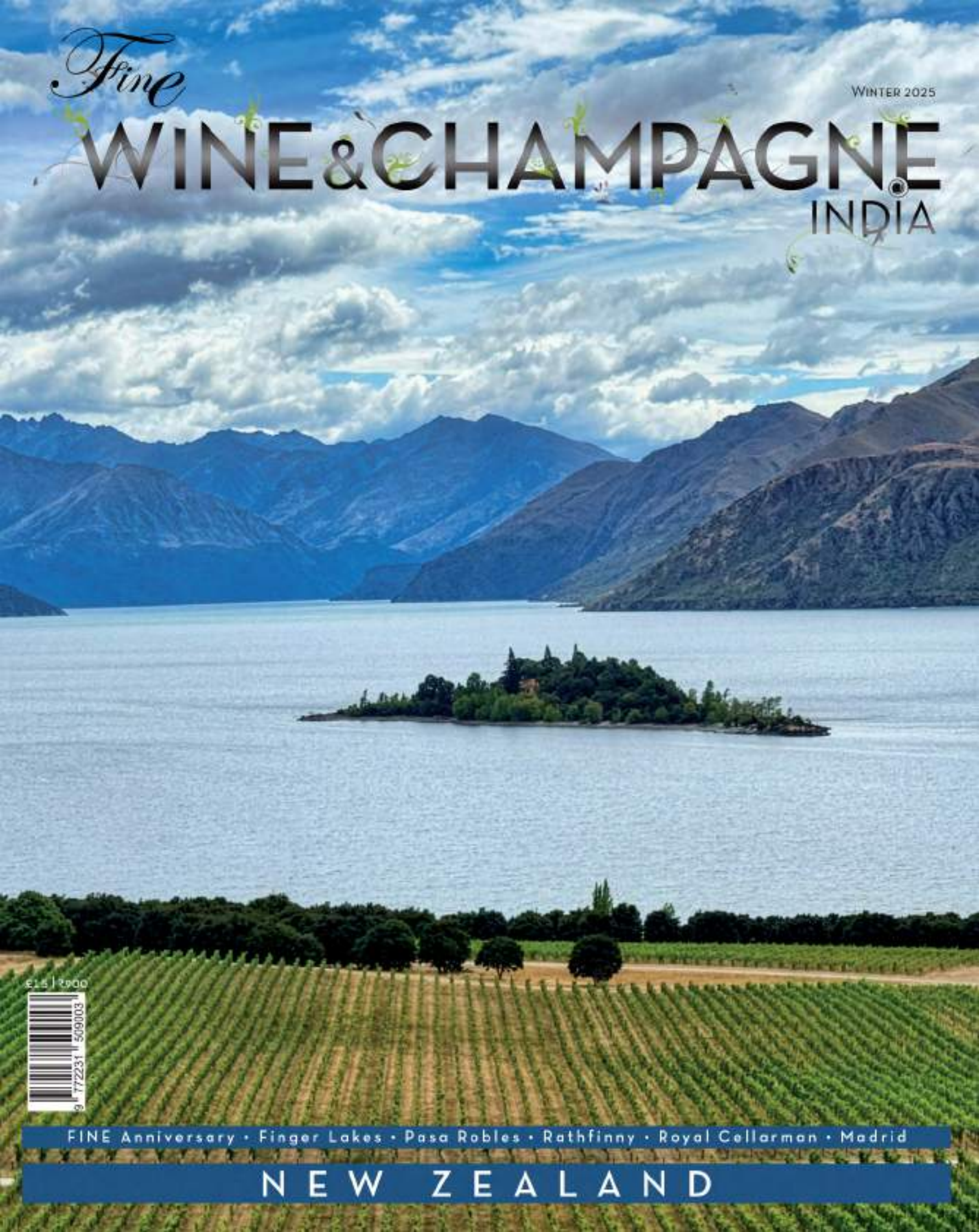


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WINTER 2025

WINE & CHAMPAGNE

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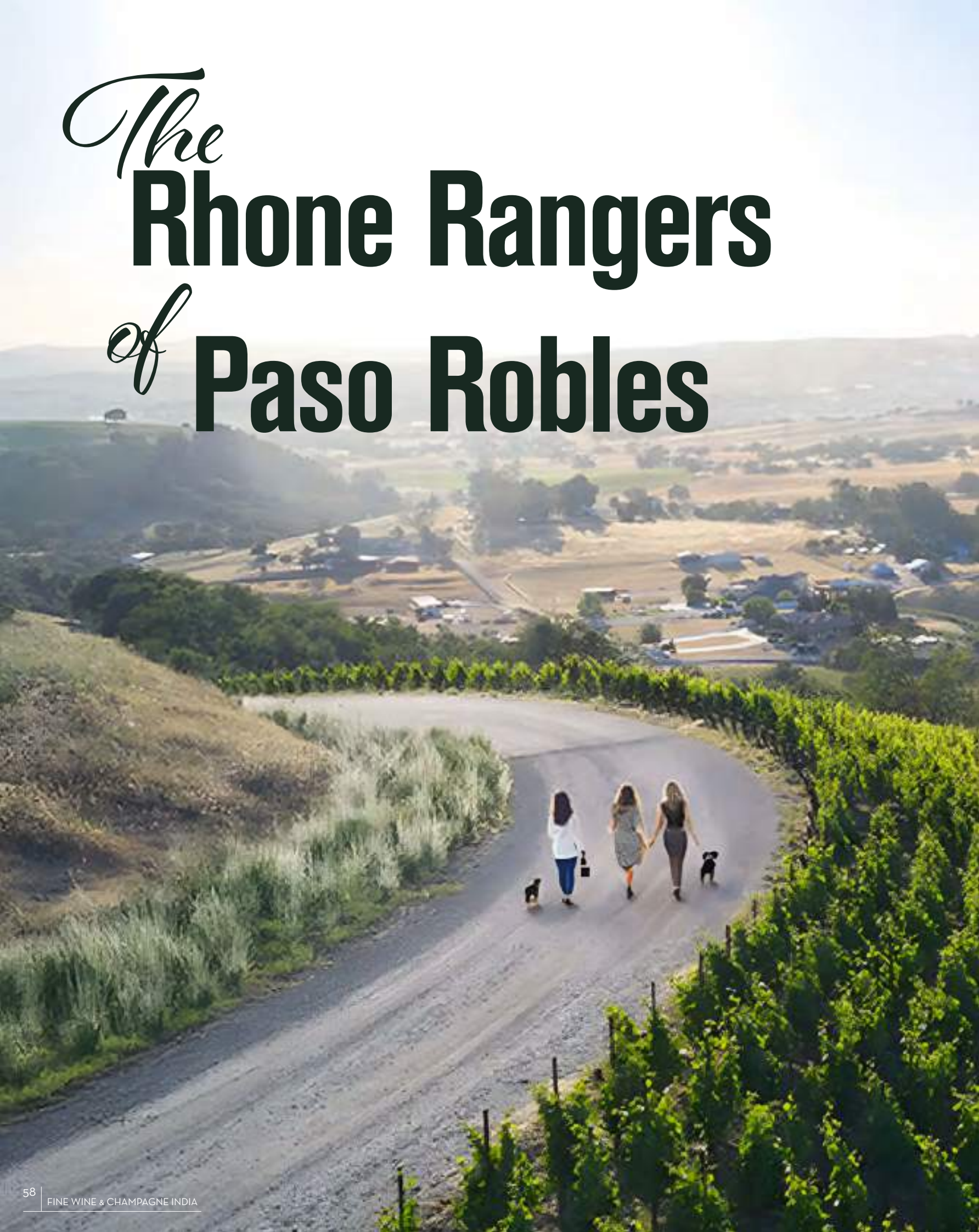
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NEW ZEALAND

The **Rhone Rangers** *of* **Paso Robles**



TEXT: Vidya Narasimhan



nce a land of abundant oak trees and almond orchards, Paso Robles (the pass of a thousand oaks) is emerging as an exciting wine region in California. It lies in the heart of the Central Coast of California, situated midway between San Francisco and Los Angeles in the San Luis Obispo County.



With the Santa Lucia mountains to the west and the Chalone Hills to the east, the western end of Paso Robles is only 14 km from the Pacific Ocean. The eastern end of the region – despite being significantly dry and inland – benefits from the cooling sea breezes that enter via the Templeton Gap, a series of river valleys and gaps between the Santa Lucia mountains. The ‘suction effect’ of these winds cools warm days and creates a diurnal range of 10°C to 37°C, resulting in a long growing season.

The region has dry riverbeds and gentle rolling hills with an elevation of 300-670 metres, and a range of microclimates. It has about 30 types of soil, which can be broadly classified as carbonate rich, clay, sandy loam (phylloxera resistant) and silica rich, with the latter two being almost neutral in pH. Uncommonly for California, most of these soil types are calcareous, as the Paso Robles region was once an ancient seabed. The high pH of calcareous soil limits the uptake of nutrients by the vine, resulting in low vigour and concentration of the flavour and acidity of the wine. Moderate rainfall in the region allows dry farming to take place.

The AVA of Paso Robles was established in 1983 with 17 wineries and about 2,000 hectares under vine. Today, the region has over 200 wineries and 17,000 hectares of vine lands – making it three times the size of Napa and the largest geographical appellation in California. The regional brand is protected by the conjunctive labelling law that passed into California law in 2007 and has been fully implemented since 2014 when the region was divided into 11 sub-AVAs based on climate, soil and terrain differences. This law ensures that the name ‘Paso Robles’ appears prominently on every bottle of wine produced within the area, even when the sub-AVA is listed on the label. It prevents confusion in the consumer’s mind and maintains the prestige of Paso Robles wines.

Unlike large-scale producers in Napa, over 85% of the wineries in Paso Robles each make around 8,000 cases of wine. The different microclimates

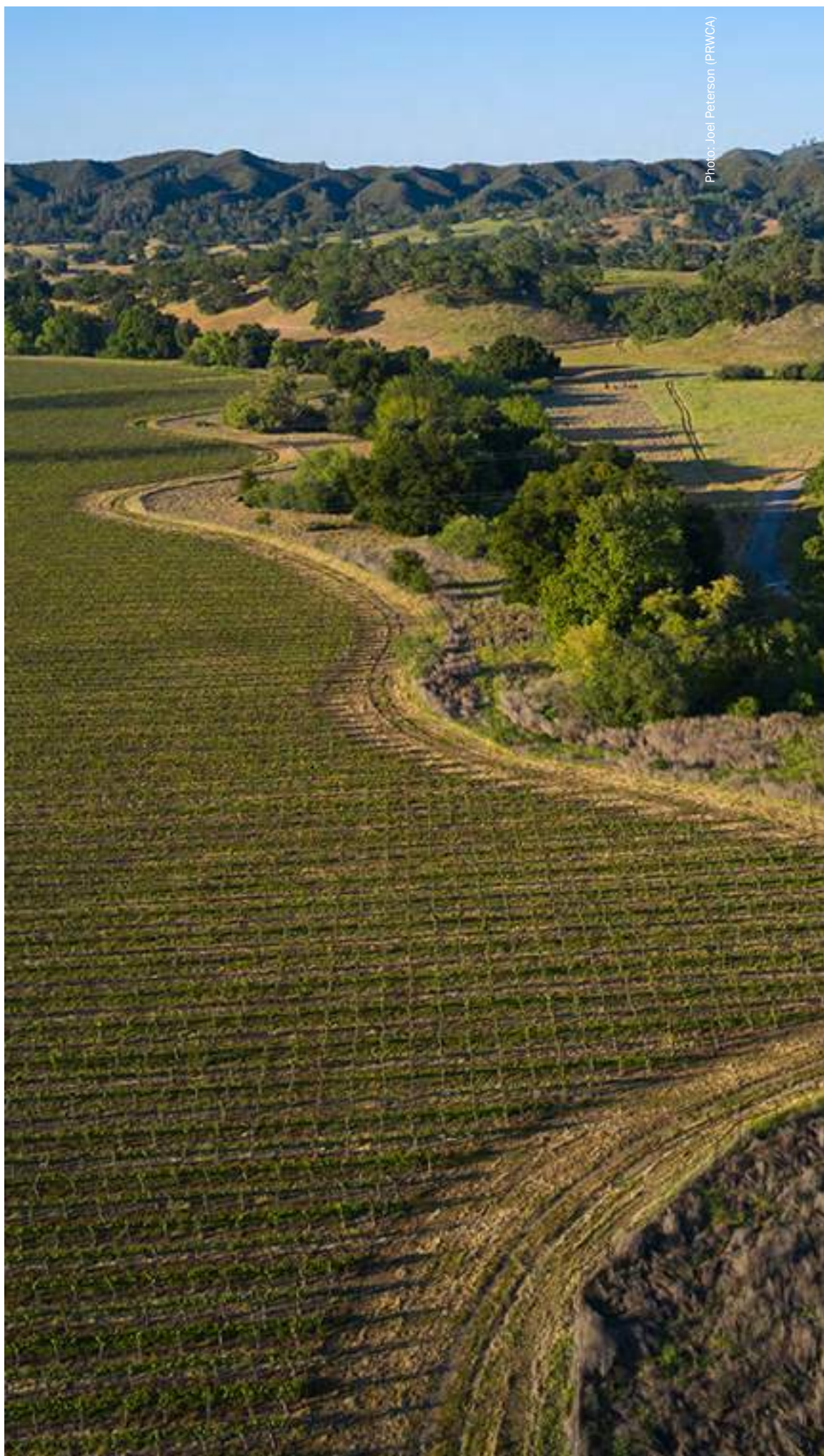


Photo: Joel Peterson (PRWCA)



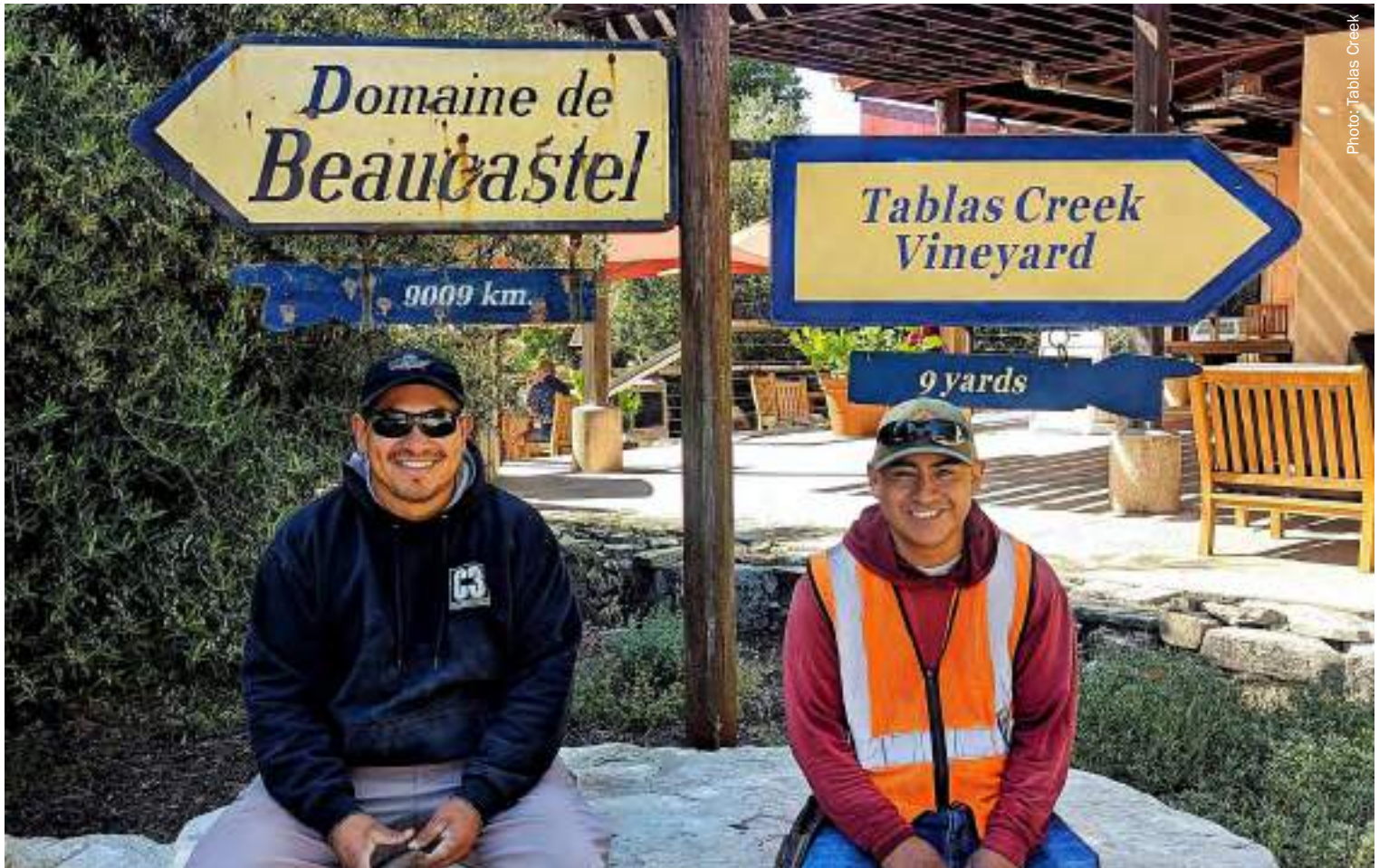
and soil types support over 60 varieties of grapes that are now grown in the region. These are predominantly black grapes, i.e. Cabernet Sauvignon (about 40% of plantings), Merlot, Syrah and Zinfandel. Many Rhone varieties such as Viognier, Grenache and Mourvèdre have also been grown in the region since the 1980s, thanks to a handful of producers such as Bob Lindquist from Qupé, Randall Graham from Bonny Doon, John Buechsenstein from McDowell Valley Vineyards and Steve Edmunds from Edmunds St John (collectively called 'The Rhone Rangers', a loose affiliation of wine producers). These Rhone varieties have grown significantly in popularity with consumers who are keen to try something different. More recently, Italian and Spanish varieties such as Aglianico, Nebbiolo, Tempranillo are being grown. Chardonnay is about 5% of the plantings and there is a trend towards planting more aromatic white varieties.

Tablas Creek Vineyard

Founded in 1989, Tablas Creek Vineyard is one of the pioneers of the Rhone movement in Paso Robles in the Adelaida District sub-AVA. Set up as a partnership between Famille Perrin of Chateau de Beaucastel, one of Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape's greatest wine estates known for organic farming, and Robert Hass, a highly reputed wine importer in California, Tablas Creek Vineyard has been farmed organically since inception, though Certified Organic only in 2003. The estate has since been Certified Biodynamic (2017) and is the world's first winery to be Regenerative Organic Certified™ (ROC™) in 2020.

Neil Collins, winemaker at Tablas Creek since 1998, makes wines that express their soil, climate and varietal character through hand-harvesting, native yeast fermentation, blending of multiple lots and ageing in very large French oak *foudres* (wooden vats), practices followed at Beaucastel for generations.

ROC™ protocols uphold some of the world's highest standards for soil health, animal welfare and farmworker fairness. The estate grows vegetables such as



daikon radish, fava beans, lettuce and native grass which are fertilised by the estate's sheep. Fruit trees have been planted around and within vineyards, bee hives are maintained on site and compost from on-site prunings and grape must is used. Natural pest control methods, such as the 45 owls bred on the estate to control rodent populations are also used. Tablas Creek is 100% solar powered and has many dry-framed blocks of vineyards.

Back in 1989, Tablas Creek brought in verified vine cuttings from Beaucastel through a three-year USDA quarantine, and were planted on the estate in 1994. This is the only estate outside France with the complete collection of the 14 Chateauneuf-du-Pape grape varieties – some of which went through 14 years of USDA quarantine. The Tablas Creek Vineyard Selections (TCVS) or 'Tablas Clones' as they are sometimes referred to, have since been shared with other wineries to launch the Rhone Rangers movement in Paso Robles. This movement has inspired similar efforts in Washington state and many other wine regions in the US that now grow Rhone varieties.

Booker

Dick and Claude Booker first bought land in Western Paso Robles in the 1920s. By the turn of the century, they had acquired about 500 hectares. Farmers and humanitarians, the brothers donated all their land to charity when they passed in the late 20th century. In 2001, Eric and Lisa Jensen bought about 40 hectares

of this land in what is now Willow Creek District Sub-AVA, intending to grow the best grapes possible to sell to the best local wineries. After making wine with a couple of winemakers in Paso Robles, they realised that they wanted to create their own expression of wine from these vineyards. They named their estate in honour of the Booker brothers and released their first vintage in 2005.



The Booker estate has practised organic viticulture since 2006 and received the California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) certification in 2021. Under vineyard manager Hillary Graves, it achieved ROC™ certification in 2023 due to her efforts to actively offset climate change through carbon

sequestration. ROC™ certification focuses on the entire farm ecosystem including farmworker fairness. In line with its guidelines, the estate grows cover crops, reduces unnecessary tilling and deploys sheep from a local herder to graze on the winter cover crops, measures that preserve soil health.

Being farmer winemakers themselves, the Jensens' pride themselves on providing excellent wages and working conditions for their team.

The Booker estate vineyards are located on steep slopes of nutrient-poor limestone soils, which ensure that

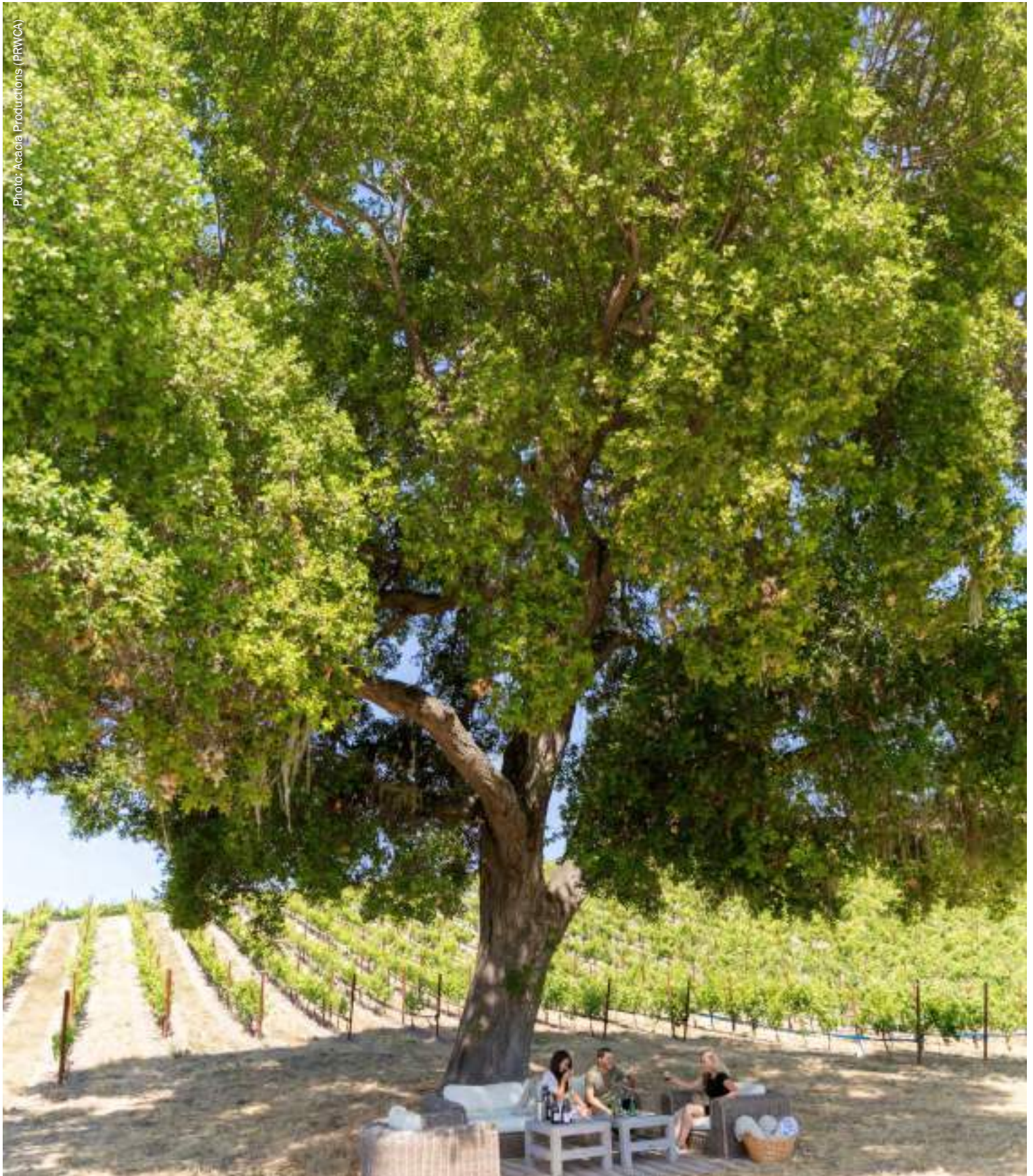


Photo: Acacia Productions (PRWCA)





Photo: Tablas Creek



McPrice Myers Winery

McPrice 'Mac' Myers began making wines in 2002 with grapes from the Central Coast. The farmer winemaker established the 'Beautiful Earth' series of wines made with grapes sourced from Paso Robles in 2005. In 2014, the current McPrice Myers site was established on eight hectares in the hills of the Adelaida District sub-AVA. The estate mostly grows Rhone varietals on its various vineyard blocks, with the exception of Petit Verdot, Zinfandel and Cabernet Sauvignon. The black grape varieties are all planted on north-facing slopes that allow slower ripening. The estate's planting of white Clairette Blanche was the youngest planting of these grapes in the entire Paso Robles region as of 2024. The grapes are carefully selected, separately vinified and expertly blended to create unique, intense wines that express the Paso Robles terroir.

the vines work hard to concentrate flavour and intensity in their grapes. The Jensens' approach to wine making is to allow the fruit to express the terroir with a soft touch and low intervention.

The Booker wines, Rhone varietals and blends, certainly don't disappoint as they frequently receive top points from wine critics.

The estate's viticultural and wine-making practices are rooted in organic, biodynamic and regenerative practices aimed at enriching the vineyard. Cover crops of fava beans, rye and sweet





peas are utilised to anchor soil moisture, boost nutrients, draw bees and increase the biodiversity of the soil. The use of insect-led pest control (for instance, introducing lady bugs to control leaf hoppers) reduces chemical use on the plants and soil.

The tasting room built from repurposed shipping containers and the winery are nestled among oak trees on the estate and are 100% solar powered. Guests are welcome to bring dogs on the estate.

Robert Hall Winery

Robert Hall, a self-made working-class man from St Paul, Minnesota, followed his passion for wine to set up the Robert Hall Winery in 1999. One of the largest wineries in Paso Robles, it has about 70 hectares of vineyards and sources grapes from various sub-AVAs within Paso Robles. The estate vineyards grow 12 grape varieties best matched to the microclimate and soil. Wines are made with considerable thoughtfulness by

crafting unique blends from separately vinified grapes.

As an industry leader focused on sustainability, Robert Hall is certified by the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (CSWA). In an industry first initiative, the winery has initiated a three-year case study to compare its sustainable vineyard practices with regenerative organic farming practices. Robert Hall Winery is also testing an earthworm-powered wastewater management system that will be used to recycle water, improve soil health and produce worm castings or vermicompost. The improved 'living soil' can hold up to nine times its weight in water, helping the vines survive the intense California heat without excessive irrigation. For Robert Hall, carbon sequestration is the goal of using worm castings which replace synthetic fertilizers (which often kill soil microbes) and reduce the need for tilling, eliminate synthetic runoff and produce fruit with a more distinct 'sense of place' or terroir.

Robert Hall makes accessible yet high quality wines that showcase the varietal expression and diversity of terroir which is the essence of Paso Robles.



J Dusi Wines

The Dusi family have been grape growers for over 100 years in Paso Robles. Northern Italian immigrants Sylvester Dusi and Caterina Gazzaroli planted vineyards in 1925 and 1945 with Zinfandel (one of the first grape varieties to be planted in Paso Robles in the late 19th century) and committed to producing high quality wine grapes using sustainable farming practices such as dry farming and bush-training. The Dusi family grows several varietals such as Grenache, Mourvèdre, Cabernet Sauvignon, Clairette Blanche, Carignane and Petite Sirah. Their grapes from the Templeton Gap district sub-AVA and from Willow Creek District sub-AVA are picked early to retain freshness over ripe, jammy and stewed flavours.

Fourth generation owner and winemaker Janell Dusi is the first person in her family to transition from exclusively selling grapes to producing estate wines. Under her management, grape growing and wine making blend tradition with progress in this boutique estate. The grapes are sorted and harvested by hand, foot-trodden in honour of Janell's Italian roots, fermented with wild yeast and aged with a restrained use of oak.



Photo: J Dusi Wines



Photo: Acacia Productions (PRWCA)

The resulting wines are elegant, intense and well balanced.

Giornata Wines

Brian and Stephy Terrizi, a winemaker and viticulturist respectively, met at wine school. Together, they started Giornata Wines with a shared passion for Italian grapes and winemaking. Their philosophy mirrors the Slow Food & Wine movement which aims to transform the wine sector by adopting sustainable techniques such as minimising the use of chemical and synthetic fertilisers and pesticides, promoting inclusivity and collaboration in the farming community and encouraging biodiversity.

Though not formally certified, the farming practices at Giornata are a combination of organic, biodynamic and regenerative methods. Recreating a small Italian farm, animals (sheep, goats, ducks, chickens) raised on the property provide compost,

Photo: Robert Hall Winery



insect control, etc. Water is used judiciously and recycled, while green fertilisers are used in moderation. The winery focuses on making various Italian varietals from estate-grown and locally sourced grape varieties such as Fiano, Vermentino, Trebbiano, Falanghina and Pinot Grigio. Some black grape varieties grown and sourced are Aglianico, Nebbiolo, Barbera, Montepulciano, Sangiovese, and Nero d'Avola.

The Giornata winemaking approach is one of low intervention, low extraction, leveraging wild yeast fermentation, focusing on freshness, fruit purity and balance in the wines with subtle flavours.

The winemakers and wineries in Paso Robles have demonstrated excellence in adopting sustainable, organic and regenerative farming and wine-making practices. They also stand out for successfully leveraging their location and showcasing their terroir via varietal fruit expression and diversity as well as via Bordeaux and Rhone blends. Paso Robles will continue to make stellar wines that are highly sought after. 🍷

Photo: Joel Peterson (PRWCA)





WINE

Tablas Creek Vineyard



Esprit de Tablas Blanc 2020

The flagship white grape blend – Roussanne (46%), Grenache Blanc (28%), Picpoul Blanc (14%), Bourboulenc (5%), Clairette Blanc (4%), Picardan (3%) – vinified separately before blending. Balance of freshness, minerality and fruit purity. Flavours of citrus, green apple, pineapple, honey and spice. 13% ABV.



Esprit de Tablas Rouge 2021

The flagship red grapes blend – Mourvèdre (35%), Grenache Noir (26%), Syrah (23%), Vaccarese (7%), Cinsault (5%), Counoise (4%) – made with neutral oak. Ripe fruit flavours, good structure and a long finish. Easy drinking. #18 in Vinous' Top 100 of 2024. 13.5% ABV.

Booker



Oublié 2020

The Booker estate ode to Chateauneuf-du-Pape – GSM blend of Grenache (56%), Syrah (24%) and Mourvedre (20%). Exudes elegance and finesse. Plum, black currant, blackberry with liquorice and sweet spices. Full bodied with fine grained tannins and a long finish. #10 in Wine Spectator's Top Ten Wines of the World in 2014. 14.3% ABV.



Fracture 2020

This flagship is homage to the fractured limestone soil on which the vines grow. 100% Syrah. Aged 18 months in 228 litres French barriques, 60% of which were new. Intensely dark with beetroot, cocoa, tobacco and sweet spice flavours. Full bodied with velvety tannins and a long finish. 14.7% ABV.

McPrice Myers



Beautiful Earth White 2023

Rhone style blend – Grenache Blanc (56%), Clairette Blanche (44%). Whole-cluster pressing and cold fermentation in stainless steel tanks with minimal malolactic fermentation and aged for six months in neutral 500 litre French puncheons. Refreshing with citrus, green mango, pear and fennel flavours and a smoky feel. 13.4% ABV.



Beautiful Earth Red 2022

Blend of Syrah (58%), Grenache (18%), Petite Sirah (8%), Mourvèdre (7%), Cinsault (2%). Fermentation for 25-30 days in stainless-steel tanks, small open top bins and concrete vats with about 10% whole clusters. Aged 18 months in 265 litre barriques and 500 litre neutral French puncheons. Juicy blackberry, cassis, pomegranate molasses, bacon, dried herbs with velvety tannins. Incredibly smooth finish. 15% ABV.

NOTES

Robert Hall Winery



Cavern Select Meritage 2021

A Bordeaux blend – Cabernet Sauvignon (76%), Malbec (19%), Petit Verdot (5%). Grapes were hand-harvested from small plots, fermented in stainless steel tanks, and aged 24 months in 100% French oak barrels of which 60% were new. Juicy, savoury, earthy and full bodied with fine, dusty tannins. Flavours of ripe raspberry, blackberry, blueberry, menthol, cocoa and caramel. 15.5% ABV.



Artisan Collection Merlot 2021

A right bank Bordeaux blend – Merlot (82%), Cabernet Franc (9%), Petite Syrah (9%). The Merlot was grown on clay soils. Fermented in stainless steel following a 15-21 day maceration and then aged in a combination of French and Hungarian oak for 18 months. Aromas of black cherry, black plum, mocha. Well structured, full bodied with fine grained tannins. 14.5% ABV.

J Dusi Wines



Dante Dusi Zinfandel 2022

100% Zinfandel from Templeton Gap district. Grapes were hand harvested early from old bush vines, crushed by foot to gently extract flavours and fermented with wild yeast. Ageing for 16 months in French and American oak barrels, of which 15% were new. Elegant yet rich with intense aromas of sweet spices, flavours of mixed red and dark berries, with fine ripe tannins and a smooth, long finish. 15.5% ABV.



Paper Street, The Narrator 2021

A GSM blend – Grenache (30%), Syrah (40%), Mourvèdre (30%). Grapes were hand harvested from limestone rich vineyards of Willow Creek District. Fermentation with wild yeast, with minimal extraction and gentle foot stomping. Aged for 20 months in French oak barrels, of which 25% were new. Aromas of lavender, herbs, tobacco, sweet spices with leather and flavours of black cherry and blackberry. Full bodied with ripe and firm tannins and a long, dry finish. 15.3% ABV.

Giornata



Fiano 2023

100% Fiano – Californian expression of a Southern Italian grape grown organically (without certification) in the San Miguel district sub-AVA on sandy loam soils. Whole clusters were part bladder pressed and part foot-trodden for gentle extraction. Aged for nine months in stainless steel barrels of which six months were on lees. Fresh with aromas of crushed rock and flavours of ripe grapefruit, canned pear, fennel and flint with a creamy texture. 13% ABV.



Nebbiolo 2018

100% Nebbiolo. A tiny production pays homage to the Barolos and Barbarescos of Piedmont. Certified organic grapes grown on silty, clay loam over calcareous rock in the Adelaida district sub-AVA. Fermented with native yeast and macerated for a long time in its skin. Aged 24 months in neutral French oak barrels and six months in the bottle. Fresh aromas of rose with strawberry, cherry, pomegranate flavours. Structured with fine and firm tannins and a dry finish. 14% ABV.