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## Paso Robles 2022 and 2023: Polar Opposites

BY ERIC GUIDO | JUNE 26, 2025

Paso Robles has quickly become one of my favorite destinations for tasting and visiting estates. I often think that if I didn't cover the region professionally, it would be at the top of my list for a vacation that combines wine, local shopping and a multitude of outdoor activities like biking, hiking and horseback riding. Paso Robles has also stepped up its restaurant scene over the last few years with establishments such as In Bloom, Les Petites Canailles (run by Chef Julien Asseo, son of L'Aventure's Stephan Asseo), Etto (established by Brian Terrizzi of Giornata), neighborhood favorite Jeffry's Wine Country BBQ, plus many more. Each of these proudly pours many of the best wines Paso Robles has to offer. During my visit in late April, an announcement that Charlie Palmer is set to renovate and open three new restaurants in the coming months had everyone buzzing. Paso Robles has officially grown up, offering world-class wine and all the necessary tourist accommodations to continue booming into the future.

As for the wine scene in general, local excitement couldn't be higher. Despite climatic challenges, even the most difficult vintages have turned out some fascinating wines thanks to quick thinking, a little luck and a willingness to adapt. The 2021 vintage continues to impress with dramatic, lively, balanced wines. The 2022s are more successful than many would have anticipated (more on that later), but the 2023s may be the most promising of all.



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*The Willow Creek District estate vineyards of L'Aventure.*

As for grape varieties, there's something for everyone. On average, Paso Robles experiences extreme daytime temperatures that reach as high as 100°F before dropping by 30-40°F at night. This diurnal push-pull allows an extensive array of varieties to thrive, helping fruit to retain acidity. Wineries like Saxum and Tablas Creek—as dissimilar as they are stylistically—have inspired a generation of winemakers to explore Rhône varieties. I'm not just talking about Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Viognier and Roussanne. Paso Robles excels with an entire cast of lesser-known Rhône grapes, such as Counoise, Carignan, Grenache Blanc and Clairette Blanche. Cabernet Sauvignon actually remains the most widely planted variety here, but Paso Cabernet differs from that of Napa Valley, Sonoma or Washington State. Here, Cabernet Sauvignon easily achieves physiological ripeness and yields wines with energy and verve that remain approachable despite their youthful grip.





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*High-pH limestone and compressed clay soils in a cutaway beneath vines in the Adelaida District.*

Zinfandel often takes on a distinctly savory profile in Paso Robles. Ueberroth Vineyard (planted in 1885) and Dusi Vineyard (planted in 1925) are home to some of the oldest Zinfandel vines in California. Readers may recognize the Dusi name from its regular appearance in the Ridge portfolio. Most of the Paso Robles producers who make Pinot Noir source fruit from other locations, but Adelaida's HMR Vineyard, planted in 1964, continues to yield a fantastic local interpretation of the variety. Last but far from least, Italian grapes continue to gain recognition. Each year, I encounter compelling new wines made from Nebbiolo, Sangiovese, Barbera, Vermentino, Nero d'Avola, Montepulciano and more.



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that also does well with varieties like Cabernet, Grenache and Vermentino. In Paso Robles, heatwaves happen in almost every vintage. No one bats an eye at a 100°F day. Rain, usually totaling around 20 inches a year, occurs in the spring and fall—the worst possible times in the growing season. Nevertheless, the region succeeds due to a mix of extreme diurnal shifts, limestone soils and good ventilation from the Templeton Gap. Even so, no one could predict the 2022 or 2023 vintage.

Speaking with producers in Paso Robles about the 2022 growing season elicits dramatically different opinions from address to address. Many winemakers have written the vintage off as a failure. Others regard the results as a happy surprise. All agree that 2022 was like nothing they had ever seen before. Challenges included a late spring frost on May 11th, which severely reduced yields at lower elevations. Compounding this, the overall warm year and the third consecutive season of drought stressed the vines. Then, a ten-day heatwave exceeding 105°F in late August forced winemakers into rapid harvest decisions, triggering widespread logistical issues such as labor shortages, difficulty scheduling picks and limited winery capacity. To make things worse, the typically significant diurnal shifts didn't take place. Fruit arrived at the wineries warm, if not hot. The sun's searing heat oxidized tannins, sometimes rendering them practically nonexistent. Some wineries harvested too early and others too late.

The biggest issue with the 2022 wines is consistency. A large proportion of the wines come across as front-loaded, with soaring aromatics and enticing textures that quickly drop off through the mid-palate. This often results in a saturation of primary fruit with underripe or barely perceptible tannins. Many wines finish with lingering tension, but lack the balance necessary for aging potential. The 2022s are particularly large-scale in feel and often tire out the palate. Alcohol percentages are relatively high in the context of the region, yet alcohol is generally well integrated across varieties, which is undoubtedly a strong point of the year. Ultimately, most 2022s are best taken in small doses and enjoyed in the short to medium term. Consumers will enjoy these wines for their drinkability.





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*Sandy clay/loam soils and gravelly stones atop a sandstone ledge at Ledge's Adam's Ranch Vineyard, situated at the base of the Santa Lucia Mountain Range.*

That's not to say that 2022 was without its triumphs. Many of the wineries I visited for this report were able to craft successful wines. In most cases, these producers prevailed through a combination of well-timed harvests, severe selection and responsive approaches in the cellar. Shorter macerations, reduced whole-cluster fermentation, gentle pumpovers (or simply moistening the cap) and less time in barrel helped winemakers obtain balance in the wines. Sacrificing fruit was often necessary, and many wineries experienced a drastic reduction in quantity as a result. However, even in the best cases, I don't see the majority of the 2022s as wines to cellar for longer than a few years. Most will be at their best from the two- to three-year mark, then drink well for several years before beginning a slow decline.

Mother Nature did a 180-degree turn with the 2023 vintage. Nearly 50 inches of rain saturated soils in early spring, flooding communities, causing erosion and washing out roads, but that rainfall also paved the way for one of Paso's most exciting vintages yet.



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*Spring rain in Paso Robles, as seen from the high elevations of the Adelaida District.*

A cool late spring and summer followed. Many winemakers compared the cool conditions to 2011 and feared they might struggle to achieve ripeness. Instead, an Indian summer in October and November provided the balanced warmth to achieve perfectly ripe, healthy fruit. Wineries harvested at their leisure, at times well into November.

My only concern about 2023 was that wineries accustomed to dramatic heat and drought would struggle to adjust to a cool year with ample rainfall. Luckily, from what I've tasted, producers rose to the occasion. This year, I sampled many 2023 whites and just-bottled reds. What I've tasted so far is very good. The 2023 vintage showcases stimulating minerality, pronounced acidity, depth of fruit and balanced structure. The wines are nervy and spry, mixing New-World fruit with Old-World tenacity. Alcohol levels are in line with a typical Paso Robles vintage (in other words, high). The extended harvest and extremely late picks meant that fruit achieved the same level of ripeness it would in a typical vintage. With that said, there's no denying the balance in these wines. I expect the 2023s to be a bit wiry and awkward from the get-go, but I predict that they will be especially capable of maturing well in the cellar. Two thousand twenty-three is a vintage that I plan to buy for my own cellar.

I tasted the wines for this article in Paso Robles in April 2025 and in our New York City offices in May 2025.

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## MAHA

My visit with Cris Cherry at Villa Creek focused on the 2023 vintage and also included a small number of 2024s. As of 2023, the Cherry House portfolio has been folded into Villa Creek to avoid confusion and strengthen the core wines, while the MAHA brand remains an interpretation of Cherry's single vineyard that surrounds the estate. Moreover, as of 2023, the MAHA vineyard is now fully regenerative certified. The 2023s here are spectacular, but I'm not surprised. Even the 2022s at this address exemplified the spry and lively house style, but when you add 2023's high water reserves and cool summer to the mix, the results are beautifully detailed, mineral-intense wines that blend grace with power.

From *Paso Robles 2022 and 2023: Polar Opposites (Jun 2025)* by **Eric Guido**

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### 2023 Before Anyone Else

Release Price: \$120

Color: White

Eric Guido, June 2025

Drinking Window: 2026 - 2029

**(91-93)**

The 2023 Before Anyone Else is sweetly floral, slowly evolving with nuances of chamomile and mint that complement ripe yellow apples. It is soft and round, with masses of ripe orchard fruit and crisp mineral tones enriched by a hint of raw almond. The palate is stained with primary concentration, offset by a bump of zesty acidity and a tinge of citrus, tapering off with dramatic length.

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### 2023 Backlit

Release Price: \$120

Color: Red

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A cascade of blue and purple florals meets balsam herbs, a hint of ground coffee and dried black cherries. The texture is velvety, with a pretty inner sweetness up front and depths of violet-laced red and black fruits. A subtle tart tinge lingers as the 2023 Backlit finishes long and staining, yet only gently tannic. Today, the Backlit is hard to read as its oak is still integrating, yet the balance within cannot be denied.

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## 2023 Understory

Release Price: **\$120**

Color: **Red**

**Eric Guido, June 2025**

Drinking Window: **2027 - 2032**

**(92-94)**



The 2023 Understory is understated, offering a pretty blend of sweet sage and pine shavings that complement crushed blackberries. Silky-smooth textures and wonderfully fresh acidity pamper the palate as crisp wild berry fruits swirl throughout. Through the finish, the 2023 takes a turn toward the serious side, long and staining with a web of rounded tannins offset by a pleasantly bitter tinge.

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## Villa Creek

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### 2023 Roussanne

Release Price: \$64

Color: White

Eric Guido, June 2025

Drinking Window: 2026 - 2029

**(92-94)**



The 2023 Roussanne blossoms in the glass with honied florals, nuances of candied ginger and chamomile. Savory elements emerge within, displaying soothingly round textures and saline mineral tones before giving way to a hint of raw almond. Apricot and spice linger through the long, lightly structured finale.

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### 2024 Rosé

Release Price: \$46

Color: Rosé

Eric Guido, June 2025

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nuances of sweet spice lift from the glass. There is a pretty inner sweetness on the palate, offset by crisp mineral tones as rosy inner florals swirl throughout. The finish is long, pleasingly tense and completely refreshing, leaving the palate salivating for more.

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## 2024 Farmhouse White

Release Price: \$28

Color: Red

Eric Guido, June 2025

Drinking Window: 2025 - 2027

91



The 2024 Farmhouse White wafts up from the glass with sweet chamomile and mint mixed with ripe apricots. The palate is soothingly round, contrasted by salty minerals and ripe orchard fruits, while a twang of citrus adds tension toward the close. It tapers off with lovely length and a pleasingly chewy sensation as a hint of sour melon fades.

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## 2024 Sunseeker

Release Price: \$34

Color: Red

Eric Guido, June 2025

Drinking Window: 2025 - 2030

92



The 2024 Sunseeker is wickedly fresh, wafting up with an invigorating blend of wild berries, sweet sage and a hint of clove. Juicy to the core, it offers soft, round textures elevated by vibrant acidity and mineral-laced cherry-berry fruits that coast across the palate. Lively tension marks the admirably long finish, leaving inner rose tones and a tinge of tart raspberry in its wake. I could drink this all day.

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## 2023 Avenger

Release Price: \$69

Color: Red

Eric Guido, June 2025

Drinking Window: 2027 - 2034

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remarkable balance, as fresh acidity guides savory red and black fruits across the palate. The finish is staining and incredibly long, with edgy tannins that resonate, further enhanced by a hint of licorice and clove. Bury this in the cellar. Powerful yet tightly wound in its youthful state.

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## 2023 Farmhouse Red

Release Price: **\$28**

Color: **Red**

**Eric Guido, June 2025**

Drinking Window: **2025 - 2030**

**93**



The 2023 Farmhouse Red is a spicy, lifted effort, with citrus zest and sour cherries forming its inviting bouquet. Silken textures mingle with juicy acidity and mineral-inflected ripe red berry fruit, complicated by a hint of savory spice. The palate is left completely refreshed, with nuances of licorice and sage lingering long.

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## 2023 Rocks & Flowers

Release Price: **\$45**

Color: **Red**

**Eric Guido, June 2025**

Drinking Window: **2026 - 2032**

**94**



The perfumed 2023 Rocks & Flowers wafts from the glass with lifted notes of violet pastille, crushed stone and citrus-laced blackberries. Juicy to the core, it sweeps across the palate with crisp wild berry fruit as nuances of baking spice mingle with crunchy tannins. A bump of residual acidity adds freshness through the close, while the 2023 leaves a tinge of balsam herbs to linger. Rocks & Flowers is a mix of 40% Grenache fermented with Mourvèdre, along with 36% Carignan and 16% Syrah.

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## 2023 Soul

Release Price: **\$52**

Color: **Red**

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The 2023 Soul, a varietal Carignan in this vintage, is dark and intense, with an array of sweet spice, minty herbs and crushed raspberries forming its bouquet. Silken in feel, it offers fresh acidity and racy wild berry fruits contrasted by a saline mineral twang toward the close. The finish is marked by staining length yet remains remarkably energetic, leaving a nearly crunchy sensation and violet inner florals to resonate.

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## 2023 The High Road

Release Price: **\$89**

Color: **Red**

Eric Guido, June 2025

Drinking Window: **2027 - 2034**

**(93-95)**



The 2023 The High Road, tasted from barrel, is darkly floral and entices with notes of sweet lavender and spice that complement citrus-infused plums. It is pleasingly round and supple, with depths of ripe red and blue fruits elevated by brisk acidity. The finish is tense and structured, with edgy tannins and a tart blackberry tinge that puckers the cheeks. The High Road is a co-fermented blend of 36% Syrah, 32% Grenache and 32% Mourvèdre.

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## 2023 Three

Release Price: **\$89**

Color: **Red**

Eric Guido, June 2025

Drinking Window: **2027 - 2034**

**95**



The 2023 Syrah Three smolders up from the glass with smoked meats, sage, black olives and crushed stone giving way to peppery blackberries. Sleek and racy yet quite textural, it reveals depths of mineral-inflected red and black fruits. The palate is saturated with savory spices and a coating of gripping tannins as nuances of rosemary slowly fade. The Three transports the taster to the northern Rhône.

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## 2023 Trovador



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The 2023 Trovador lifts from the glass with an airy blend of wild berries, stone dust and violet pastille. Elegance defines the medium-bodied palate, which offers soothingly round textures and displays ripe red and black fruits complicated by a hint of sage toward the close. Fine-grained tannins frame the finish as nuances of baking spice mix with sour citrus and a beguiling note of smokehouse meats. This Trovador is a remarkably complex blend of equal parts Syrah and Carignan. It matured for 22 months in 33% new French oak.

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