

# TABLAS CREEK VINEYARD



*The VINformer*  
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## **Wine 101: Seeking Closure** *Corks, Screw Caps and Alternatives*

Tablas Creek VINsiders may have noticed that one of the bottles in the most recent wine club shipment was sealed with a screw cap instead of a cork. Last year, we bottled half of our Rosé as well as part of our Las Tablas Estates and Vermentino in screw cap to evaluate how a white wine, a red wine, and a rose would evolve under different closures. Tablas Creek is not alone in experimenting with replacements for the traditional cork closures, and the increasing use of screw caps in the wine industry, many on high-end wines, has been a popular discussion topic for wine commentators and consumers.

Wine stoppers must meet four basic requirements: they must form a reliable seal, they must present an inert substance to the wine, they must be easily removed, and they must be relatively inexpensive to produce.

### *Natural Cork*

Corks meet all of these requirements. For centuries, cork was by far the most common method of stoppering wine bottles, and their use can be traced back to the ancient Greeks and Romans. In the Middle Ages, the use of cork fell out of practice (most likely because the majority of cork forests, located on the Iberian peninsula, were largely under Moorish control), and was replaced by wood, pitch and wax. The advent of glass bottles at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, however, demanded a more practical closure, and corks returned to prominence.

See **CLOSURE** on page 3

## **Harvest Report**

Despite the earliest onset of the rainy season in recent memory, the 2004 harvest is put to bed. What's more, the harvest looks tremendous. The whites have an ideal balance between acid and sugar, and the reds have excellent richness, ripe tannins and unusually dark color.

We had a very early bud break at the end of March (almost a month ahead of normal schedule) but happily managed to avoid any damaging frosts. The summer was consistently warm, sunny and breezy, but not particularly hot. Daytime temperatures rarely reached the upper 90s, and nights were cold, with lows in the mid to low 50s. The cooler temperatures slowed down the ripening process and increased the hangtime of the grapes; by the time harvest began, we were only about ten days ahead of our normal schedule.

As usual, Viognier was the first varietal to ripen, and we began picking on August 23rd. By mid-September, harvest was in full swing. Unlike previous seasons in which the varietals ripened sequentially, this year's weather patterns meant that several different varietals ripened at the same time, leading to

See **VINEYARD** on page 4

**Featured Wine:**  
**2001 Côtes de Tablas**

Details on page 6.

# *Focus Varietal: Grenache Noir*

**G**renache Noir is the most widely planted “cépage noble” in the southern Rhône Valley, and the second most widely planted varietal in the world. It is most often blended (with Syrah in France and Australia, and with Tempranillo in Rioja), but reaches its peak in the wines of Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Château de Beaucastel uses between 35 and 50% Grenache in its Beaucastel red, and some producers (most notably Château Rayas) produce Châteauneuf-du-Pape wines that are virtually 100% Grenache.

## *Early History*

Grenache appears to have originated in Spain, most likely in the northern province of Aragon, and ampelographers believe that Grenache was the foundation of Aragon’s excellent *vin rouge du pays*. From Aragon, it spread throughout the vineyards of Spain and the Mediterranean in conjunction with the reach of the kingdom of Aragon, which at times included Roussillon and Sardinia. By the early 18th century, the varietal had expanded into Languedoc and Provence.

The phylloxera epidemic of the late 19th century indirectly increased European plantings of Grenache. In Rioja, for example, vineyards were replanted not with the native varietals but with the hardy, easy to graft Grenache. A similar trend occurred in southern France, as the percentage of Grenache plantings after the phylloxera infestation increased significantly, replacing the previously abundant Mourvèdre.

Grenache was brought to California in the 1860s, where its erect carriage, vigor and resistance to drought made it a popular planting choice. It came to occupy second place in vineyard planting after Caringnan and was an element

in wine producers’ branded field blends. Unfortunately, this usage encouraged growers to select cuttings from the most productive vines, increasing grape production but reducing the overall quality of the vines. In recent



years, Grenache plantings in California have declined, as the varietal is replaced by the more popular Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot; currently there are 9,600 acres planted in California.

## *Grenache at Tablas Creek*

When we began Tablas Creek Vineyard in 1990, we were not completely satisfied with the quality of California Grenache vines. As a result, we imported our Grenache Noir cuttings (along with its close cousin, Grenache Blanc) from France, where Jacques Perrin at Château de Beaucastel had worked

tirelessly to regenerate high quality Grenache vines.

Grenache is a vigorous variety with upright shoots that lends itself to “gobelet” or “head pruning”; it is widely cultivated in this manner in France and in Spain. At Tablas Creek, our steep hillsides preclude cross cultivation, so we cultivate it in double cordon fashion with six fruiting canes, each with two buds. The varietal’s vigor gives it the potential to be a heavy producer. Despite our shoot thinning, we are usually obliged to fruit-prune during the growing seasons to keep the bunch count to ten or twelve clusters per vine. This practice means that we harvest approximately three tons of fruit per acre of vines.

## *Flavors and Aromas*

Grenache produces wines with high concentrations of fruit, tannin, and acids. Its flavors are most typically currant, cherry, and raisin, and its aromas are of black pepper, menthol, and licorice.

Although many California Grenache clones produce simple, fruity wines which tend to be pale in color, our French clones produce brilliant ruby red wines which are heady in alcohol (usually 15% or higher), and intensely fruity and fat.

For our signature *Esprit de Beaucastel*, we combine Grenache with Syrah and Mourvèdre to open up those more closed varieties. The varietal can also make a delightfully fruity and forward wine as in our newly released Grenache-based 2002 *Côtes de Tablas* (which received a 90 from Robert Parker in August 2004). ☺

### *CLOSURE, continued from Page 1*

Cork is made from the bark of a species of oak tree (*Quercus suber*) that has a thick, hardy bark that can be stripped from the tree without damaging the tree itself. After the bark is stripped from the tree, it is seasoned for 6 months and cut into strips. The cork stoppers are punched from these strips, bleached to disinfect them and graded for quality.

For all of their tradition, corks do have some disadvantages. They require elaborate mechanisms to be extracted from the bottle neck, for example. More importantly, they are susceptible to contamination by TCA, a chlorine-based chemical that causes wines to taste of wet, moldy cardboard. "Cork taint" affects approximately 5% of all wines bottled under cork, regardless of how expensive or rare the bottle is. The extent of the taint can vary. At one extreme is the distinctive wet cardboard odor; at the other end of the spectrum are wines that are only slightly corked, in which the fruit aromas are significantly muted. The concern for producers is not the consumers who recognize a corked wine and send it back, but rather the majority of consumers who assume they just don't like the wine.

### *Synthetic Corks*

In the past decade, alternative closures have been increasingly used as a way of eliminating cork taint. The most popular options have been synthetic corks and screw caps.

Synthetic corks were once hailed as the perfect replacement for natural corks. Made from inert plastic, they resemble corks in shape and maintain the romantic associations of pulling a cork from a bottleneck using a corkscrew, but do not suffer any risk of cork taint. Further research with synthetic corks, however, revealed some serious drawbacks. Because the synthetic corks are made from plastic and not the natural material of cork, they lack cork's ability to compress enough to be placed in bottles and expand to fill the available space. Synthetic corks do not form as tight a seal as natu-

ral corks, thereby allowing oxygen to reach the wine, causing oxidation.

### *Screw Caps*

Screw caps (also known as Stelvin, after their primary manufacturer) have been gaining increasing press and credibility in the past few years. Most screw caps are made of aluminum, with an inert film liner. They are easy to remove and prevent oxygen from reaching the wine.

Australia and New Zealand were the first to use Stelvin closures on a wide scale, and bottle much of their Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc under screw cap. In the United States, screw cap wines have been long been associated with cheap wines of poor quality. Recent studies, however, have demonstrated that American wine drinkers are becoming more aware of the problem of cork taint, and are more willing to accept high quality (and often high-priced) wines bottled with screw caps.

A study by a market research firm in northern California showed that a quarter of respondents had purchased wine under screw cap in the past three months, and that frequent wine consumers were more likely to buy screw cap wines than were infrequent consumers. Interestingly, almost 20% of wine drinkers said a screw cap would be acceptable on a wine priced at \$15 or more, a huge increase from the 1% reported in a Wine Spectator survey in 1997.

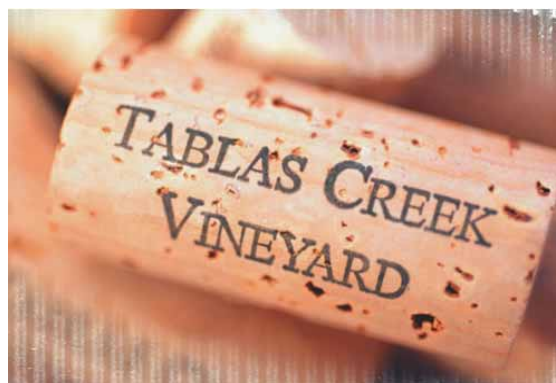
### *Closures at Tablas Creek*

In our own experiments at Tablas Creek, we've found interesting results. Blind tastings of all three wines (Rosé, Vermentino and Las Tablas Estates) at various points after bottling revealed that different closures highlight different characteristics of the wines. Wines in screw cap tend to emphasize brightness, acidity and minerality, whereas the

wines in cork tend to emphasize creaminess and softness. Additionally, the wines in cork tasted as though they had spent additional time in barrel; they had subtle hints of toast and vanilla (an unsurprising finding, as corks, like barrels, are made from oak).

Most of the industry research has focused on the effects of screw caps on white wines and on wines that are meant to be drunk young. The screw cap preserves the fruit and freshness of these wines. Since the majority of wines are either purchased on the day they will be drunk or meant to be drunk within the first several years after bottling, screw caps are an appealing option for many wines. The jury is still out about the effects of screw caps on wines that are meant to be aged. Cork allows a minuscule amount of oxygen to reach the wine, and the lack of this small bit of oxygen may intrinsically change the way the wine ages and tastes over time.

We will continue to bottle small lots of wine in both screw cap and cork over the next few years, and monitor their progress. The experimental bottlings of Vermentino and Rosé last year were quite successful, both in the market response and in the wines' evolution. For the 2004 vintage, we plan to bottle all of our Rosé and Vermentino in screw cap, as we feel their clean fruitiness benefits from screw cap. Stop by the tasting room and taste for yourself! ☺





an even greater flurry of activity than normal in a winery in September. As of September 17, all of the Viognier, Marsanne, Syrah, Vermentino, and Chardonnay had been harvested, along with half of the Roussanne. By early October, we had completed harvest of the Grenache Noir, Grenache Blanc, and the remainder of the Roussanne, but the cooler weather had extended the ripening process of our two latest ripening varietals, Counoise and Mourvèdre.

After a small rainstorm on October 17th, the sun came back out and a coastal breeze picked up as we resumed harvesting on October 18th and 19th. Over those two days, we brought in most of our Counoise and several tons of ripe Mourvèdre -- about 25% of our total production. However, several sections of the vineyard were still not completely ripe, and we decided against picking grapes that weren't quite ready.

Our first major Pacific storm of the season dumped nearly 5 inches of rain on the vineyard on October 20 and 21. We were worried about the Mourvèdre still left hanging, but Mourvèdre is a notoriously thick-skinned grape, which is not prone to rot or splitting. October is the rainiest month of the year in Châteauneuf du Pape, and French Mourvèdre is almost never harvested without some rain. When we got back out into the vineyard after the rain, we were pleased to see that the grapes hadn't lost any sugar, and had in fact gained some concentration of acidity after the rain.

The last of the Mourvèdre and Counoise was picked on November 1, concluding the 2004 harvest. We ended with final crush weights of just over 240 tons: 140 tons of red grapes and 100 tons of white grapes. The vintage appears to be a great one for both reds and whites, with relatively high acidity levels and tremendous minerality from the grapes' extended hangtime.

The wines, still in their component varietals, have completed primary fermentation (in which sugar is turned into alcohol), and most have also completed malolactic fermentation (in which malic acid is turned into lactic acid). Much of our production is finishing its fermentation processes in our newly stacked 1200-gallon foudres, riveted together onto custom-designed reinforced steel bases and stacked on top of one another, like the foudres at Beaucastel. The structure is impressive... make sure to ask for a look the next time you're at the vineyard.



The vineyard weathered the after-Christmas rains nicely, with only moderate erosion of some vineyard roads. The almost ten inches of rain we received between December 26 and January 11 replenished the ground water and turned the normally sluggish Tablas Creek into a babbling brook. This rainy season has been the wettest on record since 1969, and we still have three months left in which we can expect rain. ☺

## VINsider's Corner

### March Wine Club Shipment

We're really excited about the upcoming wine club shipment. For the first time, it will include six different wines. One is our much anticipated 2002 *Panoplie* (rated 95 points from Robert Parker), only the second *Panoplie* vintage we've ever made. We're also including a bottle of the tasting room favorite 2002 *Las Tablas Estates Glenrose Vineyard*, a terrific Syrah-based blend made from Tablas Creek clones grown on a neighboring estate. You'll also receive a bottle of the 2002 *Côtes de Tablas* (90 points from Robert Parker), the 2003 *Roussanne* (90-92 points from Robert Parker), and the perennial VINsider favorite 2003 *Vermentino* (only 200 cases produced). A bottle of the 2003 *Viognier* (our first ever single varietal Viognier), which received 90 points from Robert Parker, will complete this spring's offering.

The shipment will leave the winery on Tuesday, March 22. Local VINsiders and those who plan to be in town for the Zinfandel Festival can pick up their shipments at the winery starting Friday, March 18. Now is the time to make any changes that are needed to your VINsider record (e.g., credit card number or expiration date, shipping address, etc.). If you have record changes, please let Nikki Getty know as soon as possible at [ngetty@tablascreek.com](mailto:ngetty@tablascreek.com), or 805.237.1231 x39.

### Spring VINsider Tasting Party

Mark your calendar now for our shipment tasting party here at the vineyard on March 26 from 5:00 pm to 7:00pm. Pick up your Spring 2005 shipment while you join us for a tasting of the wines in the Spring offering. Wines from the shipment will be available for an additional 5% off that night only. The event is free for VINsiders and \$15 for their guests; please RSVP by March 21 to [events@tablascreek.com](mailto:events@tablascreek.com) or 805.237.1231 x39.



# WINE ORDER FORM

**DISCOUNTS**  
 Non-Wine Club members receive a 10% discount on orders of 12 bottles or more.

Wine Club members receive a discount of 25% on orders of 12 bottles or more and 20% on orders of fewer than 12 bottles.

**SHIPPING**  
 For best results, we recommend having your wine shipped to a business address.

CA  
 1- 6 bottles: \$14.00  
 7-12 bottles: \$20.00

CO, ID, NM, NV, OR, WA, WY  
 1-6 bottles: \$20.00  
 7-12 bottles: \$30.00

AK, IA, IL, MN, MO, NC, NH, VA, VT, WI, WV  
 1- 6 bottles: \$25.00  
 7-12 bottles: \$40.00

**LEGAL**  
 Due to federal and state laws, we are permitted to ship to addresses in the above states only.

Wines may only be shipped to and received by adults at least 21 years of age. **Adult signature is required for receipt of wine orders.**

WINE	QUANTITY	PRICE	TOTAL
<b>WHITE WINES</b>			
ESPRIT DE BEUCASTEL BLANC 2003	_____	\$35.00	_____
ESPRIT DE BEUCASTEL BLANC 2002	_____	\$35.00	_____
CÔTES DE TABLAS BLANC 2002	_____	\$22.00	_____
ROUSSANNE 2003	_____	\$27.00	_____
GRENACHE BLANC 2003	_____	\$27.00	_____
PICPOUL 2003 (4 bottle limit)	_____	\$27.00	_____
CLOS BLANC 2000	_____	\$35.00	_____
<b>RED WINES</b>			
ESPRIT DE BEUCASTEL 2002 (6 bottle limit)	_____	\$40.00	_____
SYRAH 2002 (2 bottle limit)	_____	\$35.00	_____
LAS TABLAS ESTATES GLENROSE VINEYARD 2002	_____	\$32.50	_____
CÔTES DE TABLAS 2002	_____	\$22.00	_____
CÔTES DE TABLAS 2001 (Featured Wine)	_____	\$22.00	_____
<b>DESSERT WINES (375 mL)</b>			
VIN DE PAILLE 2003 (4 bottle limit)	_____	\$65.00	_____
		<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	_____
MasterCard/Visa Number _____		<b>DISCOUNT</b>	_____
Expiration Date _____		<b>7.25% TAX (CA ONLY)</b>	_____
Name on Card _____		<b>SHIPPING</b>	_____
Signature _____		<b>ORDER TOTAL</b>	_____

**BILL To:**  
 Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
 TCV Wine Club Member number: \_\_\_\_\_

**SHIP To:**  
 Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Return form to Tablas Creek Vineyard, 9339 Adelaida Road, Paso Robles, CA 93446 or fax to 805.237.1314

## FEATURED WINE: 2001 CÔTES DE TABLAS

*Wines are organic products and, as such, have their own life cycles. At the vineyard, we taste through our cellar every month, and see which wines are showing particularly well given the season and the wines' own inherent evolution. As a way of sharing these observations with you, we will periodically spotlight one of our wines. To encourage you to try these great wines, we are offering the featured wine, for the designated time only, at a 15% discount. This discount is granted above and beyond any other discounts that might apply, such as for case purchases or wine club membership.*



**The Featured Wine program continues with the 2001 Cotes de Tablas, featured from January 28 to February 28.**

**Tasting Notes:** The 2001 Cotes de Tablas is a rich, spicy wine, with copious aromas of cherries, roasted meats and spice. The flavors are an elegant balance of ripe plum, loam and licorice, backed by firm but ripe tannins.

**Suggested Food Pairings:** Côtes du Rhône style wines like the Cotes de Tablas are quite versatile, and pair wonderfully with food. The 2001 vintage is particularly good with hearty meat dishes, such as grilled steaks, rich beef stews, and spicy sausages,

but is also delicious when paired with pastas with meat sauce, cassoulet, or coq au vin. Try it with the Haas family favorite, braised short ribs with black olives!

### ***Wine Pairing: Braised Shortribs with Black Olives***

This dish is wonderfully comforting on a winter night. It pairs beautifully with the 2001 *Cotes de Tablas*. The flaming brandy, although not absolutely essential, burns up the excess fat and makes quite a difference to the flavor of the finished sauce.

*Serves 6 as a main dish.*

#### **Ingredients**

5 lbs. bone-in short ribs, trimmed of excess fat  
4 tbsp. brandy  
8 oz. red wine  
6-8 oz. chicken stock or water  
1 tbsp. butter  
1 tbsp. olive oil  
6 oz. pitted black olives, rinsed  
bouquet of thyme, parsley and bay leaf  
strip of orange peel  
2 crushed garlic cloves  
salt and pepper to taste

- Ⓢ Preheat oven to 300 degrees.
- Ⓢ In large pot on medium-high, brown the meat in the olive oil and butter, in batches.
- Ⓢ Return all meat to pan, and arrange ribs in single layer.
- Ⓢ Warm brandy in a soup ladle, pour it over the meat, carefully set a light to it, and shake the pan until flames go out.
- Ⓢ Add the red wine and enough stock to come halfway up the sides of the ribs. Let it bubble quickly for about 30 seconds.
- Ⓢ Lightly season with salt and pepper, add the bouquet, orange peel and garlic. Cover pot with a layer of foil and the lid.
- Ⓢ Cook in oven at 300 degrees for 2 to 2 1/2 hours, until meat is fork-tender. Check periodically to make sure liquid is simmering and not drying up.
- Ⓢ Ten minutes before serving, remove bouquet and add olives. Stir to combine.
- Ⓢ Serve with egg noodles or rice.

## Tablas on Tour: National Events

### ☉ March 9, 2005

Paso Robles Road Show  
New Orleans, Louisiana  
www.pasowine.com

### ☉ March 18-20, 2005

Paso Robles Zinfandel Festival  
Paso Robles, California  
www.pasowine.com  
805.239.8463

### ☉ March 19, 2005

Rhône Rangers Tasting  
San Francisco, California  
www.rhonerangers.org  
707.462.5943

### ☉ March 31- April 2, 2005

High Museum Atlanta Wine Auction  
Atlanta, Georgia  
www.atlanta-wineauction.org  
404.733.5335

### ☉ April 4, 2005

Paso Robles Road Show  
Chicago, Illinois  
www.pasowine.com

### ☉ May 4, 2005

Paso Robles Road Show  
Denver, Colorado  
www.pasowine.com

### ☉ May 12-14, 2005

Hospice du Rhone  
Paso Robles, California  
www.hospicedurhone.com  
805.784.9543

### ☉ May 20-22, 2005

Paso Robles Wine Festival  
Paso Robles, California  
www.pasowine.com  
805.239.8463

## Tablas at Home: Coming Events at the Vineyard

### Follow Your Heart... Far Out Wineries

February 19-21

Celebrate heart health with your Valentine! Tablas Creek, along with the other Far Out Wineries, will be donating 5% of the proceeds from our weekend sales to the American Heart Association. Each of the 12 member wineries will be serving heart-healthy snacks from the American Heart Association's cookbook, and AHA representatives will be at various tasting rooms throughout the weekend to answer questions. Information about wine and its effects on the heart will also be available.

### Saturday, February 26 Wine and Cheese Seminar

12:00 to 2:00 PM

Join Tablas Creek for our first annual Wine and Cheese Seminar! Jeff Scott, Master of Cheese from Los Angeles, will be at the vineyard to speak about the history of artisanal cheeses. He will then lead a tasting of cheeses from France, Italy, Spain and England, and discuss the best wines to pair with each. Don't miss this fantastic opportunity to taste Tablas Creek wines with some spectacular and unusual cheeses! The event is \$30 for VINSiders and \$40 for guests. Space is limited and reservations are required.

### Saturday, April 2 Blending Seminar

10:00 AM to Noon

If you love Rhône varietals, join us for our third annual barrel tasting and blending seminar! Jason Haas and winemaker Neil Collins will lead a barrel tasting of the individual varietals, and then will set you loose with graduated cylinders to produce your own blend. This event is extremely popular and sells out quickly -- make your reservations now. The cost is \$25 for VINSiders and \$35 for guests.

### Saturday, April 30 Tapas and Wine Pairing Seminar

12:00 to 2:00 PM

Need ideas for what to serve at your next party? Explore the world of Spanish tapas and the traditional drink to be taken with tapas -- wine! Join us as a local chef discusses the history of tapas and prepares regional recipes to be paired with Tablas Creek wines. The event is \$30 for VINSiders and \$40 for guests. Space is limited and reservations are required.

To make reservations or get more information on any of these events, please contact Nikki Getty at 805.237.1231 ext. 39 or at [ngetty@tablascreek.com](mailto:ngetty@tablascreek.com).

## Tablas Creek Cuttings

### Picpoul Released!

Just in time for Valentine's Day, try the newest Tablas Creek white varietal -- Picpoul! Picpoul ("lip-stinger", in French) is a traditional grape of Châteauneuf-du-Pape known for its bright acidity. Château de Beaucastel uses Picpoul in their white blends, but 2003 was the first year that Tablas Creek has had enough of the varietal to vinify it. We're thrilled with the results, and bottled it as a single varietal. The 2003 vintage shows a rich nose of roasted pear and spice. In the mouth, buttery flavors of pineapple and orange are balanced by crisp acids. It has a delightful pina colada finish. We only made 65 cases of this wine, so supplies are severely limited. Stop by the tasting room and get yours soon!

### Paso Robles Wineries Hit the Road

Join Tablas Creek and other members of the Paso Robles Vintners and Growers Association on the road this spring and summer! For the first time, our local winery organization will be taking its show on the road, with trade tastings and consumer events in four cities. The cities and dates are New Orleans (week of March 7), Chicago (week of April 4), Denver (week of May 2) and Seattle (week of June 6). For more information, visit the PRVGA's website at [www.pasowine.com](http://www.pasowine.com). We hope to see you there!

#### Tasting Room Open Daily

We're open from 10 am to 5 pm daily, with tours by appointment. For more information, visit [tablascreek.com](http://tablascreek.com) or call 805.237.1231.

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