides, I like the fifteen or so minutes of alone time in the cellar, just me and the wine, taking everything in, smelling the cellar smells, making sure nothing is out of place. I am a pretty solitary person, and I like easing into the day alone. If someone happens to be in the cellar before me, it can actually throw my entire day. I'm very protective of our wines – of each tank and every barrel – and I enjoy being the first person on and the last to leave.

3:00 PM: Two of the four blends we are putting together are done by about 2:30, and by 3:00 I need to leave the cellar to be in the tasting room for a quarterly meeting with the owner, partners, compliance, tasting room manager, GM of the company, etc., to catch up with each other, and find out what's been going on in different areas of the company. We then get a little down time – socializing, blind tasting, etc. The blind tasting was the most fun, but it was also neat to hear about what else is going on in other areas of the company – the tasting room, events department, etc. One of our partners and our Director of Sales brought a 1967. It's what he called an "important" wine, and indeed it was!

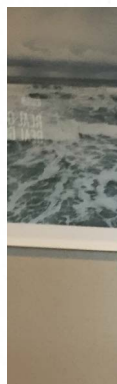
6:00 PM: In for the evening. Shower, make a quick and dirty meal for dinner, prep coffee for the morning, and taste through some wines that I acquired through various people throughout the past couple of days, feed the dogs, wash dishes, then cuddle in bed with my puppy while studying *Wine Production and Analysis*, sipping on some vino, and falling asleep with heavy eyelids.

Tuesday:

7:30 AM: After a brief walk through our acre or so of Tempranillo – planted just a year ago – I am back in the cellar to discuss with my co-workers the game plan for the day. It looks like it's going to be a slam dunk, and the rest of the week will be an easy, joyous coast into the weekend. Then bam! Game changer: my boss changes the work orders on me and throws off my game plan, and pretty much my entire morning. It's ok. I quickly formulate a new game plan. No problem. I can roll with the punches like nobody's business. I begin to set things into motion again. Zing! Boss changes work orders on me again. Not once, not twice, but three times! I can feel the veins in my forehead starting to throb. I'm overwhelmed, I'm frustrated, he's frustrated, tension is high, my co-workers are backing away... But once I take a step back, figure out one thing at a time, and develop a new game plan (yet again), I mellow out and the day finally gets a real start to it – a little later than I would have liked, but we're finally ready.

4:00 PM: I work up until the very last minute and everything gets done, including cleaning the cellar properly, closing valves, coiling hoses, squeegee-ing the floor, etc. I do NOT appreciate it when the cellar is left in chaos to be tidied up the next morning. I just can't have it. It's not proper, and I lose sleep over it. All of the blends are put together. My bosses tell me they thought it would take three days. I managed to get it done in two. It feels good. The rest of the week should be pretty smooth, in theory.

5:30 PM: I am not in the mood to do anything when I get home except shower and lay in bed and read. The day was mentally draining, but I go to see my parents and my grandma anyway. I love my family very much and I think my visits after work are helping my grandma out. It's good for her to see a different face in the afternoon. My grandmother is having health issues and has moved in with my parents until she gets better. We all have full time jobs with varying schedules, so I'm doing what I can to help out and just be there. I always bring a bottle of wine. They don't usually let me bring anything else. We have leftovers. We cleaned out the fridge, and my grandmother eats really well. We are so proud of her!

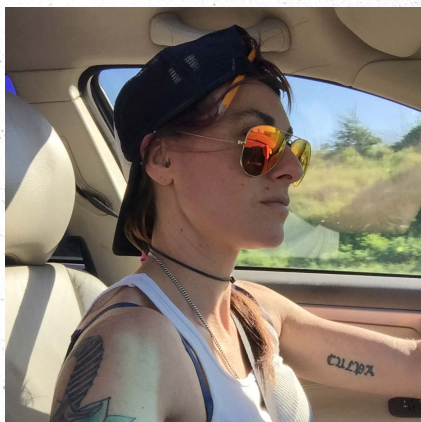


Wednesday:

5:50 AM: Wake up. My schedule is thrown, but for a very welcome reason. It's a lab day for me today, and I'll be spending the entire day at a different cellar, a custom crush facility in Edna Valley where we process and store some of our wines, and it's where I do any of our lab work that we need done until our second, newer building on the Tooth & Nail property is finished, which will include a brand new, pristine lab, special for me! (YAY! Happy dance!). My commute to the facility on Corbett Canyon Road is much shorter than my commute to Paso Robles, so I get to sleep in a few extra minutes. The drive in is not as beautiful, but nothing beats walking into the lab, putting on some peaceful music, and tuning the rest of the world out for the day. It's just me, the wine, the chemicals, the equipment, and the equations. Nothing distracts me. I'm completely at peace and serene. When I'm lucky, no one bothers me. No one comes in. Nothing matters but the wine, the procedure, and getting accurate results. When I'm in the lab, the rest of the world melts away. I can work through lunch and not even care. Lab days are quickly becoming my favorite days, though I would never turn down a barrel-down, or a rack-and-return. I love getting dirty in the cellar, but the quiet, poetic finesse of exactness and titration in the lab is pretty much unbeatable. It pleases me very much.

7:05 AM: I walk the estate vineyard of the custom crush. It's more southern than Paso Robles, with cooler days and warmer nights. Forget bud break; these wines are putting out foliage like nobody's business. I'm amazed at how alive the vines have become. I only come down to the Edna cellar about once a month for a few days to do analysis, and A LOT can change in a month when it comes to the growth of a vine. The last time I was down, everything still seemed dormant. Now it's hardly even spring, and the vines are eager to produce fruit and soak up some sunshine. This is going to be an interesting harvest, and ours is always particularly long because we have three vineyards. Two are east side Paso Robles, but one is in Santa Maria, so we have a very long growing and harvesting season. Fruit ripens earlier in the south counties, so we have Chardonnay, Pinot Noir coming first. We also have some really great cool climate Syrah and Grenache coming from the Murmur vineyard as well. Basically we have the best of both worlds when it comes to fruit. It just means our harvest tends to last a bit longer than those of other people dealing with only one climate.

9:00 PM I'm back home. Shower, prep coffee, lay out clothes for tomorrow morning. Sleeping by 9:30.



Thursday:

7:15 AM: Back at the Castle (Tooth and Nail) in Paso Robles. Today I scope out the Cabernet Sauvignon block. It's pruned, and bud break has definitely happened. It's not as far along as the Syrah, but further than the Zinfandel. We only have about nine and a half acres of estate fruit, so it's not difficult to walk a few blocks in the morning and get really intimate with the vines. This block overlooks Midnight Cellars and Dark Star across the way from us on Anderson Road. Sometimes, when I'm delivering the case transfer to the tasting room on Thursdays, I'll shoot a text to my buddy Brandon over at Midnight Cellars and wave and see if he can see me.

9:00 AM: With all equipment sanitized – clamps, gaskets, tank, hoses, and pump – I am ready to rack the Orange Muscat to tank. I know, I know, sounds overly sweet and icky, but it's for a nice white blend we make called Fragrant Snare. It is actually not overly sweet and is great for summer! It's mostly Chardonnay, Albariño, bone-dry Gewürztraminer and a splash of the Orange Muscat. It's the only wine we actually source juice for, and it's just to make something light and easy drinking. I think our marketing people call it the “porch-pounder”.

9:30 AM: Racked Orange Muscat to tank, cleaned up, organized and stacked barrels, checked bioreactor, did a quick bung swap and barrel wipe-down of some of our lots still going through malo-lactic fermentation. They tend to get a little funky if you don't keep an eye on them, in addition to popping bungs left and right and just being overall unruly. Put the case transfer together for the tasting room, then took lunch at 12:30. I LOOOOOOOVE days where I have time to take lunch! The day seems very mellow to me, and I think it's just because we got the blends to tank so quickly, perfectly, and almost effortlessly. Neither boss is around today.

1:00 PM: I take the case transfer to the tasting room. I started just straight up driving the forklift into the tasting room, whether people are in tasting or not. I think people like the excitement of seeing a forklift in the tasting room. We may not have knights in shining armor, but we have me, on a forklift, delivering cases upon cases of wine, and I'm usually dressed like a freak of nature with two-toned eye makeup.

4:00 PM: Went to meet up with my wine homey, Brandon, assistant winemaker across the way at Midnight Cellars. I can be a little reclusive, but I've been trying to get out more. We talk shop and sip beer. I stay for about an hour and then make the longish drive back home to Los Osos. I need to get a place in Paso, already. UGH! This harvest is going to suck if I'm still commuting!

6:00 PM: My love and I put on some music, sip some beers, and prepare the marinade for this epic, five-pound pork shoulder he picked up at J&R meats in Arroyo Grande. It's great to have him back home. I've missed his company terribly.



Friday:

5:00 AM: Everyone is freaking out because not only is some master Sommelier supposedly coming to taste in the tasting room and cellar later on, but also our wine club pick-up party and shipment is also on the horizon, and our GM needs numbers, like yesterday. I do NOT go back to bed after pushing the coffee button this morning. I get out of bed, make fresh squeezed orange juice, get ready as fast as I can, and make sure I am at work by seven (OK, actually 6:45) to pull samples for one of our winemakers and get a decent jump on inventory for our GM. I don't want anyone to stress out, but somehow everyone does anyway. I don't know how many times I need to tell everyone to relax, because I'll get things handled, but people stress, no matter what. I think it's just human nature. And I get it. I wouldn't trust anyone to do my job better than I either, so I get their shot nerves.

10:00 AM: The day is chaotic as hell. I understand that stress levels are high. I do what I can to help, but it's like herding cats. Everyone is cranky, frustrated. I'm put on one job, then pulled off it and put on another. I'm happy it's Friday, as I could use a beer, and oh my, look at the time! It's not even close to noon!

2:00 PM: I finally get around to eating lunch, and lucky me, my homie Stillman Brown, winemaker at Zeppelin Winery, says that if I "model" his latest T-shirt design for his winery, he'll give me one free. He cruises over to Tooth & Nail. As much as I want the T-shirt, I'm actually more excited for some light-hearted company and maybe a few laughs. The tension and energy in the cellar was super negative today. Fridays are usually so casual and fun. Not necessarily light in the work load department, but moods are chipper. This Friday sucked hard, and I'm eager to get home and party with my love, who has been working night shift at the nuclear power plant where I used to work as well, before making a mid-life career change that involved a LOT less money but a LOT more fun. And who can say the struggle to pay your bills isn't worth it when your hands are cracked, dry, bleeding, stained; you haven't washed your pants or your hair in a week; all your clothes are stained; your friends can't remember the last time you partied together; and your family tells you if you don't get another hobby you'll drive everyone around you crazy??? Whatever. It's called passion, and I have it!

4:00 PM: I'm out the door and sailing toward Los Osos. I could not be happier to put this day behind me.

6:15 PM: I may have sent my love a text about the day not being amazing, so as soon as I rolled up, he had a 32 oz. bottle of PBR and a shot of Jameson waiting for me. The pork shoulder is already smoking on the Traeger. I stop at the market on the way home and get green beans, butter, potatoes, cream, chicken stock, and cookies! I said I would make the starch and the vegetable dish, even though stopping at the market was the last thing I wanted to do on my way home from work.



Saturday:

8:00 AM: People can talk all they want about “easy like Sunday Morning”, but Saturday is where it’s at, and Saturday mornings in particular. Saturday morning you can be a little hung-over. You can stay up a little too late the night before and sleep in a little too long that morning – with or without a hangover – wake up slowly, sip coffee and juice in bed, read an actual paper that will stain your fingers with ink, wrestle a bit with your lover, and just be decadent. Saturday is a day that is completely free because you have a buffer on both ends. Friday is work and then absolute hedonism, and Sunday is you trying to repent, or at least recover enough from your sins and transgressions from the night before so you can function again Monday morning.

Proust Questionnaire: Orion Stang

I first met Orion Stang early last year when he was still working at a large, moneyed winery in Paso Robles. Then I heard he'd struck out on his own late last year, so we made plans to meet up again, this time for sushi in a strip mall so that I could taste his new releases and learn more about his brand, Dilecta, to which he now devotes himself full time.

Stang, 34, was born on a tiny island off the coast of Georgia called St. Simons. A single dad and lover of Persian cats (he has one tattooed on his arm), he established Dilecta in the fall of 2011. "Dilecta is a Latin term meaning to love or to be loved," he says. "I figure winemaking represents love in so many ways; it's truly a passion that has my heart intertwined. It's the driving force in my creativity. It consumes my every step during those sweat-drenching, 16-hour days in the fall."



What is your idea of perfect happiness?

Satisfaction in a "perfect" wine blend. The years it took to get to that point – difficulties, sacrifice, cheer and joy... All of the above, of course.

Which historical figure do you identify with?

Growing up, I heard my parents talk a lot about political figures. Those who brought us out of, or closer to, war. I never listened, but I kept hearing the name President Carter on the news, and how he was always so close to getting the world together in peace. I thought everyone felt sorry for him like I did. Such a great guy, trying his heart out. The success of the Camp David Accords, 1978, between Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was a standout moment for President Carter – one that penetrated my bubble of the world and my place in it.

Which is the living person you most admire?

For honesty and consideration, for covering my back and an insane ability to be my friend – whatever comes – there is a soldier in the United States Army who comes to mind: Air Trooper Robert "Robbie" Burres. We were kids together and grew up side by side. When life took us down different paths, Robbie still had my back. He still has.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

There have been times in my life when I have met someone or had an opportunity fall into my lap. Not being able to recognize "gifts of fate" has amplified my own ability to fail. I let things slip through my fingers; I should have done this, I should have said that...but didn't.

What is the trait you most deplore in others?

Being in the public eye, as a representative of my own wine, I meet mostly takers. Nothing drives me crazy more than having a conversation with someone who feels it necessary to put on airs.

What is your favorite journey?

To sun-kissed vineyards in the late afternoon during the heat of the summer when the skin of the grape expands to the touch and the sweetness explodes in your mouth. Walking row by row with the grower, the excitement growing between the two of us.

On what occasion do you lie?

Lies always get me in trouble; I can never remember them. But the urgency to lie, or at least think that a lie is the best way to go, is usually to hide something from another family member so as to not hurt their feelings. Like I said, it always gets me in trouble.

What is your greatest regret?

Considering this question from a thirty-something perspective, spoiling away my younger years during high school. Never the student to pay attention to something unless it concerned a shallow end, I wasted a lot of time.

When and where were you the happiest?

In 2004, I had an extreme opportunity to experience Florence, Italy from the high windows off Via Guelfa at the Apicius Culinary Institute. Thrown in with students from all over the world, my world exploded with new horizons, camaraderie, and a tingling down deep to the very fiber of my soul.

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

A constant tendency, like an Achilles heel, towards shyness. It develops from the bottom of my belly and makes my head sweat. No matter what I do, or if I don't do anything, the malady is consistent.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

Seven years ago, the gift of life granted me a daughter who has developed into the fairest, finest little person I have ever known.

If you could choose what to come back as, what would it be?

A Butler, circa the late 1800s, to some high (the highest) society mansion where the King and Queen, or the Prince and Princess, or the Duke and the Duchess, prevailed over the land and their subjects. I would be learned in all the craft and artistry required, affording the manor only the best standards of the time.

Who are your favorite writers?

In order: John Irving, 1942—present, *Setting Free the Bears*, 1968, fiction; Zadie Smith, 1975—present, *White Teeth*, 2000, fiction; Thomas Keller, 1955—present, *The French Laundry Cookbook*, 1999.

Who are your heroes in real life?

I would have to say, after acknowledging my Mom and Dad, Chef Omri is one of them. An Israeli immigrant, Omri established himself as one of the best chefs known to those in the industry. I had the pleasure of working in one of his restaurants as a lowly waiter and witnessed this master at work. He pushed himself to a level of excellence as hard as he pushed those who could stand the pace.

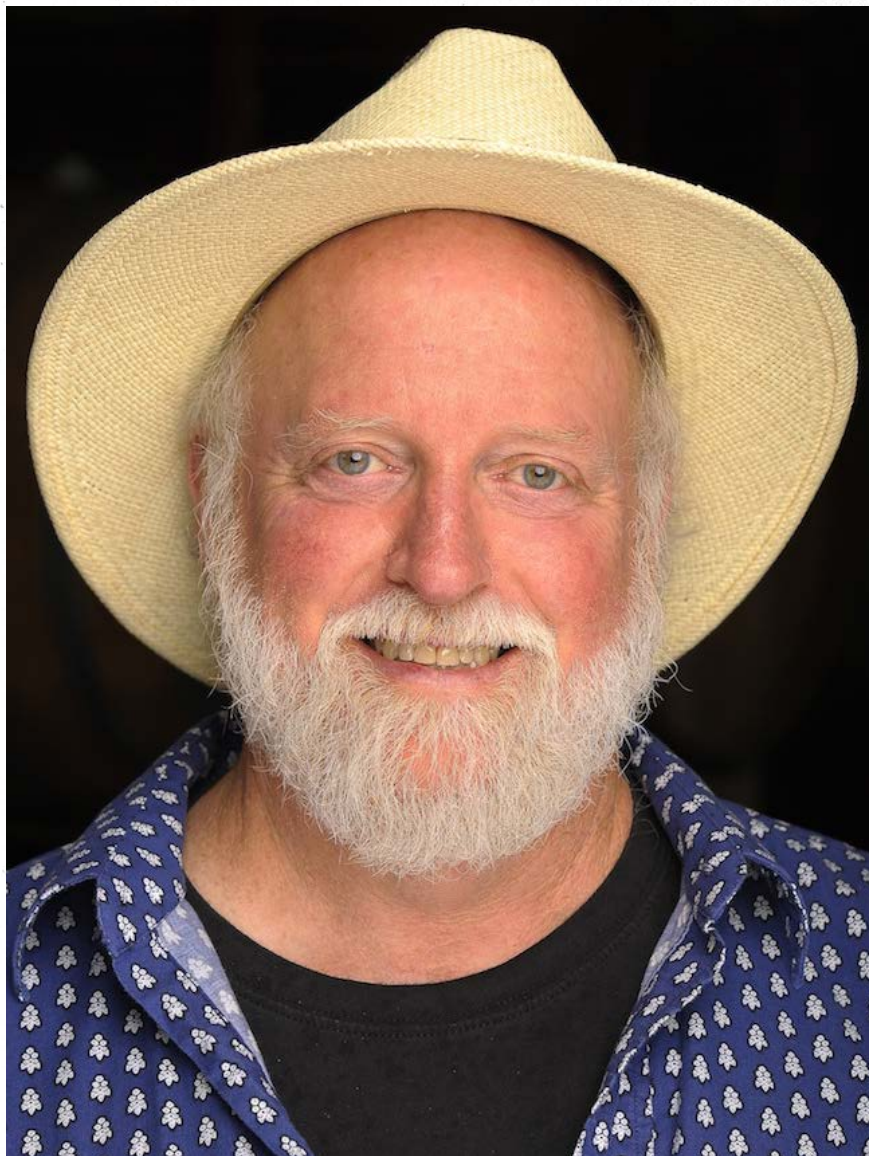
What is your motto?

How can you turn your back on who you are and what you do? Be true to yourself. Give the best of what you are.

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John Munch



This issue is dedicated to John Munch, of Le Cuvier, a pioneering man with a profound understanding of, and devotion to, the Paso Robles winegrowing region.

