

SCORES

May 31, 2018

2017	Cotes de Tablas Blanc	White	92
2017	Esprit de Tablas Blanc	White	92-94
2017	Marsanne	White	92
2017	Patelin de Tablas Blanc	White	90
2017	Picardan	White	90
2017	Picpoul	White	90
2017	Vermentino	White	90
2017	Viognier	White	92
2016	Esprit de Tablas Blanc	White	93+
2016	Roussanne	White	92
2011	Esprit de Tablas Blanc	White	93
2006	Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc	White	95
2001	Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc	White	92
2017	Dianthus Rosé	Rosé	92
2017	Patelin de Tablas Rosé	Rosé	89
2016	Cotes de Tablas	Red	92
2016	Counoise	Red	88
2016	En Gobelet	Red	92+
2016	Full Circle Pinot Noir	Red	90
2016	Grenache	Red	89
2016	Le Complice	Red	89-91
2016	Panoplie	Red	93-95
2016	Patelin de Tablas	Red	90
2016	Tannat	Red	92
2015	Esprit de Tablas	Red	95+
2010	Esprit de Beaucastel	Red	95+
2005	Esprit de Beaucastel	Red	96
2000	Esprit de Beaucastel	Red	92



USA, CALIFORNIA, CENTRAL COAST: TABLAS CREEK & FOUNDER ROBERT HAAS 1927-2018

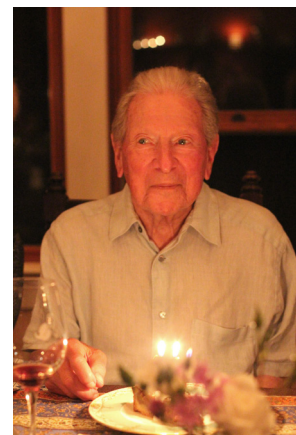
Robert Haas, who passed away in March of this year at the age of 90, will go down in history as a hugely important figure in the world of wine. Born in Brooklyn in 1927, Haas's family owned M. Lehmann, a liquor store that eventually became New York's leading fine wine merchant, and as a young man fresh out of college after military service, he immediately took an interest in the business. In the 1950s, on his initiative, Lehmann became the first store to offer Bordeaux futures for sale in the United States. Then, in 1954, Haas made his first trip to France to purchase wine and cultivate the firm's relationships with suppliers—including such notable estates as Domaines Henri Gouges, Ponsot and Dauvissat. In the 1960s, upon his father's retirement, Lehmann was sold, and Haas established an importing business in various guises before incorporating Vineyard Brands in 1973. As Robert Parker observes, Haas's career as an importer marks him out as a "true pioneer and visionary," and one of "the great early advocates of fine wine and estate bottled wines" in the United States.

Haas's career as an importer, however, was only one aspect of his seminal contribution to North American wine culture. It was a friendship formed with the Perrin family of Châteauneuf-du-Pape's Château de Beaucastel in the 1960s that sowed the seeds that would come to fruition in Paso Robles's Tablas Creek Winery three decades later. An early advocate for Californian wine, Haas was accompanied by Jean-Pierre and François Perrin on several of his trips to the Golden State, and together, as Jason Haas recalls, "they came away convinced that California was capable of making world-class wines and confused as to why no one was trying Rhône varieties in the clearly Mediterranean climate." When the search for a site that might be suitable got underway, climate and geology led Haas to western Paso Robles, with its limestone soils, warm days and comparatively cool nights.

It would be hard to overestimate the role that Tablas Creek—and its explicit endorsing connection with Château de Beaucastel—played in marking out Paso Robles as an important emerging wine region, and one with an affinity for the grape varieties of the Rhône Valley. In addition to putting Paso on the map, the vine genetics that Haas brought to the United States (derived from cuttings taken in the Perrins' vineyards) have benefited literally hundreds of American grape growers. Today, Tablas Creek's success seems so assured that it's easy to forget what a bold move its foundation represented in the 1990s. As Jason Haas puts it, Tablas Creek set out to "make wine from grapes that most Americans didn't know and couldn't pronounce and [to blend] these grapes into wines that didn't really have a category in the marketplace." Already in his 60s, Robert Haas must have always conceived of Tablas Creek as a legacy for the future. Its place at the nexus between the wines of France and the wines of the United States also makes it his most fitting monument.

The tasting notes accompanying this article cover the latest releases from Tablas Creek, as well as verticals of the winery's emblematic bottling, the Esprit de Tablas red and white, and its predecessor cuvée, the Esprit de Beaucastel. Tasted at the winery with Jason Haas a matter of weeks after his father's passing, it was a nice opportunity to reflect on Robert's life. It also underscored how gracefully these wines are evolving: while fully mature, the 2000 Esprit de Beaucastel red and the 2001 Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc were still drinking very well. In style, the red Esprit de Tablas has evolved the most, losing its wild, animal character toward the end of the 2000s in favor of a purer, cleaner expression of fruit. Today's vintages, produced from older vines and with the benefit of more experience, are likely to prove even more long-lived than those of yesteryear.

-William Kelley



REVIEWS

2017 Côtes de Tablas Blanc

92 points

“Wafting from the glass with notes of peach, anise and rose water, the 2017 Côtes de Tablas Blanc is full-bodied, textural and layered, with lovely balance and a long, flavorful finish. It’s a blend of 44% Viognier, 24% Marsanne, 20% Grenache Blanc and 12% Roussanne. 1,750 cases were produced.”

2017 Esprit de Tablas Blanc

92-94 points

“The 2017 Esprit Blanc de Tablas is very promising, revealing aromas of peaches, honeycomb, paraffin and spice, followed by a full-bodied, gourmand palate that avoids any excess. It’s a blend of 68% Roussanne, 17% Grenache Blanc, 7% Picpoul Blanc, 4% Picardan and 4% Clairette Blanche that will be bottled in December.”

2017 Marsanne

92 points

“The 2017 Marsanne reveals aromas of lemon oil, beeswax and fresh peach, followed by a full-bodied, textural and multidimensional palate balanced by gentle acids and concluding with a sapid but pure finish. This is Tablas Creek’s fifth standalone Marsanne, and it should be interesting to follow for a decade or more. Haas notes that Marsanne needs a certain vine age to be interesting, and it also benefits from a cooler year—two criteria that were met in 2017.”

2017 Patelin de Tablas Blanc

90 points

“The 2017 Patelin de Tablas Blanc wafts from the glass with notes of rose water, preserved citrus and Provence herbs. On the palate, it’s medium-bodied and flavorful, with succulent acids, a satiny texture and a pure finish. The 2017 is a blend of 44% Grenache Blanc, 29% Viognier, 12% Roussanne, 12% Marsanne and 3% Clairette Blanche. There were 4,200 cases produced, mostly from purchased fruit derived from Tablas Creek vine material.”

2017 Picardan

90 points

“Offering up aromas of apple skin, paraffin wax and lemon oil, the 2017 Picardan is an attractively bright but textural wine with a layered mid-palate and a tense, saline finish. This rare grape variety seems to stand very well on its own. Only 100 cases were produced from fourth-leaf vines.”

2017 Picpoul

90 points

“The 2017 Picpoul is an expressive, fruit-laden rendition of this variety, offering up aromas and flavors of honey, apples and peaches, followed by a glossy, generous palate with nice depth and cut, concluding with a pure, flavorful finish. Haas observes that replacing Viognier with Picpoul in the Esprit Blanc was transformative, and tasting it on its own, one can understand why.”

2017 Vermentino

90 points

“The excellent 2017 Vermentino offers up a fragrant and youthfully expressive nose of white peach, spring flowers and fresh apples. On the palate, the wine is medium-bodied, delicately glossy and pure, with succulent acids, bright flavors and a long, stony finish.”

2017 Viognier

92 points

“Wafting from the glass with a fragrant but understated nose of citrus blossom, fresh apricot, honey and spice, the 2017 Viognier is a medium to full-bodied, concentrated and intense wine, with lovely saline sensations (that Haas comments are what he seeks out in Viognier worth bottling on its own) and a penetrating finish. Follow this for the next handful of years.”

2016 Esprit de Tablas Blanc

93+ points

“A blend of 75% Roussanne, 18% Grenache Blanc and 7% Picpoul Blanc, the 2016 Esprit Blanc de Tablas reveals aromas of honeyed citrus, fresh peaches and white flowers. On the palate, it’s full-bodied, textural and layered, has good concentration and depth and is nicely balanced despite its rich, gourmand qualities. Haas feels that the estate’s Roussanne was especially successful this year, thus the 2016 contains the largest percentage of that grape in this blend’s history. Give it a few years in the cellar to unwind before following it for a decade or more.”



2016 Roussanne**92 points**

“Wafting from the glass with notes of apricot, subtle spice, beeswax and citrus oil, the 2016 Roussanne is a glossy, textural wine with good cut and balance. Elegant and understated in profile, it concludes with a saline finish. This is fermented and matured in foudres, demi-muids and barrels, seeing only around 10% new oak. Bottled in December, this is a comparatively reserved rendition of the Tablas Creek Roussanne, and I’d expect it to really unwind with a few years of bottle age.”

2011 Esprit de Tablas Blanc**93 points**

“The 2011 Esprit Blanc de Tablas is showing very well, offering up an expressive nose of marmalade, rose water, drawn butter and citrus blossom. On the palate, it’s glossy, medium to full-bodied and pure, with lovely energy and mid-palate depth, concluding with a chalky, youthful finish. While 2011 was a cool year in Paso Robles, it wasn’t by any means as challenging as it was on the North Coast, and this must be counted as a great success, still in its infancy.”

2006 Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc**95 points**

Sandwiched between the powerful 2007 and 2005 vintages, Jason Haas described the 2006 Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc as a “Goldilocks” vintage, and it’s evolving very gracefully. The wine opens in the glass with a lovely bouquet of beeswax, lemon oil, yellow plums and an exotic touch of petrol. On the palate, it’s medium to full-bodied and richly textural, with excellent balance and purity, chewy extract and wonderful integration. This is a superb white Rhône blend that’s drinking at its peak.

2001 Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc**92 points**

“The 2001 Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc was the debut vintage of this cuvée, and it’s still drinking well, offering up a mature bouquet of frangipane, drawn butter, preserved lemon and subtle bay leaf. On the palate, it’s medium to full-bodied, pure and stony, with a chalky, dry finish. It’s in no danger of imminent decline!”

2017 Dianthus Rosé**92 points**

“A Mourvèdre-dominated blend that nods to Tavel in color and style, the 2017 Rosé Dianthus reveals a deep-pitched bouquet of Provence herbs and earthy Griotte cherry. On the palate, it’s medium to full-bodied, layered and concentrated, with lovely cut and persistence, and it concludes with a long, sappy finish that shows some light, mouthwatering phenolic grip from its brief time on skins. This is a truly excellent rosé that ranks among the four or five best being produced in California, and it will be versatile at the table. 900 cases were produced, entirely from estate grapes.”

2017 Patelin de Tablas Rosé**89 points**

“An homage to the rosés of Provence that’s produced mainly from whole-cluster pressed Grenache, the 2017 Rosé Patelin de Tablas reveals a pretty nose of strawberry, watermelon and fresh herbs. On the palate, it’s glossy, medium-bodied and refreshing, with a crisp, pure finish. The blend contains 29% Mourvèdre, so I suspect it will see out two summers—though I doubt much will survive Thanksgiving.”

2016 Cotes de Tablas**92 points**

“A Grenache-dominated blend, the 2016 Côtes de Tablas wafts from the glass with an expressive bouquet of juicy cherries, Provence herbs, orange rind, licorice and sweet soil. On the palate, it’s medium to full-bodied, layered and textural, with a rich but succulent core of fruit, bright acids and fine-grained tannins. This is a really lovely rendition of the Côtes de Tablas that should age gracefully for a decade or more.”

2016 Counoise**88 points**

“The 2016 Counoise offers up aromas of strawberry, Griotte cherry, orange rind and herbs, followed by a supple, open-knit palate with fine, youthfully chewy tannins and a juicy core of fruit. Haas has described Counoise as the Rhône’s answer to Gamay, and I agree.”

2016 En Gobelet**92+ points**

“A blend of 39% Mourvèdre, 30% Grenache, 20% Syrah, 8% Counoise and 3% Tannat, the 2016 En Gobelet derives from head-trained vines. Haas notes that this method looks both back to the past, as head-trained vines are the heritage of old California and Châteauneuf-du-Pape, and forward to the future, as this is how all of Tablas Creek’s new plantings are being pruned. Wafting from the glass with notes of dried flowers, red cherry, rosemary and orange rind, it’s a medium to full-bodied, vibrant wine with lovely purity and a fine-grained, tautly chalky finish. This is one of the most mineral, racy reds in the portfolio, and while the first meaningful year of production was 2009, I can readily imagine this aging very gracefully.”



2016 Esprit de Tablas**92-94 points**

“The 2016 Esprit de Tablas contains more Syrah than has been the norm in recent years, a reflection of its unusually fine quality in this vintage. A blend of 46% Mourvèdre, 31% Syrah, 18% Grenache and 5% Counoise, the wine reveals youthful notes of strawberries, licorice and aromatic bark. On the palate, it’s textural, medium to full-bodied and savory, with fine-grained tannins, good balance and nice depth and dimension. It will be bottled in July and seems to be a very promising rendition of Esprit de Tablas.”

2016 Full Circle Pinot Noir**90 points**

“The 2016 Full Circle Pinot Noir is grown in Robert Haas’s Templeton Gap vineyard rather than the Tablas Creek estate in Adelaida. It’s a pretty wine, wafting from the glass with notes of red and black cherries, dried flowers, sweet spices and soil, followed by a medium-bodied, supple palate with a juicy core of fruit, fine tannins and a sappy finish. It’s an accomplished, well-made Pinot Noir from this warm vintage.”

2016 Grenache**89 points**

“The first standalone Grenache bottling since the 2013 vintage, the 2017 Grenache reveals a pretty bouquet of rose petal, kirsch and white pepper, followed by a medium-bodied, delicate wine that emphasizes the floral, expressive side of this variety (with the more powerful lots tending to go into the estate blends). Give it a year or two in bottle for its youthful structure to melt away and then enjoy it for the next handful of years.”

2016 Le Complice**89-91 points**

“A blend of 59% Syrah, 20% Grenache, 19% Terret Noir and 2% Roussanne, the soon-to-be-bottled 2016 Le Complice is a new cuvée from Tablas Creek. Offering up aromas of licorice, grilled meat, dried flowers and plummy fruit, it’s medium-bodied, fine-boned and savory, with lots of energy and youthfully chewy, savory tannins. It won’t be released until next spring, so I’m looking forward to checking in on it again to track its evolution.”

2016 Panoplie**93-95 points**

“A blend of 66% Mourvèdre, 25% Syrah and 9% Grenache, the 2016 Panoplie wafts from the glass with aromas of ripe cherry, lavender, licorice and dried earth. On the palate, it’s full-bodied, beautifully balanced and structurally authoritative, concluding with an intense, chewy finish. It’s an infant right now, but I’m looking forward to tasting it after its bottling in July.”

2016 Patelin de Tablas**90 points**

“The 2016 Patelin de Tablas will be released later this year, and it’s really beginning to become expressive, bursting from the glass with aromas of blackberry, raspberries, cracked pepper and Provence herbs. On the palate, it’s medium-bodied, supple and juicy, with a lovely core of fruit, youthfully chewy tannins and a nicely pure finish. Bottled under screwcap, fully 3,000 cases of this blend of 52% Syrah, 31% Grenache, 11% Counoise and 6% Mourvèdre were produced.”

2016 Tannat**92 points**

“The 2017 Tannat is lovely, wafting from the glass with a pure bouquet of red cherry, licorice and black olive. On the palate, it’s full-bodied, richly tannic and layered, with an ample core of juicy fruit and a long, chewy finish. Less aggressively structural than I expected, it will be a perfect match with fatty grilled meats.”

2015 Esprit de Tablas**95+ points**

“The 2015 Esprit de Tablas is a beauty, bursting from the glass with notes of rose petal, cracked pepper, Provence herbs, licorice and sweet red cherries. Medium to full-bodied, satiny and layered on the palate, it’s elegant and expansive, with an ample but vibrant core of fruit and a beautifully defined, fragrant finish. A blend of 49% Mourvèdre, 25% Grenache, 21% Syrah and 5% Counoise, this is Jason Haas’s favorite vintage of Esprit since 2006, and it’s easy to see why.”

2010 Esprit de Beaucastel**95+ points**

“Thanks to an early flowering and a cool season that saw harvest a month later than usual, the 2010 Esprit de Beaucastel spent six weeks longer on the vine than average. It’s really beginning to unwind, revealing complex aromas of dried herbs, sweet soil, black olives, cassis and cherry. On the palate, the wine is full-bodied, rich and velvety, with a lovely core of fruit that’s picking up plenty of savory nuance. It is balanced by bright acids and concludes with a flavorful finish that still displays some youthful chew.”



2005 Esprit de Beaucastel

96 points

The 2005 Esprit de Beaucastel is in a beautiful place, wafting from the glass with a wild and stunningly complex bouquet of grilled meat, plummy fruit, Provence herbs, rich soil and an exotic top note of Egyptian musk. On the palate, it's full-bodied, layered and rich, with juicy acids, fine-grained but chalky tannins, excellent energy and immense savory complexity. Evoking a youthful version of Beaucastel's fabulous 1981 vintage, this superb wine still has more than a decade of life ahead of it.

2000 Esprit de Beaucastel

92 points

"The inaugural vintage of this cuvée, the 2000 Esprit de Beaucastel is still drinking well, though in this era, it represented about two-thirds of the estate's production, as opposed to the more selective 15% or so that it represents today; the oldest vines were also merely six years old. The wine offers up a complex bouquet of cherries, currants, thyme, lavender and sweet soil. On the palate, it's medium-bodied, open-knit and savory, with chalky tannins and a sapid finish. This doesn't boast the concentration or intensity of later vintages, but it's a beautifully characterful and complete debut offering that should continue to drink well for another 5 or 6 years."

