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WEEKEND GETAWAY

Paso Robles, the
casual wine country

JUNE 2012

\$4.99US \$6.50CAN

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Chill!

Fruity drinks that
make a splash P.66

Paso's time

Today, a weekend in Paso Robles dishes all the indulgence of a trip to Provence

BY SARA SCHNEIDER | PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS LESCHINSKY

MORE PASO HITS

Wineries

Cypher's in-your-face attitude shows in its tasting room—twisty scarlet glass chandeliers, “Here-tic” and “Anarchy” on its wine labels—but talent lies under the ‘tude. You’ll see when you take a bottle of Grenache Blanc out front to Farmstand 46 and order the Goat (pork shoulder) sandwich. \$10 tasting; cypherwinery.com

Daou combines old California with high design at its new winery tasting room, like a modern mission in the sky. Bring cheese, buy a rich white Rhône, and claim one of the barrel-stave Adirondacks on the grass looking out to forever. \$10 tasting; daouvineyards.com

L’Aventure, the dream of a Frenchman who chose Paso over Bordeaux, is a regional cornerstone with its intense, avant-garde red blends. \$10 tasting; aventurewine.com

Clayhouse is one of many area wineries that has a tasting room in town, in case car-free sipping is your goal. Grab a stool and hope they’re pouring the inky, concentrated old-vine Petite Sirah. \$5 tasting; clayhousewines.com

Villicana has solid Cab and Syrah, but also taste its aromatic “botanical brandy”—one of the first gins in the West made from grape must—in the rustic tasting room. \$5 tasting; villicanawinery.com

Kenneth Volk, founder of Pinot-pioneer Wild Horse, pours rare varieties (try the Négrette). Pick up a summer’s worth of heirloom tomatoes at Fat Cat Farm in the back. \$10 tasting; volkwines.com

Local bounty

Thomas Hill Organics bistro (\$\$\$; thomashillorganics.com) uses vegetables from its own garden. For cosmopolitan tapas, try new **Fenomenal** (\$\$; closed Sun; fenomenalplace.com). **We Olive** (weolive.com) celebrates the region’s other crop, with dozens of olives and oils for sample and purchase.

Stay

Anchoring the square, the **Paso Robles Inn** (from \$201; 2-night min.; pasoroblesinn.com) offers comfort handy to more than a dozen tasting rooms downtown. For an Old World weekend, reserve a bed surrounded by endless vines at Justin Winery’s **Just Inn** (from \$375; justinwine.com; 414).

WE’VE SEEN THIS BEFORE. A small California town is a brief stop for fathers footing it between missions, then a dusty hub for cattle ranching, then ... wine grapes. Except that in Paso Robles, the rise to stellar wine has been precipitous. Less than 20 years ago, the area had a mere 30 wineries. Today, more than 200 wineries are serving up an unusual diversity of wines that stand tall with the world’s best, in tasting rooms that run from cottage quaint to high-style sleek (and all lacking pretension).

Never far behind great wine, creative chefs are highlighting the Central Coast’s riot of edibles. And wine country—comfy hotels are sprouting up. In short: The region has arrived. >28