

HOME COOKING LOCAL FLAVOR

Dani Sellers, Kendall Carson (Edward Sellers Tasting Room manager), and Ed Sellers enjoy a glass of wine before dinner.



WINE COUNTRY DINNER: RECIPES START ON PAGE 114

Flavor Profile

Paso Robles, California

The Setting: Vineyards and olive groves dot the undulating horizon in this charming Old California town 3 hours south of San Francisco and 3 1/2 hours north of Los Angeles.

Peak Season:

Temperatures can hit 105° in the summer, so the cooler, drier period between September and mid-November is the ideal time to visit. You can also take advantage of the Harvest Wine Weekend, October 17-19.

Specialties: Rhône-style wines, olives, olive oil, almonds, and Paso Robles' famous hot springs.

Be Sure To Try: Rotta Winery's 2004 Black Monukka, \$22. This dessert-in-a-bottle tastes decadently like ripe honeyed apricots.

Cottage Staple:

Pasolivo's signature handpicked Tuscan olive oil blend, \$30 for 500 ml. It will lend Paso's lush, peppery taste to your dishes.

FOOD STYLISTS: ANA KELLY, ROBYN VALARIK; PROP STYLISTS: LINDSEY ELLIS BEATTY, GENA SIGALA

“It's the undiscovered wine country”

After an easy 3 1/2-hour drive from Los Angeles, we explored Paso Robles' markets and hillsides, seeking out local flavors in one of the Golden State's “last frontier” wine regions >

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THE SUNSET OVER PASO ROBLES' rolling hillsides wasn't what made me fall in love with the place. It wasn't even Sara Foster's delicious cooking or her brother-in-law Ed Sellers' award-winning wines or the unparalleled corn tortillas we had eaten earlier that day. It was the moonrise over young Syrah fields. Five silent minutes watching the full silver moon climb over the low-slung vines showed quite clearly how detached Paso Robles, about halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles, feels from the rest of the world.

I didn't stay out too long after dark, choosing instead to return to the Hotel Cheval, a posh 16-room boutique hotel in Paso's historic downtown. My room was just off an outdoor courtyard with a magnificent fireplace. In the brisk October air I should have been reading *The Call of the Wild*, but blogging by firelight is a luxury I should afford myself more often.

The next morning, food editor Kim Sunée, contributing editor Sara Foster, and I explored Paso's downtown district and found an impressive diversity of stores tucked into its charming Old California side streets. Kim tried on locally made jewelry at Firefly Gallery, Sara got some cowgirl style at Boot Barn, and I sipped my way through an olive oil tasting at We Olive.

From there we traveled out into the rough-and-tumble countryside to gather ingredients for Sara's family meal. We stopped at markets for fresh meat, produce, and olive oil. While Sara grilled her Herb Rotisserie Leg of Lamb outside a small cottage on the vineyards, I spoke with Ed and his winemaker, Amy Butler. They told me Paso Robles, nestled between the Santa Lucia Mountains and the Cholame Hills, is an ideal place to grow Rhône grapes like Syrah, Mourvèdre, and Grenache. Amy touted the mineral-rich soil and daily 50-degree temperature swings as exactly what her grapes need to make earthy, smoky wines. Having tasted Ed's award-winning Cuvée des Cinq, we heartily agreed.

We shared Sara's meal sitting at the edge of Ed's fledgling vineyards, already imagining the many good harvests to come. >



Cottage Industry

Meet Amy Butler, one of a half-dozen women in Paso Robles producing award-winning wines. We asked her what it's like to be a woman in a mostly male profession:

"True, there aren't many women in the production side of this industry, but that is changing. It is hard work and very physical, but it's also earthy and family positive," says Amy, a UC Davis grad whose wines for Ed Sellers have won nine gold medals this year. She and her female counterparts share "good camaraderie without a lot of hard-edged competition," she says. "We don't necessarily seek each other out or form a sewing circle or anything, but we support each other, which makes it nice. In some ways, it's a job cut out for women—it's creative, requires patience, perseverance, and organizational skills, and, at times, it calls for some pretty fancy juggling. I've never felt that my gender was a barrier to my success. I've had to prove myself, but everyone else does, too. And fortunately for all of us, winemaking attracts a lot of cute boys."

"Amy touted the mineral-rich soil and daily 50-degree temperature swings as exactly what her grapes need to make earthy, smoky wines"

Some things
get better
with age.



Spices don't.



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