



Daou Vineyards



Hotel Cheval

the closer-than-Napa wine getaway

PASO ROBLES

Despite an explosion of wineries, California's most down-to-earth wine country hasn't lost a lick of its charm.

WHY PASO?

Not long ago, Paso Robles was a tiny, quiet, country town. It's still quaint, but the historic center is a bustling little hub of all things wine-related. The streets are lined with olive oil shops, tasting rooms, and excellent restaurants, many started by L.A. transplants in search of a simpler life. The introduction of Rhône varietals about 15 years ago really put the region on the map. Now 200 wineries dot the area's bucolic hillsides. Call it the anti-Napa, where wine-makers embrace a spirit of collaboration and experimentation rather than pomp and circumstance.

GETTING THERE

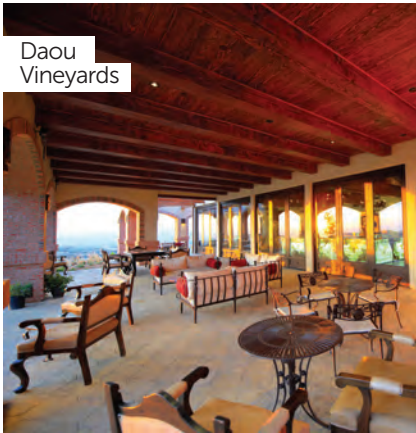
Paso Robles lies in California's Central Coast, about a six-hour drive from San Diego. Maps may point you to I-5, but we prefer taking 405 North to the more scenic Highway 101. The train is also a good option; Amtrak drops visitors off a mere three blocks from the heart of downtown.

STAY

Storybook-like **Hotel Cheval** (1021 Pine Street, hotelcheval.com) offers the most luxurious accommodations in Paso and is located just off the town's beautiful main square. The ivy-covered courtyard is lit by outdoor fireplaces, and on weekends, the hotel employs a s'mores butler whose sole



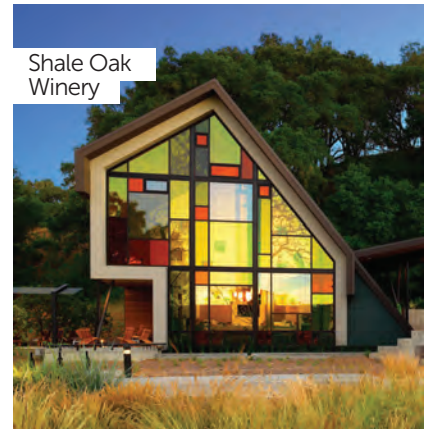
By Casey Chiotti



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Niner Wine Estates



Shale Oak Winery

job is making the delicious treat for guests. Choose your own homemade marshmallow—flavors have included hazelnut and cinnamon sugar.

EAT

Understated in décor, but not in flavor, **Il Cortile** (608 12th Street, ilcortileristorante.com) serves authentic, rustic Italian. Dishes are masterfully created by chef Santos MacDonal, who worked at many of L.A.'s most venerable Italian restaurants before making the move to Paso. His perfectionism is evident in everything from the homemade pasta to fall-off-the-bone lamb osso bucco. Locals also love **Artisan** (1401 Park Street, artisan-pasorobles.com), an American Bistro with a flair for fusion. **Thomas Hill Organics** (1305 Park Street, thomashillorganics.com) grows its own fruits and vegetables and serves an excellent Sunday brunch. For a quick bite while on the wine trail, stop by cute **Farmstand 46** (3750 Highway 46 West, farmstand46.com), which offers ready-made salads and gourmet sandwiches.

COMING SOON
Paso Robles will be gaining an influx of new hotel rooms with the addition of **The Ayres Resort and Spa**, set to break ground this fall.

WINERIES & TASTING ROOMS

For a glimpse into what makes the region's wine unique, head to **Tablas Creek** (9339 Adelaida Road, tablascreek.com), the winery credited with bringing Rhône varietals to

Paso. The winery, which uses all estate-grown grapes, is known for complex, balanced blends. However, 2010's harvest was so plentiful that single varietals typically used only for blending are available to taste. The pinot noir made with 100 percent Cou-noise grapes is delicious and unique.

The most spectacular winery view belongs to **Daou Vineyards** (2777 Hidden Mountain Road, daouvineyards.com)—a winery started by two brothers with ties to San Diego. Don't forget to check out the Spanish bell dating back to 1740.

Experienced French winemaker Stephan Aseo makes excellent inky reds like the Optimus—a Syrah, Cab, and Petit Verdot blend—at quirky **L'Aventure**. (2815 Live Oak Road, aventurewine.com) The eco-friendly **Shale Oak Winery** (3235 Oakdale Road, shaleoakwinery.com) is one of Paso's youngest. Shale pours affordable wines in its LEED-certified tasting room, while **Niner Wine Estates** boasts a beautiful outdoor patio, allowing you to take in the gorgeous rolling hills and lavender fields (2400 West Highway 46, ninerwine.com).

Ditch the car and taste at some of Paso Robles' great in-town tasting rooms.

Bodegas de Paso Robles (729 13th Street, bodegaspasorobles.com) pours award-winning Spanish varietals, while **Clay-house** (849 13th Street, clayhousewines.com) is known for easy-drinking reds and a yummy rosé. **Pithy** (1244 Pine Street, pithy-wine.com) offers tastings of its house-made old-fashioned sodas as well as wine. Enjoy a bento box of bites alongside your tasting.

WHAT'S NEW

Paso's first distillery started bottling earlier this year. **Re:find** (2725 Adelaida Road, refinddistillery.com) makes top-shelf spirits using saignée, the excess juice removed to improve wine quality before fermentation. Located inside Villicana Winery, it's very much a boutique operation. Bonus: owner and distiller Alex Villicana has plans to expand by planting a rye crop. Yes, that means bourbon is on its way.

