



## West Side, Paso Robles

It's perhaps not fair to Paso Robles only to talk about its side west of Highway 101. After all, some compelling wine is being made on the East Side (for example, AmByth). But most of the real action here is still to the west.

Conventional wisdom once had it that climate was the main divider between west and east, as proximity to the Pacific tends to be the determining factor. In Paso that's somewhat true, but things are more complicated. Besides a hillier topography and greater rainfall than the East Side, the most compelling aspect of the West Side is its soil, in particular the areas that have limestone, a rarity in California. This has become one of the defining features, allowing wines made in the warm and sunny climates to complement their rich, layered fruit with the fine bones and acidity that come from calcareous soils.

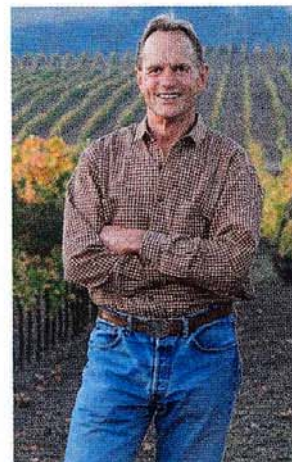
We see evidence of this in some of the region's standout vineyards: in the Rhône wines of Tablas Creek (founded with the Perrin family of Château Beaucastel) and the James Berry Vineyard, which provides fruit to celebrated vintners like Saxum Vineyards and Wind Gap; in the Bordeaux grapes of Justin Vineyards & Winery; and many other erratics such as the Ugni Blanc of Paix Sur Terre. These wines can sometimes be massive in body, titanic in fruit, but they do retain freshness due to the soils. I love the white wines from Tablas Creek, particularly the Esprit de Tablas Blanc (formerly Esprit de Beaucastel), a blend of Roussanne, Grenache Blanc and Picpoul, whose plump and rich character is thrillingly undercut by a streak of mineral dryness, with flavours that beguilingly speak of meadow flowers, white tea and honeycomb.

Photograph: Ann Cecil/Getty Images

**Tablas Creek, Esprit de Tablas Blanc, Paso Robles 2011** 19 (96)

£29.99 **AG Wines**

Full and honeyed with flavours of peaches and almonds, this Roussanne-based white is rich, but both leavened and anchored with a spine of minerality. **Drink** 2015-2018 **Alc** 13.5%



**Above left: Tablas Creek Winery is among those West Siders with a Californian rarity: limestone soils**

**Above right: the mix of clay-loam and gravel on which Sanford & Benedict Vineyard is planted gives 'animated' wines**

**Above: Vietnam veteran Richard Sanford realised the lie of the land in the Santa Rita Hills offered 'sensational' potential**