

Estate of Mind: Fruit from an Exceptional Source Essay Responses:

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"Exceptional fruit" delivers flawless, premium, unique drinking experience. Wine speaks of soil it was born from, the sense of place, history, tradition - the elusive concept of terroir.

The webinar featured several vineyards, but captured my attention highlighting two distinctive places in Paso Robles - J. Lohr and Patrimony Estate.

Paso Robles. In the past overshadowed by sheer caliber of Napa. Recently, overhyped by 99-points bromance reviews of 15%+abv beasts.

Formerly, Paso has been the largest undivided AVA. It was, however, always what Matt Kramer calls "East" and "West" Paso. The informal division line, Highway 101, has been a rough marker between the sophisticated, Pacific influenced, mountainous West with prized calcareous soils - and the flatter, warmer, more commercial East, occupied by high-volume producers.

In 2014, TTB had approved the long-awaited proposal of 11 districts within AVA, to highlight various qualities. This allowed for terroir-driven labelling, if sourced exclusively from one district, while giving freedom to blend, under broader Paso Robles AVA tag. Both have benefits.

J. Lohr vineyards stretch from north to south, to take advantage of diversity - cool sites on elevation and closer to Templeton Gap (break in mountain ranges letting cool Pacific air inland - "air conditioner of Paso", as Steve Carter, Vineyard Manager, calls it), and warmer, eastern locations for riper, fleshier fruit. Viticulture focuses on optimal outcome - in cooler sites, extended growing season produces denser tannin and more acidity. Rootstock choices to advance maturity, and canopy management for maximum exposure are employed. On warmer sites, to curb vigor, less fertile, shallow soils on ridges and knolls are preferred, where vines struggle to dig deep for water. Although most fruit for Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon is sourced from El Pomar District, winemaker blends in other sites (and a small addition of Malbec for lushness), for magical concoction - dense but soft, spicy with opulent fruitiness and a touch of violets - perfectly balanced Cab representative of Paso as a whole.

Patrimony Estate is very much located in what the old timers would call West Paso. Just west of 101, this cool, mountainous region is prized for abundant calcareous soils. Only 14 miles off the coast, carefully selected aspects for maximum light interception and sun exposure cater to Cabernet grapes, allowing them to slowly build phenolic complexity and rich flavors, while wide diurnal range (50F) retains high acidity. Calcareous clay provides best of both geological worlds: according to Erik Johnson, Estate Manager, clay lends the bouquet, flesh, and color, while limestone brings out minerality. It's perfect for sufficient drainage and water holding capacity, allowing to dry farm, which makes for more expressive fruit. The result - uber-concentrated, ripe yet vibrant with acidity, velvety and berry rich gem, so evocative of its estate-exclusive terroir.

J. Lohr blends various sites for best balance. Patrimony boasts specific "Adelaida District" provenance. Two distinct approaches, yet very "Paso" result - dense but soft; rich in fruit and purple florals, yet refreshing with acidity. One region, two approaches - the pure soul of Paso. Captivating.