

# Paso Robles: Looking at the 2018s

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This report wraps up the 2018 Central Coast coverage and focuses on Paso Robles and San Luis Obispo County. This region has been on an incredible qualitative roll over the past decade, and 2018 is another beautiful vintage that is unquestionably in the same league as 2012 through 2017, all of which are loaded with beautiful wines.

Looking at the growing season for Paso Robles, 2018 saw a cooler start and end to the growing season, with a warmer than average July and early August. If you add up the growing degree days, it actually shows a warmer year, but the cooler end of August and September drove the style of these wines, and the result is plenty of concentration with terrific aromatics, higher acidities, and slightly lower alcohol levels. This is a great combination for a warm region like Paso Robles. The wines are darker, structured, and lively, with beautiful purity of fruit, yet still have ample concentration and classic Paso Robles opulence. There were no heat spikes or notable rain events during harvest, and winemakers were able to harvest at will. The result is that while the vintage character is certainly present in the wines, the winemaker and house style is also front and center, making it slightly hard to make sweeping statements on the wines. For example, the 2018s from Stephan Asseo's l'Aventure are structured and in need of bottle age, while the 2018s from Justin Smith's Saxum Vineyard have loads of upfront charm and accessibility. Nevertheless, as a whole, I think this will be a vintage that's going to reward 2-3 years of bottle age and they should age beautifully. In addition, yields are up there (similar to 2017), so there should be plenty of wine to go around.

Lastly, while I try to keep these reports regionally focused, there is always some overlap, and this report includes a handful of releases from throughout the Central Coast and Santa Barbara County.

## **Paso Robles: California's Most Dynamic Region?**

The argument could be made that Paso Robles is the most dynamic and up and coming region in California today. The number of new and exciting producers is hard to keep up with, they've created numerous new AVAs focused on climate and soils, new vineyards are being planted regularly, and they continue to experiment with new varieties. This drive and focus shows in the wines. In addition, Paso Robles's culture of being open and incredibly supportive of one another is unique in the world of wine and, in my view, unquestionably has helped propel Paso Robles into the list of world-class wine regions.

I've tried to group producers below to give some high-level guidance, but this is far from an inclusive list.

### **Benchmark Producers:**

Adelaida, Alta Colina, Booker, Epoch, Herman Story, l'Aventure, Law Estate, Linne Calodo, McPrice Myers, Saxum, Tablas Creek, TH Estate, Torrin, and Villa Creek

### **Up and Coming Producers:**

Aaron, Benom, Bodega de Edgar, Brecon, Caliza, Clos Solene, Daou Vineyards, Downstream, Fulldraw Vineyard, Jada Vineyard, Ledge, Leverage, Lost Blues, My Favorite Neighbor, Nicora, ONX Wines, Paix Sur Terre, Patrimony, Pec & Burl, Pharaoh Moans, Seduire, and Turtle Rock

## **The 2019s**

Looking ahead at the 2019s, this was another cooler year and the wines show plenty of similarities to the 2018s, with vibrant, fresh, yet still concentrated profiles. I'll review these in-depth next year, but Paso Robles's string of superlative vintages doesn't appear to be in any danger of being broken.

As always, happy hunting!

Jeb

this elegant yet powerful Grenache does everything right. It actually reminds me of the Vieilles Vignes Cuvée from Clos Saint Jean in Châteauneuf du Pape.

Mostly Syrah with 23% Grenache, 20% Mataro, and 5% Tempranillo, the **2018 Claude's Cuvee** has a juicy, elegant, yet still concentrated, classic Paso style with its black and blue fruits, ground pepper, chocolate, and violet aromas and flavors. With full body, an elegant, seamless texture, good acidity, and plenty of tannins, give bottles 2-3 years and enjoy over the following decade.

There are two barrels of the **2018 Maturin James Berry Vineyard**, a blend of 38% Graciano, 26% Syrah, 21% Mataro, and the rest Grenache, aged 20 months in new oak. Deep purple/blue-colored, with gorgeous notes of blackcurrants, blueberries, ground black pepper, graphite, and crushed stone-like minerality, it's full-bodied and has a flawlessly balanced, elegant texture, silky tannins, and a great finish. With plenty of background oak and ripe tannins, it needs 2-3 years of bottle age and will

keep for 15 years or more. It will probably merit a triple-digit rating at maturity.

The **2018 G2 Vineyard** checks in as a blend of 91% Syrah, 5% Grenache, and the rest Mourvèdre. This stunning wine flirts with perfection and offers a deep purple color as well as a magical bouquet of blue and black fruits, candied violets, new leather, camphor, and a hint of orange blossom. With flawless balance, a deep, opulent texture, building tannins, and a monster of a finish, it's an incredible wine that blends power and elegance perfectly. Don't miss it!

Coming all from the 4 Hearts Vineyard and based on 78% Zinfandel and 22% Tempranillo, the **2018 Westberg Red** just about jumps out of the glass with its red, black, and blue fruits as well as notes of incense, spice box, chocolate, and leathery aromas and flavors. Full-bodied and beautifully done, it has a light, elegant texture and a great finish. This killer Paso Robles red does everything right and will evolve for a solid 10-12 years. [www.turtlerockvineyards.com](http://www.turtlerockvineyards.com)

### ULTIMA TULIE WINES

ULTIMA TULIE WINES	2018	CHARDONNAY	SANTA MARIA VALLEY	\$38	WHITE	89
ULTIMA TULIE WINES	2017	SYRAH	EDNA VALLEY	\$52	RED	94
ULTIMA TULIE WINES	2017	SYRAH / PETITE SIRAH	CENTRAL COAST	\$52	RED	90
ULTIMA TULIE WINES	2017	PETITE SIRAH	PASO ROBLES	\$52	RED	90+?

Coming all from Bien Nacido and fermented and aged in 25% new French oak, the **2018 Chardonnay** has an exotic nose of melon and honeyed tropical fruits as well as a kiss of classy oak, some classic marine-like notes, good depth of fruit, integrated acidity, and a clean finish.

Smoked black fruits, toasted nuts, damp earth, chocolate, and leafy herb notes all emerge from the **2017 Syrah**. This beauty has a wonderful sense of balance, pure, clean fruit, ripe tannins, and a great finish. It's impressive.

A blend of two-thirds Syrah and one-third Petite Sirah brought up in 66% new French oak, the **2017 Syrah / Petite Sirah** offers uber-ripe, sexy notes

of jammy blackberries, cured meats, melted licorice, and ground black pepper. This soft, plush Syrah has no hard edges, lots of sweet fruit, and I suspect will be best enjoyed over the coming 4-6 years.

Slightly closed and reductive, the **2017 Petite Sirah** reveals an inky purple color as well as a big, boisterous nose of blue fruits, white and black pepper, and candied violets. It doesn't pull any punches on the fruit yet is nicely balanced, has a mouthfilling texture, and ripe tannins. Give it a year or two to shed some baby fat and it should evolve nicely through 2029. [www.ultimatulie.com](http://www.ultimatulie.com)

### VIGO CELLARS

VIGO CELLARS	2018	VIIGNIER	PASO ROBLES	\$32	WHITE	88
VIGO CELLARS	2017	GRENACHE BLANC	PASO ROBLES	\$32	WHITE	89
VIGO CELLARS	2015	SYRAH	PASO ROBLES	\$40	RED	90
VIGO CELLARS	2017	SYRAH	PASO ROBLES	\$40	RED	90
VIGO CELLARS	2016	GRENACHE	PASO ROBLES	\$40	RED	89
VIGO CELLARS	2018	GRENACHE	EDNA VALLEY	\$40	RED	89

The **2018 Viognier** comes from the Pomar Junction Vineyard and was brought up in a mix of neutral oak and stainless steel tanks. Pretty notes of apricot and nectarines as well as subtle flowers give way to a medium-bodied, juicy, slightly salty Viognier that stays balanced and enjoyable. Drink it over the coming year.

From the same vineyard, the **2017 Grenache Blanc** offers more citrus, lime, and exotic flower notes as well as a medium-bodied, nicely balanced, textured style on the palate. It has a great finish and will be a versatile white that should keep for 2-3 years.

Blackberries, ground pepper, and cedar wood notes all emerge from the **2015 Syrah**, which is medium to full-bodied and has a supple, elegant texture, good complexity, and outstanding length.

Also all Syrah, the **2017 Syrah** has a slightly more floral, sappy style as well as pretty berry fruits, medium-bodied richness, juicy acidity, and a clean finish. It grows on you with time in the glass and is a pretty, elegant wine that should drink nicely for 4-6 years.

The lighter ruby-hued **2016 Grenache** has a spicy nose of mulled red and black fruits, toasted spice, orange blossom, and exotic flowers. Another wine from this estate that opens up nicely with time in the glass, it has an understated elegance, good purity of fruit, and a clean finish.

Lastly, the **2018 Grenache** offers lots of mulberry, cherry, spice, and floral notes to go with a juicy, medium-bodied, elegant style on the palate. It's not a blockbuster, and it has a Pinot Noir-like texture, but I like its balance as well as its purity of fruit. It's going to drink nicely for 4-6 years. [www.vigocellars.com](http://www.vigocellars.com)

### VILLA CREEK

VILLA CREEK	2017	ROUSSANNE JAMES BERRY VINEYARD	WILLOW CREEK DISTRICT	\$60	WHITE	94
VILLA CREEK	2018	GARNACHA	ADELAIDA DISTRICT	\$75	RED	94
VILLA CREEK	2017	THIS WAY THAT WAY	PASO ROBLES	\$85	RED	97
VILLA CREEK	2018	3	SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY	\$80	RED	96
VILLA CREEK	2018	HIGH ROAD JAMES BERRY VINEYARD	WILLOW CREEK DISTRICT	\$85	RED	94
VILLA CREEK	2018	AVENGER	PASO ROBLES	\$65	RED	93

The **2017 Roussanne James Berry Vineyard** checks in as 100% Roussanne, all from the James Berry Vineyard, raised 18 months in barrels. Beautifully done, with lots of dried pineapple, white currant, toasted spice, and brioche notes, it hits the palate with medium to full-bodied richness, beautiful depth of fruit, a clean, elegant texture, and a great finish.

All Grenache from the estate vineyard and the Luna Matta Vineyard, aged 16 months in barrel, the **2018 Garnacha** offers a juicy, lively bouquet of mulberries, black cherries, spring flowers, and peppery herbs. It's elegant and medium to full-bodied, with wonderful purity and a great finish. Drink it over the coming 7-8 years.

Checking in as an even split of Grenache and Syrah from the estate MAHA Vineyard and James Berry Vineyard, the **2017 This Way That Way** has a meaty, spicy style as well as lots of blueberry and cherry fruit, notes of ground pepper and violets, full-bodied richness, beautiful tannins, and a great finish. It's straight-up classy and just a stunning wine from this estate.

It should easily evolve for a decade as well.

All Syrah, the **2018 3** is a more spicy, meaty wine revealing a deep purple color, notes of cassis, cracked pepper, white chocolate, and spicy incense, full-bodied richness, sweet tannins, and a great finish. This plush, super-sexy, brilliantly balanced Syrah can be drunk anytime over the coming 7-8 years.

Ground pepper, leafy herbs, plums, and even a touch of blue fruits emerge from the **2018 High Road James Berry Vineyard**. A rich, full-bodied wine from this estate, it has plenty of fruit, good mid-palate depth, and the class to evolve nicely for over a decade.

A Syrah-dominated blend that includes 20% Mourvèdre and 10% Syrah, the **2018 Avenger** offers an almost glass-staining purple color as well as loads of red and blue fruits, ground white pepper, smoked game, and Asian spices. Loaded with baby fat and full-bodied, give bottles a year or two and it should drink nicely through 2028. [www.villacreekwine.com](http://www.villacreekwine.com)