

A New Wine Vibe In Paso Robles

by Leslie Gainer, Wine Editor

There's a new vibe in this unpretentious yet innovative wine region of Paso Robles. Just 10 years ago, driving into downtown felt like a sleepy scene from "Back to the future." Now, roll into town, and begin exploring the four blocks surrounding the Downtown City Park as you engage in leisurely culinary and conversational times with the winemakers, olive oil purveyors, fromagerie owners, and unique oeno-hip chefs at their downtown restaurants. You'll find yourself meeting a combination of third generation locals to ex-patriots from Paris and beyond.

If you've opted to take the train from L.A. or San Francisco, disembark and make the Anglim Winery tasting room your first stop in town. Situated in the 120 year old depot, your first taste merges the visual history of decades past, with the sensory palate experience of the innovative new winemaking from the area.

Continue out the station and cross Pine Street to the mod painted warehouse / airplane hangar like building which houses Hice Cellars. A third generation winemaker takes his father's love of Dago red, and grandfather's passion for Bordeaux, to create his own style using grapes from bio-dynamically farmed vineyards which are hand-picked, un-fined, unfiltered, and phosphate free. The 2005 Tres Blanc, '04/'05 Red Table Wine, and 2002 Vintners Blend are wines to linger over and cherish. You can also experience the love of Whiskey here - he's the official winery dog who will be happy to share the tri-tip and sausage which you may get to taste hot off the BBQ on a lazy Sunday at the tasting room.



Head up town to the square and few blocks surrounding the City Park and you have enough choices to take days to satiate. Restaurants, one of a kind boutiques, music venues, and theatres provide options for every form of entertainment, depending on your mood and energy level.

The process of selecting a place for dinner may make you want to extend your stay. Bistro Laurent is the namesake for French ex-patriot chef Laurent Grangien. When you become seduced by the exquisite, otherwise hard to find wine you've selected to have with dinner, step into his wine shop, and stock your cellar in a heart beat.

Villa Creek is another favorite of the local winemakers. The mission style building offers the sanctity of indoor or outdoor dining. The bar overlooks the park, and one of the spots for assimilating with the locals. The carne asada tacos, scallop ceviche, and premium margaritas are de riguer.

Pre-dinner wine tasting has become a walkable affair, now that over 10 tasting rooms and wine bars are within a two block radius of the square.

Vinoteca offers flights and full glasses of wines from the regions for a relaxed educational experience in terroir and varietal comparisons. Just around the corner on Park Street, is Edward Sellers where the setting and wine coalesce to transport you to a blissful place.

One block north, the 13th Street area is becoming it's own little sub appellation of activity. The Pianetta Winery Tasting Room is another multi-generation collaboration with Caitlan heading the tasting room operations, already an entrepreneur in her early 20's. The 2004 Sangiovese is as fascinating and engaging as the conversations with Caitlan.

Head back to Park Street, just the north side of 13th, and there is an enclave that includes We Olive -- a tasting room of locally produced olive oils and tapanades. In the courtyard behind is The Wine Attic – the spot for live outdoor jazz & blues, appetizers and wine on a Saturday night – and a wine shop by day.

Artisan is true to it's name when it comes to innovative cuisine. Chef Chris Kobayshi seamlessly creates in the world of sweet and savory. When he launched the restaurant just one short year ago – he kicked off the local palates with new ventures like a lobster pot pie and beignets with goat cheese filling. He is truly an artist in residence.

While it may be hard to envision your next meal after a decadent evening of wining and dining, when tomorrow comes, the downtown has a delightful range of options as you stroll and shop for gourmet foods for a picnic in the park or at the outlying



Half-way between LA and the Bay...

wineries. Try Odyssey Café for curried chicken salad, rotisserie chicken, and espresso brownies. Vivant Fine Cheese has a happily aromatic and flavorful selection, along with fresh baked breads. These days, there are over 100 wineries, and forty different varietals to choose from as you venture out to the winery tasting rooms. Maps are available at local inns & hotels, most wine tasting rooms, and from the Paso Robles Wine Alliance.

On any given day or night, chances are at one or more of the wineries you can experience a class in food and wine pairing, a reception with a local artist, an outdoor film, events like the Winery Music Awards with shows June-October, and in recent years past – you may even make it to the coveted drag show and after party at Clautiere Vineyard. Paso Robles is pre-papparazi cool – and the locals plan to keep it that way.

