

2011 Harvest Report

Harvest 2011 finished on November 9th in a flurry of activity, with at one point 62 different bins of grapes scattered around the winery and on the crush pad waiting to be destemmed. Much of this fruit was unexpected, though no less welcome for it.

With most of our estate harvested, and wet frosty weather looming November 4th-6th, we figured that we'd be lucky to get anything additional in. But lucky we were. The rains amounted to little more than half an inch, and the frosts that affected most of Paso Robles (for once) missed us. So with sunny weather resuming on the 7th, we scurried to finish harvesting our own property, as well as some of the later-ripening *Patelin* vineyards. All together, we finished harvest with 100 different lots, 70 from our own vineyard and 30 from various other vineyards for *Patelin* and *Patelin Blanc*.

Yields in 2011 were low, though thanks to this late flurry of grapes not as low as we'd feared. Over the entire 105 producing acres, we harvested 238 tons, or 2.3 tons per acre. Of those, 98 tons were white and 140 were red. That's down significantly (about 34%) compared to 2010, but probably more like down 15%-20% compared to a normal year.

Compared to 2010, every variety except Roussanne was down. Some varieties (most notably Viognier) are almost nonexistent in the cellar. Of our key reds, Mourvèdre was down least in terms of yields, while Syrah was hardest-hit. But 2010 was not a normal vintage; it was one of our most plentiful vintages, even if its 3.5 tons per acre were still modest by most standards. Averaging the high-yielding 2010 and the low-yielding 2009 provides an idea of a more typical vintage. Compared to this theoretical "normal" vintage, we saw significant declines in Syrah, Grenache, Viognier, Grenache Blanc, *See* HARVEST, page 4



The VINformer Vol. 11, No. 1 February 2012

Biodiversity in the Vineyard

by Levi Glenn, Viticulturist

Tablas Creek is adding new members to the vineyard family! We are now the proud owners of twenty-odd Dorper sheep as well as a few Barbados. We also completed a limestone lambing barn made almost entirely from reused materials. At the beginning of December we received fifteen more laying hens, and a month from now we will have three little piglets. Goats will be added later, and cows are somewhere in our future. To protect our livestock from predators (coyotes, bobcats and mountain lions), we have also added a pair of guard donkeys to the menagerie.

The animals will increase the overall biodiversity of our estate. Two years ago we started to farm biodynamically on 20 acres of the estate. One of the main tenets of biodynamics is to promote biodiversity. While the most visible components may be different animal and crop species, the most important impact on the vineyard's health is the microbial biodiversity that diverse flora and fauna encourage.

Our new herd of ruminants will reduce our weed population in the vineyard, but there's more to it than that. As they munch, they also are fertilizing the vineyard, which reduces the number of tractor passes, lessens soil compaction, reduces equipment repairs, and allows our tractor operators to focus their efforts elsewhere. All this translates into lower costs now and reduced environmental impacts down the road. The herd will be in the vineyard during most of the dormant season, roughly from November through March. If left in the field past

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Focus Varietal: Viognier

Variable (pronounced VEE-ohnyay) is the most-planted white Rhône varietal in the United States, and produces wines with intense aromatics of peaches, apricots, and violets, as well as viscosity and lushness on the palate. At Tablas Creek, it takes the lead in our *Côtes de Tablas Blanc*, an important secondary role in our *Patelin de Tablas Blanc*, and has even occasionally appeared as a varietal wine.

Early History

Viognier is historically grown in the Northern Rhône valley, and reaches its peak in the tiny appellations of Condrieu and Château Grillet. The precise historical origin of the varietal is unknown, but many believe it dates back to the Roman Empire. According to one story, Emperor Probus imported Viognier into Condrieu from Dalmatia (in present-day Croatia) in 281 AD as a means of replacing the vineyards destroyed by Emperor Vespasian. Legend has it that Vespasian tore up the Condrieu vineyards after the locals revolted, a revolt which he attributed to drinking too much of the native wine.

Regardless of how the varietal originally arrived in Condrieu, historical records confirm that Viognier was grown in the area during the Roman Empire. When the Romans were forced out of Gaul in the 5th Century, the vines remained uncultivated for centuries but were revived by locals in the 9th Century. The varietal spread to neighboring Château Grillet, and from there to the papal palace at Avignon in the 14th Century.

By the 1960's, Viognier plantings had diminished dramatically, down to an estimated 15 acres in Condrieu and little more elsewhere in the Rhône Valley. But with the growth of interest in varietal wines in the late 1980's, the grape was brought to California, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. There are now nearly 3000 acres of Viognier in California alone, making it by far the most planted white Rhône varietal.

Viognier in California

American growers, led by pioneers such as Alban, Calera and Joseph Phelps, brought Viognier into the United States in small quantities in the late 1980s. Almost simultaneous-ly, other American grow-ers brought over what drought resistant, enabling it to thrive in the dry Paso Robles summer climate. It flowers and ripens early, and is usually the first varietal harvested in very early September. Because Viognier flowers so early in the season, it is susceptible to spring frosts, most notably in 2011 when its production was decimated. We have installed frost-protection fans in our largest Viognier block, which help most years.

The vines have medium-sized leaves, with small clusters of small, deep yellow berries that produce straw-gold colored wines. On the roughly six acres we have in production, we've averaged just over 16 tons in production since 2006, about 2.8 tons per acre. Viognier makes up roughly 15% of our white Rhône production.

We typically ferment Viognier to emphasize its freshness rather than its richness. It naturally ripens with relatively high sugars and low acidity, so we ferment it in stainless steel, and look to blend it with lots that have good minerality, bright acidity and low alcohol. Our most frequent partners for our Viognier are Marsanne (for minerality and elegance) and Grenache Blanc (for acidity). These three varieties, plus brighter, leaner lots of Roussanne, make up our Côtes de Tablas Blanc each year. In our Patelin de Tablas Blanc, which is based on the bright acids and rich mouthfeel of Grenache Blanc, Viognier contributes floral aromatics and stone fruit flavors.

Flavors and Aromas

Viognier's powerful aromas of peaches, apricots, and violets make it one of the world's most recognizable grape varieties. In the mouth, it shows great richness, flavors of stone fruit and honey, and a long finish. It is typically best drunk young.

were Roussanne cuttings from the Rhône Valley, which were then propagated and planted in vineyards around California. Years later, in 1998, those vines were identified as Viognier, not Roussanne – a discovery which added a new Viognier clone for California producers to work with. We contributed two new clones, imported from Château de Beaucastel.

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In the Vineyard and Cellar

Viognier is a reasonably difficult grape to grow, as it is somewhat more prone to disease than other varietals and can be unpredictable in its yield. It is, however, reasonably

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bud-break, the sheep could start to sample the young tender leaves and cause serious losses. The cows, which represent fertility in the Biodynamic ethos, will provide us with manure we need for our Biodynamic preparations and our green waste/cow manure compost. As this program grows, we hope to make all the compost we need on the property. The pigs will be, well, tasty.

As for flora, there are over 200 producing olive trees on the property, and we planted almost 50 more this year. Every fall following the grape harvest, we pick the olives and press them into the green-gold olive oil we sell in our tasting room. Unfortunately, in May of 2011, just as the olive blossoms were at their peak, we received an unseasonal rainstorm. It has left us with so few olives



The newest additions to the vineyard: sheep!

that there isn't enough to make olive oil this year. Still, the olive trees attract and support different insect and microbial life than grapevines, and they're nice to look at. In addition to olives, each of the past few winters we have planted a variety of peaches, pears, cherries, apples, and quince. Some of the fruit and olive trees are actually intermixed in certain vineyard blocks, much like many diversified farms throughout the Mediterranean. Fruit produced is eaten by our vineyard crew as a fresh afternoon snack or shared with the winery staff.

"Living soil" is a term often used in the world of organics and Biodynamics, and refers principally to healthy soils with high microbial activity. These microbes take organic matter in the soil and break it down into forms that are accessible to the plant's roots. All we have to do is provide these microbes with comfortable surroundings. So we apply compost, incorporate the cover crop, till the soil to provide oxygen, and don't apply chemicals that would otherwise ruin their party. These little microscopic field hands do the rest of the work for us.

Bees are another addition soon to make an appearance on our own property (our neighbor to the west has kept beehives for years). We have plenty of fruit trees to pollinate, plus all the native wild flowers and the cover crops that we seed every fall to attract beneficial insects. These cover crops provide habitat for the bugs we want so that they will go out and eat the bugs we don't, such as leafhoppers and spider mites.

Biodiversity is probably not going to make a significant impact on the quality of our wines in the short term. But we expect the healthier soils that we are building to improve the long-term health of the vines, and their longevity. If we can keep our vineyards healthy and productive at ages forty and up (an age at which many California vineyards are having to be replaced) the long-term impact on quality could be dramatic. And healthier vines should produce grapes in better balance and more reflective of their terroir.

These changes are the next logical step in trying to become a single farm unit, where we produce as much as we can from our own property, and reduce outside inputs, which should further encourage the expression of our terroir. With our initial work on Biodynamics we are taking an important step forward.

Mapping the Future: New Vineyard Land

We're thrilled that we have secured Tablas Creek's future as an estate winery with the purchase of the 150 acre parcel to our south. Learn more on the Tablas Creek blog: tablascreek.typepad.com



A New Website!

After more than a decade on our original web site, we have launched the redesigned tablascreek.com, with more detailed notes and resources on our wines, a section dedicated to the needs of trade and media, more intuitive search and navigation, an improved ordering experience and a beautiful fresh look created by San Luis Obispo's Kraftwerk Design.

Please visit, and tell us if you catch anything that's not working as it should! www.tablascreek.com



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and Picpoul Blanc. We saw essentially average yields in Mourvèdre, Counoise, Tannat, Marsanne and Vermentino. And we saw an increase in Roussanne.

The degree to which the yields correlate to the varieties that were out at the time of our April frosts is not surprising. All the low-yielding varieties except Picpoul were out. And all the normal-yielding varieties except Marsanne weren't. Roussanne, the only grape to show an increase, is both late-sprouting and notoriously frost-resistant.

Our average sugars at harvest continued their gradual decline. This is, we believe, partly due to the cool vintage (2011, like 2010, was one of the coolest on record in Paso Robles) but also due to the continuing capability of older vines to deliver fully ripe flavors at lower sugar levels.

The harvest was shorter than most. We began on September 20th and finished on November 9th, a span of 51 days. By contrast, 2010 harvest took 59 days, 2009 took 64 days, 2008 took 58 days and 2007 took 66 days. Our longest harvest ever, 2004, took a whopping 89 days.

The quality of the wines looks terrific. The whites are generally rich and expressive, with beautiful acidities thanks to the late, cool spring and the unusual lack of heat spikes during the growing season. The reds are deep in color and wonderfully aromatic.

In the cellar, we've bottled our 2010 *Côtes de Tablas*, and it will be released in March. We are currently blending the 2011 whites, and will begin blending the 2011 reds in the spring, even as we bottle our 2010s. You can stay current on the vineyard happenings by visiting our blog: tablascreek.typepad.com.

VINsider News: Spring Shipment

We are proud to announce the spring 2012 VINsider club shipment, highlighted by the 2009 *Panoplie*, the 2010 *Côtes de Tablas*, and the 2010 *Antithesis* Chardonnay. The shipment includes:

1 bottle of 2009 *Panoplie*, our elite red wine from our lowest-yielding vintage ever, available only to VINsiders. (95 points from Tanzer's IWC; 94-96 Rhone Report)

1 bottle of 2009 *Grenache*, displaying powerful Grenache fruit balanced by bright acids and chalky tannins (90+ points from Wine Advocate, 91 Tanzer's IWC)

1 bottle of 2010 *Cotes de Tablas*, the follow-up to our Wine Spectator "Top 100" 2009, showing the bright spiciness of Grenache balanced by the cool restraint of the 2010 vintage.

1 bottle of 2010 *Antithesis*, a crisp, minerally Chardonnay from an exceptionally cool vintage (90-92 points from Wine Advocate; 90 Tanzer's IWC)

1 bottle of 2010 *Grenache Blanc, a* varietal bottling of the zesty white Rhône grape that we introduced to California (91 points from Tanzer's IWC)

1 bottle of 2010 *Côtes de Tablas Blanc*, our showcase for Viognier, balanced by the acids and mineral of Grenache Blanc (90 points from Wine Advocate; 90 Tanzer's IWC; 92 James Suckling)

The spring 2012 shipment will ship from the winery Tuesday, March 20th. Will-call customers can pick up their shipments at the winery starting Friday, March 16th. Now is the time to make any updates needed to your information so the shipment can be delivered properly. You can update your membership information online, or if you have any questions about your membership please contact our wine club team at 805.237.1231 x39 or vinsider@tablascreek.com.

Recent Press

We're thrilled that two different Tablas Creek wines were recognized by the Wine Spectator and the San Francisco Chronicle in their influential year-end "Top 100" lists. The Spectator recognized the 2009 *Cotes de Tablas* (93 points, \$30) while the Chronicle recognized the 2010 *Patelin de Tablas Blanc.* This is the third consecutive year a Tablas Creek wine has been featured in the Wine Spectator's list, and the sixth time in the last seven years Tablas Creek has been so honored by the San Francisco Chronicle.

Wine & Spirits magazine awarded 2010 *Patelin de Tablas* 91 points and named it a "Best Buy"; the Wine Spectator gave it 91 points and its "Smart Buy" designation.

And finally, Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar rated 15 wines 90 or more points, including 93 points for the 2010 *Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc*, 2009 *Esprit de Beaucastel* and 2009 *En Gobelet*, and 95 points for the 2009 *Panoplie*.



We were once again honored to be a part of the Yosemite Vintners' Holidays, and spend three beautiful days in December admiring the frozen waterfalls in Yosemite National Park with Eli (age 6 1/2) and Sebastian (age 4).



WINE ORDER FORM FEBRUARY 2012

DISCOUNTS	WINE	QUANTITY	LIST V. PRICE	INdependent Price	VINSIDER PRICE TOTAL
Wine Club members receive a discount of 25% on orders of 12 bottles or	Featured Wine [10% Discount is reflected in price]				
more and 20% on orders of fewer than 12 bottles VINdependents receive a discount of 20% on orders of a case or more and 10% on orders of fewer	TANNAT 2009 (12 bottle limit)		\$36.00 ite Wines	\$32.00	\$28.00
than 12 bottles. Non-VINsiders re- ceive a 10% discount on orders of 12 bottles or more.	PATELIN DE TABLAS BLANC 20	010	\$20.00	\$18.00	\$16.00
SHIPPING Shipping included on orders that	Côtes de Tablas Blanc 2010)	\$27.00	\$24.30	\$21.60
include 6 or more bottles of <i>Esprit</i> and/or <i>Esprit Blanc</i> . CA*	Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc 2010(12 bottle limit)		\$40.00	\$36.00	\$32.00
1-2 bottles: \$10.00 3- 6 bottles: \$15.00 7-12 bottles: \$25.00	Vermentino 2010		\$27.00	\$24.30	\$21.60
CO, ID*,NM, NV*,OR, WA*,WY 1-2 bottles: \$15.00	ESPRIT DE BEAUCASTEL BLAN	c 2009	\$40.00	\$36.00	\$32.00
3-6 bottles: \$25.00 7-12 bottles: \$35.00	Roussanne 2009		\$30.00	\$27.00	\$24.00
AK, DC, FL, GA*, HI, IA, IL, KS*,	RED WINES				
MD*, ME*, MI*, MN, MO, NC*, NE*, NH*, NY*, OH*, SC*, TN*, TX*, VA*, VT*, WI, WV* 1-2 bottles: \$20.00	PATELIN DE TABLAS 2010		\$20.00	\$18.00	\$16.00
3- 6 bottles: \$30.00 7-12 bottles: \$45.00	Côtes de Tablas 2010		\$30.00	\$27.00	\$24.00
*State and local taxes apply LEGAL	Esprit de Beaucastel 2009 (12 bottle lin	nit)	\$55.00	\$49.50	\$44.00
Due to federal and state laws, we are permitted to ship to addresses in the	DESSERT WINES				
above states only. Wines may only be shipped to and received by adults at least 21 years of age. An adult	Vin de Paille 2006		\$65.00	\$58.50	\$52.00
signature is required at delivery for all shipped wine orders.	VIN DE PAILLE SACREROUGE 2		\$45.00	\$40.50	\$36.00
in an smpped whit orders.			Subtotal		
BILLING & SHIPMENT: EITHER			Additional Case Discount		
VINsider Name:			7.25% TAX (CA ONLY)		
VINsider Number:			Shipping		
Signature: Bill to my credit card on file Ship to my address on file		 on file	ORDER TOTAL		
O_R		on nic	□ I certify	that I am 21 y	ears or older.
BILL TO:	Ship To:		CREDIT	Card:	
Name:	Name:		MC/Visa/AmEx #:		
Address:	Address:		Exp. Date:		
City, State, Zip: City, State, Zip:			Name on Card:		
Email:	Email: Phone:		Signature:		

To order: return form to Tablas Creek Vineyard, 9339 Adelaida Road, Paso Robles, CA 93446 or **fax** 805.237.1314 :: **email** orders@tablascreek.com :: **order online** at www.tablascreek.com

FEATURED WINE: 2009 TANNAT

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 it, we offer the featured wine, for the designated time only, at a 10% discount. This discount is 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 2009 Tannat, featured from February 1 to February 29, 2012.



Production Notes: The 2009 *Tannat* is our eighth bottling of this traditional varietal from southwest France, originally native to the Basque region. The Tannat grape has intense fruit, spice, and tannins that produce wines capable of long aging.

Tasting Notes: The wine shows a dense purpleblack color and has a nose of blue and black fruit, mineral, smoke, game herbs (sage and juniper), and spice. The rich palate has flavors of black cherry, smoked meat, and bittersweet chocolate with big but ripe tannins and a long, smoky, generous finish

Suggested Food Pairings: The 2009 *Tannat* pairs beautifully with hearty meat dishes, such as braised short ribs or pork loin with apricots.

Wine Pairing: Braised Shortribs with Black Olives

This Haas family favorite is wonderfully comforting on a winter night. It pairs beautifully with the Tannat, or with any of our more powerful red wines. The flaming brandy, although not absolutely essential, burns up the excess fat and makes quite a difference to the flavor of the finished sauce.

Ingredients:

- 5 lbs. bone-in short ribs, trimmed of excess fat
- 1 tbsp. butter
- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- 4 tbsp. brandy
- 8 oz. red wine

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- 6-8 oz. chicken stock or water
- bouquet of thyme, parsley and bay leaf
- strip of orange peel
- 2 crushed garlic cloves
- 6 oz. pitted black olives, rinsed 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 300 degree oven for 2 to 2 1/2 hours, until meat is fork-tender, checking 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 at Home: Coming Events at the Vineyard and in Paso Robles

Sunday, February 1910:30 AMPaso Robles Rhone Rangers Experience

Join the 40+ members of the Paso Robles Rhone Rangers chapter for a fun and educational seminar, lunch and tasting on everything Rhone and Paso Robles. The day's events will take place at Windfall Farms in east Paso Robles. Tickets for the full slate of activities, including the seminar and lunch (10:30am-1:00pm) are \$75, and tickets for the Grand Tasting alone (1:30pm-4:00pm) are just \$25. Qualified trade will be admitted free to the Grand Tasting. For tickets or more information visit rhonerangers.org.

Saturday, March 17 Zin Summit X Far Out Wineries

10:00 AM

No, we don't make a Zinfandel, but we won't let that prevent us from enjoying the Zinfandel Festival! We'll be pouring at the annual "Zinfandel and More" seminar, organized by the Far Out Wineries. The event will include a walk-around tasting in the caves at JUSTIN winery, seminars with the winemakers, and an opportunity to meet the principals of the Far Out Wineries. The cost is \$55 per person. Tickets are now available; the event always sells out, so get your tickets soon. Call 805.237.0138 for reservations or more information.

Sunday, April 1 Spring 2012 VINsider Shipment Tasting Party

One benefit of the VINsider Wine Club is the opportunity, after each semi-annual shipment, to taste the wines that the shipment contains, learn what new projects we've been working on, and spend some unhurried time with the Tablas Creek winemakers and management. On Sunday, April 1st we'll be closing the tasting room to the public and dedicating it to our wine club members. VINsiders will reserve one of four visit time slots (10:30am, 12noon, 1:30pm, or 3pm) and we'll take each group through the results of the 2011 harvest, our new Biodynamic efforts, including our animal barn, and a tasting of the wines in the spring VINsider shipment, including the remarkable 2009 Panoplie. We will serve a small dish to pair with the whites and another with the reds. Open to VINsiders only (free) and their invited guests (\$15/person). Contact us at 805.237.1231 x34 or events@tablascreek.com for reservations or more information.

Saturday, April 14 Blending Seminar

10:00 AM

If you love Rhône varietals, join us for our annual blending seminar. Jason Haas and winemaker Neil Collins will lead a barrel tasting of the individual varietals (both reds and whites), and then will set you loose with graduated cylinders to produce your own blend. This event is extremely popular and sells out quickly. The cost is \$30 for VINsiders and \$40 for guests. Space is limited and reservations are required; contact us at events@tablascreek.com or 805.237.1231 x34.

Friday, April 20 Farm to Fork Earth Day Dinner

6:00 PM

Co-hosted by the Central Coast Vineyard Team and Artisan of Paso Robles. Join Winemaker Neil Collins and Founder Robert Haas as they welcome you to Tablas Creek for a unique dinner that will kick off the 2012 Earth Day Food & Wine Festival. When you arrive, you will tour our organic and polycultural vineyard, including the new animal barn, and learn what we are doing now to ensure the health and longevity of our vineyard for future generations. Then enjoy a remarkable multi-course dinner prepared by famed Executive Chef and owner of Artisan of Paso Robles, Chris Kobayashi. The local farmers and food purveyors who grew or raised the food you will be eating will join guests at the long family-style table overlooking Tablas Creek's vineyards, so you can meet them and learn their stories. Each course will, of course, be paired with Tablas Creek wines. Seating is limited to preserve the intimate nature of this dinner. Seats are \$175 and are sure to sell out. For more information, or to purchase tickets, call 805.369.2288 or visit www.earthdayfoodandwine.com.



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March 11, 2012 ٢

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Family Winemakers of California Tasting

March 9-10, 2012 California Barrel Tasting at MacArthur Beverage Washington, DC

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February 24-25, 2012

Naples, Florida

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February 29, 2012 Paso Robles Grand Tasting Tour Newport Beach, California www.pasowine.com 805.239.8463

Southwest Florida Wine and Food Festival www.swflwinefest.org

619.295.3939

March 20-21, 2012

San Diego, California

March 24-25, 2012 San Francisco, California www.rhonerangers.org 800.467.0163

April 12-15, 2012

s April 26-28, 2012

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Pebble Beach Food and Wine Festival Pebble Beach, California www.pebblebeachfoodandwine.com 805.369.2288

Rhone Rangers Grand Tasting

Winemaker Dinners at Wine Vault and Bistro

Tablas on Tour: National Events