

13 Great Reds from Paso Robles

New reviews from one of California's hottest up-and-coming wine regions

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With the Saxum Paso Robles James Berry Vineyard 2007 having been announced as the 2010 *Wine Spectator* Wine of the Year, it puts not only Saxum, but the entire Paso Robles region in the spotlight. Here are some wines from our recent tastings that show why this area deserves the attention.

Paso's identity is strongly anchored in Rhône varieties, as this group demonstrates. Paso vintners also aren't shy about blending, creating cuvées with clever proprietary names. Blends of the Rhône grapes Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre are the most popular here. Counoise, another Rhône grape (perhaps best known as a component of Châteauneuf-du-Pape), makes an appearance in Booker's Oublié and the Tablas Creek. Torrin's The Banshee adds in some Alicante Bouschet, a non-Rhône grape.

For a great wine (and something that's decidedly not Rhône-influenced), check out the Ancient Peaks Merlot, made from grapes that come from the Margarita Vineyard at the southernmost tip of Paso Robles.

BOOKER Grenache Paso Robles The Ripper 2008 Score: 92 | \$55

Deliciously ripe and juicy, with lively plum, wild berry and blueberry flavors that are pure, complex and full-bodied, ending with mineral and dusty earth notes. Drink now through 2017. 175 cases made. —*J.L.*

FOUR VINES Petite Sirah Paso Robles The Heretic 2008 Score: 92 | \$40

Vivid wild blackberry, huckleberry and blueberry notes are terrific-ripe, juicy and very concentrated. Though full-bodied, the tannins stay in the background to let the core of fruit flavors shine through. Peppery details come in on the finish. Drink now through 2020. 900 cases made. —*M.W.*

MONTES Star Angel Aurelio's Selection Paso Robles 2007 Score: 92 | \$60

Marked by complex flavors built around rich mineral, graphite, dried berry, sage and cedar notes that are slow to unfold but offer wonderful depth, focus and length as they do. Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre. Drink now through 2022. 3,000 cases made. —*J.L.*

SANS LIEGE Grenache Paso Robles Pickpocket 2008 Score: 92 | \$36

Ripe, zesty, generous wild berry, raspberry, spice and floral rose petal scents are medium- to full-bodied and complex on the palate, gaining depth and nuance, and ending with an intriguing mineral, pebbly aftertaste. Drink now through 2020. 185 cases made. —*J.L.*

TORRIN The Banshee Paso Robles 2008 Score: 92 | \$60

A ripe, juicy, fleshy style, with up-front plum, blackberry and black cherry fruit that's fleshy, spicy and full-bodied, ending with a vivid juicy berry aftertaste. Mourvèdre, Grenache, Syrah and Alicante Bouschet. Drink now through 2020. 94 cases made. —*J.L.*

ALTA COLINA Syrah Paso Robles Toasted Slope 2008 Score: 91 | \$40

Broad, rich, intense and concentrated, with layers of roasted coffee, scorched earth, dried berry and herbs, mineral, sage and cedar flavors. Impressive for its power and finesse. Ends with a gravelly, mineral aftertaste. Drink now through 2020. 120 cases made. —*J.L.*

CLOS SOLÈNE Hommage à nos Pairs Reserve Paso Robles 2008 Score: 91 | \$95

Rustic and chewy, with a sweet-and-sour character, but also a sense of charm and focus, offering dense wild berry and blackberry fruit, with mineral, sage and cedary notes that are full-blown and powerful, yet focused and persistent, returning to the chewy tannins on the finish. Syrah and Grenache. Drink now through 2020. 100 cases made. —*J.L.*

DENNER Syrah Paso Robles 2008 Score: 91 | \$40

Delightfully complex, elegant and stylish, with a mix of mocha, espresso, wild berry and blackberry fruit that's complex, deep and full-bodied, ending with a pleasant lift that keeps the flavors lively. Drink now through 2019. 519 cases made. —*J.L.*

AUSTIN HOPE Syrah Paso Robles Hope Family Vineyard 2009 Score: 91 | \$42

Firm and chunky, with a smoky tobacco, roasted herb and scorched earth edge to the savory wild berry and blackberry flavors that are full-bodied and intense, ending with pleasantly chewy tannins. Drink now thru 2016. 810 cases made. —J.L.

ALTA COLINA GSM Paso Robles 2008 Score: 90 | \$40

A musclebound red, with firm tannins wrapped around a core of dense dried berry, currant, cedar, mineral, graphite and roasted herbs. Full-bodied and concentrated, ending with a long, chewy finish. Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre. Drink now through 2018. 334 cases made. —J.L.

BOOKER Oublié Paso Robles 2008 Score: 90 | \$51

Vivid, juicy wild berry and blackberry flavors have crisp acidity and a supple texture in this medium- to full-bodied red, with a touch of red and black licorice, gaining depth while remaining elegant and easy to drink. Counoise, Mourvèdre and Syrah. Drink now through 2018. 150 cases made. —J.L.

TABLAS CREEK Esprit de Beaucastel Paso Robles 2008 Score: 90 | \$50

Offers a complex array of ripe cherry, wild berry and plum, with touches of mineral, presented in a supple, elegant, well-integrated style, with dark red berry flavors forming the core. Drink now through 2020. 3,000 cases made. —J.L.

ANCIENT PEAKS Merlot Paso Robles 2008 Score: 88 | \$16

Offers bright red currant and cherry fruit and juicy, easygoing flavors, with notes of tomato leaf and Asian spice. Drink now through 2015. 1,300 cases made. —T.F.