

The WINE ADVOCATE®

TABLAS CREEK

2003	ROSE	ROSÉ	90
2003	ANTITHESIS CHARDONNAY	WHITE	(87-89)
2002	COTES DE TABLAS	RED	90
2003	COTES DE TABLAS BLANC	WHITE	(89-91)
2002	COTES DE TABLAS BLANC	WHITE	89
2002	ESPRIT DE BEAUCASTEL	RED	92+
2003	ESPRIT DE BEAUCASTEL BLANC	WHITE	(90-92+)
2002	ESPRIT DE BEAUCASTEL BLANC	WHITE	93

2003	GRENACHE BLANC	WHITE	90
2002	PANOPLIE	RED	95
2003	PICPOUL	WHITE	89
2003	ROUSSANNE	WHITE	(90-92)
2002	ROUSSANNE	WHITE	90
2003	VERMENTINO	WHITE	88
2003	VIIGNIER	WHITE	90

"The joint venture of the Perrin family of Châteauneuf du Pape's Château de Beaucastel and Robert Haas of the Vineyard Brands import company, Tablas Creek has stunning vineyards planted on steep limestone hillsides a few miles from the Pacific Ocean. The early vintages were somewhat mixed in quality, but things have settled down beautifully since 2000. This estate is now fashioning French inspired wines of impeccable quality, with considerable finesse and elegance made from the ripe concentrated fruit of California's Central Coast.

The white wines are varietal in character, and keep the oak well in check. While not as good as the 2002, the excellent, screw cap finished **2003 Vermentino** (no malolactic, all tank-fermented and aged) exhibits a crisp, refreshing, lemon/lime-filled personality with candied citrus and grapefruit-like notes. With medium body as well as a strong finish, it is a flexible, dry white to enjoy with an array of dishes over the next several years. Resembling a white Hermitage, the **2003 Picpoul**, which saw partial malolactic, offers up a lovely perfume of fino sherry intertwined with lemon rind, hazelnut, and oily citrus-like scents. Medium to full-bodied, long, and rich, with surprising power, it will only be available for purchase at the winery. It should drink well for 2-4 years. The outstanding **2003 Grenache Blanc** smells like a top-flight white Châteauneuf du Pape. Aromas of licorice, citrus, flowers, white currants, and raisins emerge from this dense, full-bodied yet remarkably vibrant, lively white. Sadly, there are only 250 cases of this 2003. It went through 100% malolactic fermentation, but was aged completely in neutral old wood. Impressive! Tablas Creek also does an impeccable job with **Viognier**. The **2003** is a non-malolactic offering aged 90% in neutral wood and 10% in stainless steel. Revealing hints of mint, licorice, honeysuckle, and white peaches, it is a medium-bodied, elegant, steely white with good delineation as well as a touch of minerality. Drink it over the next year. I guess a winery producing so many white wines can't resist the challenge of Chardonnay. Tablas Creek's **2003 Antithesis**, made from Dijon clones, exhibits Chablis-like notes of minerals, lemon zest, orange rinds, and honey in an earthy, medium-bodied format with a distinctive *terroir* character. Displaying no evidence of oak, it should drink well for 4-5 years.

The imitation southern Rhône wine blends are impressive. The elegant, full-bodied, dry **2002 Côtes de Tablas Blanc** (36% Viognier, 26% Grenache Blanc, 30% Marsanne, and 8% Roussanne) possesses loads of pineapple, honeysuckle, and candied lemons and limes. It cuts a full swath across the palate but has good vibrant acidity at the back end. Flexible with food, it should drink well for several years. Not yet bottled, the **2003 Côtes de Tablas Blanc** is primarily a blend of Viognier and Marsanne with some Grenache Blanc. Ripe, heady and rich, it offers up notions of melted licorice, pear, pineapples, and honey. It may develop more body and power than the 2002 Côtes de Tablas. Both the 2002 and 2003 Roussanne are impressive examples of this difficult to grow as well as vinify varietal. The **2002 Roussanne** (1,000 cases) was aged in equal parts stainless steel and wood. An exotic perfume of sealing wax, melted butter, peaches, pineapples, rose petals, and orange skins is followed by a full-bodied white with superb delineation, and a long finish. A distinctive taste of anise can be found in this noble, complex, exotic white. Similarly-styled, the medium to full-bodied, powerful, heady **2003 Roussanne**

exhibits more fruit in the nose and flavors. These intense dry whites are ideal to drink with seafood over the next 3-4 years.

A step up in price as well as quality is the **2002 Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc**. There are 1,700 cases of this beautiful blend of 70% Roussanne, 25% Grenache Blanc, and 5% Viognier. Aged in a combination of stainless steel and wood, it exhibits spicy, rose petal, and citrus oil notes as well as hints of licorice, honeysuckle, and tropical fruits. Full-bodied, powerful yet elegant, it should be consumed over the next 2-3 years. The **2003 Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc** is a blend of 68% Roussanne, 27% Grenache Blanc, and 5% Viognier. More tightly textured, with seemingly higher acidity, it is a powerful, broad, concentrated effort offering a smorgasbord of aromas and flavors, including candle wax, lanolin, pineapples and other tropical fruits, and rose water.

I am beginning to think that Tablas Creek's rosé is the finest made in California. While among the most expensive, it's worth it, in my opinion. The **2003 Rosé's** character reflects its blend (64% Mourvèdre, 28% Grenache, and 8% Counoise). A gorgeous perfume of sweet plums, cherries, currants, and flowers is followed by a full-bodied, concentrated, light plum/pink-colored rosé revealing amazing body and power (it carries its 14.8% alcohol beautifully). Finishing with dry, firm, powerful flavors, this serious rosé possesses the power and flavor of a big, dry red, yet its vibrancy and perfume make it oh, so seductive. Enjoy it over the next 6-12 months.

The **2002 Côtes de Tablas** is an outstanding example of a Côtes du Rhône blend from California's Central Coast. The good news is that there are 3,500 cases of this beauty. Made from 45% Grenache, 22% Syrah, 21% Mourvèdre, and 12% Counoise, this well-structured red possesses a peppery, red and black fruit-scented nose with hints of plums, allspice, and tobacco. Drink it over the next 5-6 years. The wood foudre-aged **2002 Esprit de Beaucastel** is a beauty. A 2,000 case blend of 57% Mourvèdre, 27% Syrah, 10% Grenache, and 6% Counoise, it is a dense, elegant offering revealing notes of hickory barbecue intermixed with tree bark, blackberries, new saddle leather, and kirsch. A wine of generosity and intensity, yet surprising elegance and definition for such a full-bodied effort, it should drink well for a decade or more. Tablas Creek's top red (their version of Beaucastel's other-worldly Hommage à Jacques Perrin) is the limited production (190 cases) cuvée called Panoplie. From a vineyard planted in limestone soils, the **2002 Panoplie** (80% Mourvèdre, 13% Grenache, and 7% Counoise) tips the scales at 14.8% alcohol. A black/purple color is accompanied by a huge nose of barbecue spices, blackberries, licorice, earth, pepper, sausage, and tree bark. Full-bodied and structured, with an expansive texture, hints of raspberries and currants persist across the palate with a kiss of licorice as well as kirsch. The long finish lasts for 50 seconds. This stunning offering is a great success. Like all Tablas Creek's reds, it was bottled without fining or filtration."

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