

TABLAS CREEK VINEYARD



The VINformer
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April 2010

State of the Vineyard

It is an incredibly green spring out here at the vineyard, after a very satisfactory winter. Since October, we've received almost 36 inches of rain (the most we've received in four years), and periods of extended cold ensured the vineyard went fully dormant. The rainy season began in October with a massive rainstorm that threatened harvest, and dumped nearly ten inches of rain on Tablas Creek, and continued with several big storms in December, January and February. The rain could not have been more needed, after three drought years.

The cover crop, composed of sweet peas, oats, vetch and clover, is amazingly lush, and the tall grasses dwarf the vines in places. That the cover crop is so thick and green is a testament both to the great rain and to the work that we've been doing with compost and fertilization over the past few winters. We spent the last two weeks of March in the vineyard, mowing and disking; it had been too wet earlier in the month or two to get tractors in between the rows.

We're looking forward to what locals are predicting will be one of the best wildflower seasons in memory. So far, lupines line the roads and mustard is starting to sprout between the rows, and the first California poppies are in abundance. Las Tablas Creek has been running merrily since January, and although its level has gone down a little we still see water seeping out of low-lying areas in the vineyard, so the ground remains saturated in lots of places.

In mid-March, we finished pruning. In addition to allowing us to shape the vine and control the next year's yields, pruning stimulates the vines to push earlier. So, in our

See **VINEYARD**, page 3



Tablas Creek moves cautiously toward biodynamics

by Robert Haas

Tablas Creek Vineyard, following the practices of our partners at Château de Beaucastel, had always intended to farm our Paso Robles property organically. That is to say, farming our vineyard without the use of systemic chemicals and relying on compost, cover crops and mineral amendments to improve the health of our chalky clay soils and grow healthy vines. We have farmed organically since our founding, and got our national organic certification in 2003.

For a number of years we have been stalking going one step further by starting to practice biodynamic agriculture, defined by Wikipedia as: "*a method of organic farming with homeopathic composts that treats farms as unified and individual organisms, emphasizing balancing the holistic development and interrelationship of the soil, plants, animals as a self-nourishing system without external inputs insofar as this is possible.*"

Biodynamic agriculture is regarded by many as the most sustainable modern ecological farming system. It has much in common with other organic approaches, such as emphasizing the use of manures and composts and excluding of the use of artificial chemicals, but differs from most organic techniques – which typically seek to replace chemical herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers with non-chemical alternatives – in focusing more on biodiversity and the holistic health of the farmed ecosystem.

In March, Neil Collins and Ryan Hebert – our winemakers/vineyard managers – joined me for a drive up to view the Napa Valley vineyards of Grgich Hills winery.

See **BIODYNAMIC**, page 4

Focus Varietal: Mourvèdre

Mourvèdre (more-vehd-ruh), with its meaty richness and wonderful longevity, forms the backbone of our *Esprit de Beaucastel*. Twenty-one acres of our vineyard are devoted to Mourvèdre, the most of any grape and over a third of our red acreage.

Early History

Mourvèdre is native to Spain, where it is known as Monastrell and is second only to Grenache (Garnacha) in importance. From the Spanish town of Murviedro, near Valencia, Mourvèdre was brought to Provence in the late Middle Ages where, prior to phylloxera's arrival in the late 19th century, it was the dominant varietal.

Phylloxera was particularly devastating to Mourvèdre. Whereas most Rhône varieties were easily matched with compatible rootstocks, Mourvèdre proved difficult to graft. Thus, when the vineyards were replanted, most producers chose to replant with varieties that were easier to graft, such as Grenache. For decades, Mourvèdre was found in France almost exclusively in the sandy (and phylloxera-free) soil of Bandol, where it is bottled both as a red wine and as perhaps the world's most coveted dry rosé.

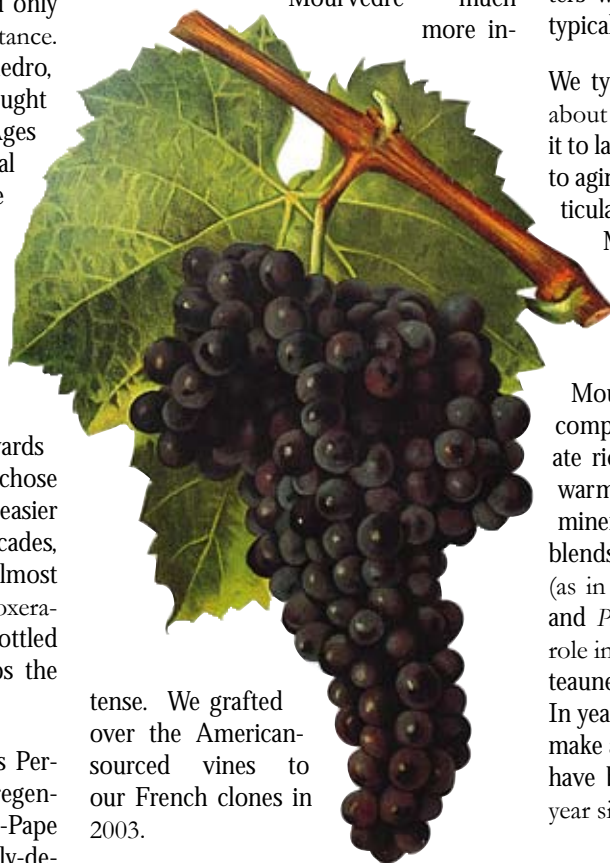
Shortly after World War II, Jacques Perrin of Château de Beaucastel led regeneration efforts in Châteauneuf-du-Pape by grafting Mourvèdre onto newly-developed rootstocks and making it a primary grape in the red Beaucastel wines. Beaucastel is still distinctive among Châteauneuf-du-Pape producers for using an unusually high percentage of Mourvèdre: up to 35% in some vintages.

Mourvèdre in the New World

Mourvèdre came to California as Mataro (a name taken from a town near Barcelona where the varietal was grown) in the mid to late 1800s. In California it was probably first established in Santa Clara County. More recently, the growing popularity of Rhône varieties and the importation of

high-quality clones have given the varietal a new life. Currently about 400 acres are planted in California.

Mourvèdre was one of the initial eight grape varieties that we imported into the United States. Simultaneously, we planted two acres of the California-sourced Mataro clone near the top of our vineyard. We vinified the French and American clones separately, and found the French Mourvèdre much more in-



tense. We grafted over the American-sourced vines to our French clones in 2003.

Mourvèdre in the Vineyard

Mourvèdre is a late-ripening varietal that flourishes in hot summer temperatures. As such, it is beautifully suited to our climate at Tablas Creek, and its lateness in sprouting makes it less vulnerable to spring frosts. Mourvèdre is fairly vigorous. The vines tend to grow vertically, making it an ideal candidate for head-pruning (the method traditional to Châteauneuf-du-Pape), although vines can also be successfully trellised. It is typically our last varietal harvested, often not until early November.

Mourvèdre berries are moderate in size, medium-dark in color, with very thick skins. These thick skins are important because with its extremely late ripening, Mourvèdre is often still on the vines at the time of the first rains of the fall.

Mourvèdre in the Cellar

Mourvèdre can be successfully fermented both in open-top fermenters with punch-downs, and in closed-top fermenters with pump-overs. In Bandol, it is typically fermented in whole clusters.

We typically press our Mourvèdre after about 10 days of fermentation, and move it to large, neutral barrels. It is well suited to aging in foudre, as it does not take particularly well to new oak. We blend our Mourvèdre lots in the summer after harvest, and return the blends to foudre for an additional year of aging.

Mourvèdre is a wonderful blending component; its structure and mid-palate richness complement the openness, warmth and acids of Grenache and the mineral, spice and tannin of Syrah. It blends successfully both in a leading role (as in Bandol, or our *Esprit de Beaucastel* and *Panoplie*) as well as in a supporting role in Grenache-based wines (as in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, or our *Côtes de Tablas*). In years when it gets fully ripe, it can also make a delicious single-varietal wine. We have bottled a varietal Mourvèdre each year since the 2003 vintage.

Flavors and Aromas

Wines made from Mourvèdre are intensely colored, rich and velvety with aromas of red fruit, chocolate/mocha, mint, leather, earth and game. They are well-suited to aging, although they are also often more approachable when young than the more overtly-tannic Grenache or Syrah.

Food Pairing Suggestions

Mourvèdre-based wines pair well with grilled and roasted meats, root vegetables, mushrooms and dark fowl such as duck: flavors that harmonize with the earthiness of the wine. 🍷

VINEYARD, from page 1

frost-prone region, we typically start with our latest-pushing grape varieties (which we're not worried will sprout too soon and get frosted). We leave our earlier-sprouting varieties, like Grenache and Viognier, for last. In addition to pruning the healthy vines, we take this opportunity to fill in gaps that have appeared in the vineyard blocks over the years. As it is rarely successful to plant a new vine in a row with other established vines, we extend canes from healthy vines to fill in the spots where vines have died or been killed in past years. This can equally well be used where one arm of a cordon has died, which we have seen happen in both Mourvèdre and Syrah over the years.



With budbreak (above, first seen on March 24), we have now turned our attention to frost mitigation, which will (quite literally) be keeping winemaker Neil Collins up at night for the next six weeks. Spring frosts are the biggest risk we face each year, and we have several systems in place to reduce the impact of frost on the grapes. Mowing alternate rows of cover crop allows for cold air to drain down the hillsides instead of settling near the vines. We also have our frost protection fans assembled and ready to go. The fans propel the cold air dozens of feet in the air by way of a short chimney. The cold air is then replaced by the warmer air just above the surface. And finally, the 40 foot high wind machine we installed to protect the coldest parts of the vineyard last year is ready for action. 🌱

Recent Press and Accolades

It has been a remarkable month of press for Tablas Creek. Paso Robles (and Tablas Creek) have been featured in travel stories in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, as well as in an Associated Press article that was picked up in hundreds of local newspapers.



In addition, the *Wine Spectator* featured a full-page feature article on Tablas Creek called "Pushing the Rhône Frontier" as a part of its March 31st issue focusing on American Rhône. In that article, the *Spectator* called the wines, "among the most elegant Rhône wines in California." The 2007 *Esprit de Beaucastel* was singled out for particular praise, with a score of 94, as was the 2007 *Grenache*, with a score of 92.

Additionally, general manager Jason Haas and Tablas Creek were the focus of a *New York Times* article by Jordan Mackay called "Local Versions of Europe's Everyday Wines", in which the author explored California's challenge to make wines of character around and below \$20. In the story, the *Côtes de Tablas* was mentioned as one of California's successes: "an excellent version of a red Cotes du Rhône".



And finally, Jason and Winemaker Neil Collins (and vineyard dog Millie) were featured in cover story in *Vineyard and Winery Management* magazine titled "Tablas Creek Sticks to its Guns". The article discussed the many impacts of Tablas Creek on American Rhône-style wines and the Paso Robles region.

We keep a complete listing of recent press on our Web site: <http://www.tablascreek.com/InTheNews.html>

2008 *Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc* Released

We're thrilled to announce the national release of the 2008 *Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc*. This eighth release of our flagship white wine is a product of the exceptionally intense 2008 vintage, and combines the richness of Roussanne, the generosity and freshness of Grenache Blanc, and the bright acids of Picpoul Blanc. It recently received 90-92 points from Robert Parker and 92 points from Stephen Tanzer's *International Wine Cellar*. As usual, VINSider wine club members received early access to this wine in the fall 2009 shipment.



Winemaker Neil Collins stirs the biodynamic soil preparation.

Grgich's vineyards have been farmed biodynamically for the last seven years. While there, we toured with Ivo Jeramez, Mike Grgich's nephew, who is in charge of their vineyard operations. Ivo and his vineyard manager graciously spent the whole day with us, took us around to their vineyards in American Canyon and Rutherford, new and old, and described exactly the processes that they employed and what they found to be the benefits. They are convinced that reasoned biodynamic farming has improved their soils and the health of the vines as compared to the traditionally farmed, chemically-treated vineyards of their neighbors.

When I first studied biodynamic farming six or seven years ago I admired it as a sort of existential philosophy but found it hard to believe that the homeopathic preparations and the use of the astrologic calendar prescribed could create a significantly better vineyard environment than our organic farming was already producing. My problem with the concept has been that many of the methods unique to the biodynamic approach are so esoteric. It is hard to believe that miniscule amounts of herbal and mineral preparations introduced into vineyard sprays and compost additives can affect anything.

Now, I am not so sure of my earlier conclusions. The list of wine properties who follow biodynamic practices is highly

distinguished, including Domaines de la Romanée-Conti, Leflaive, Dujac, Gouges, Huet, Domaine Weinbach, Zindt-Humbrecht, Leclerc Briant, Araujo, Frog's Leap, Joseph Phelps, Beckmen, Bonny Doon and over 500 others. And Ivo, for one, is convinced that his conversion from "chemical" farming to biodynamic farming has greatly improved the health of his vineyard.

There are two main homeopathic field preparations on which biodynamics is based. The first is horn manure: a humus mixture prepared by filling the horn of a cow with cow manure, burying it in the ground in the autumn to decompose and recovering it in the spring to use in a ground spray to increase microbiologic activity. The second is crushed powdered quartz, buried in a cow horn in the spring and recovered in the autumn, used in a mixture of water and sprayed on the vines as a fungicide.

In addition, biodynamics prescribes treatments to compost using various natural herbs and extractions, including yarrow blossoms, chamomile blossoms, stinging nettle, oak bark, dandelion flowers, valerian flowers, and horsetail. These natural herbs each have their own properties, but all have been used in traditional medicine (as well as farming) for millennia. The chemicals that the plants produce naturally mimic, in many cases, those contained in chemical herbicides, fungicides, pesticides and fertilizers. And there is good reason to suspect that they work; plants have had to battle with insects, fungus and other encroaching plant species for millions and millions of years, and have developed ingenious ways of protecting themselves and their environment.

Lunar guides to planting and harvesting are another aspect of biodynamic farming, and one which often comes in for skepticism. The phase, or synodic lunar cycle, is said to favor above-ground processes while the moon is waxing and below-ground processes as the moon is waning. The synodic cycle also controls tidal effects, which are well documented. These involve not only large bodies of water, but also the surface tension of liquids, which would explain why a vine pruned in a waxing cycle "bleeds" more than one

pruned in a waning cycle. It is worth noting, however, that these are guides to be followed as much as is practical, not iron clad directives, and biodynamics respects this.

Since Tablas Creek is farmed organically and estate bottled from our one contiguous vineyard, we are already most of the way to farming biodynamically. All that we have to do is prepare and use the prescribed homeopathic manures and composts in the vineyard and farm in harmony, as much as possible, with the astronomical calendar. So, this year we are going to start biodynamic farming on 20 acres and begin to weigh its affect on the health of the vineyard. If it is as successful as we hope we can expect to see stronger more disease and insect resistant long-lived vines.

How will all this affect the taste of our wines? We will see. Healthier and older vines are the aim. The environment in Paso Robles, with its enormous swings in temperature between day and night, its dry summers and cycles of drought, and its thin, rocky soils, is a high-stress one for grapevines. We are suspicious that these annual stresses will compromise the lifespan of our vineyard, and hope that by farming biodynamically, we will keep the vineyard healthy. If we can do so, the impacts on wine quality should be dramatic; older vines produce grapes with more intensity and more character of place. And, young or old, we expect that healthy vines will produce physiologically ripe grapes with the good balance of sugars and acids that make great and long lived wines. 🍷



WINE ORDER FORM

APRIL 2010

DISCOUNTS

Wine Club members receive a discount of 25% on orders of 12 bottles or more and 20% on orders of fewer than 12 bottles. Non-VINsiders receive a 10% discount on orders of 12 bottles or more.

SHIPPING: Flat-Rate Shipping (\$10 on all Shipments) for April

All month, any orders of any quantities of any wines can be shipped anywhere we ship for just \$10. And, as always, shipping is included on any orders that include six or more bottles of any of our flagship *Esprit de Beaucastel* wines.

We can ship to the following states:
AK, CA*, CO, DC, FL, GA*, IA, ID*, IL*, KS*, MI*, MN, MO, NC*, NE*, NH*, NM, NV*, NY*, OH*, OR, SC*, TN*, TX*, VA*, VT*, WA*, WI, WV*, WY

**State and local taxes apply*

LEGAL

Due to federal and state laws, we are permitted to ship to addresses in the above states only. Wines may only be shipped to and received by adults at least 21 years of age. **An adult signature is required at delivery for all shipped wine orders.**

WINE

WINE	QUANTITY	LIST PRICE	VINSIDER PRICE	TOTAL
FEATURED WINE [10% DISCOUNT IS REFLECTED IN PRICE]				
SYRAH 2006	_____	\$31.50	\$24.50	_____
VINSIDER EXCLUSIVES				
GRENACHE BLANC 2008 (6 bottle limit)	_____	\$27.00	\$21.60	_____
ROUSSANNE 2008 (12 bottle limit)	_____	\$27.00	\$21.60	_____
ROSE 2009	_____	\$27.00	\$21.60	_____
GRENACHE 2007 (6 bottle limit)	_____	\$35.00	\$28.00	_____
SYRAH 2007 (12 bottle limit)	_____	\$35.00	\$28.00	_____
PANOPLIE 2007 (4 bottle limit)	_____	\$95.00	\$76.00	_____
WHITE WINES				
ESPRIT DE BEAUCASTEL BLANC 2008 (12 btl limit)	_____	\$40.00	\$32.00	_____
CÔTES DE TABLAS BLANC 2008	_____	\$25.00	\$20.00	_____
ANTITHESIS 2008	_____	\$35.00	\$28.00	_____
ESPRIT DE BEAUCASTEL BLANC 2007	_____	\$40.00	\$32.00	_____
RED WINES				
CÔTES DE TABLAS 2008	_____	\$25.00	\$20.00	_____
ESPRIT DE BEAUCASTEL 2007 (12 bottle limit)	_____	\$50.00	\$40.00	_____
MOURVÈDRE 2007	_____	\$35.00	\$28.00	_____
EN GOBELET 2007 (12 bottle limit)	_____	\$40.00	\$32.00	_____
TANNAT 2007	_____	\$35.00	\$28.00	_____
ESPRIT DE BEAUCASTEL 2006 (12 bottle limit)	_____	\$50.00	\$40.00	_____

SUBTOTAL _____

DISCOUNT _____

8.25% TAX (CA ONLY) _____

SHIPPING _____

ORDER TOTAL _____

I certify that I am 21 years or older.

BILLING & SHIPMENT: EITHER

VINsider Name: _____

VINsider Number: _____

Signature: _____

Bill to my credit card on file Ship to my address on file

OR

BILL TO:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Email: _____

SHIP TO:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

CREDIT CARD:

MC/Visa #: _____

Exp. Date: _____

Name on Card: _____

Signature: _____

FEATURED WINES: 2006 SYRAH

Wines are organic products and, as such, have their own life cycles. At the vineyard, we taste through our cellar every month and see which wines are showing particularly well given the season and the wines' own inherent evolution. As a way of sharing these observations with you, we will periodically spotlight one of our wines. To encourage you to try these great wines, we are offering the featured wine, for the designated time only, at a 10% discount. This discount is granted above and beyond any other discounts that might apply, such as for case purchases or wine club membership.

The Featured Wine program continues with the 2006 *Syrah*, featured from April 1 to April 30, 2010.



Tasting Notes: The 2006 *Syrah* is Tablas Creek's fourth national release of this classic Rhône varietal. The wine displays the character of the Syrah grape exuberantly and elegantly, with classic flavors of bacon fat, wood smoke, blackberry and mineral. The 2006 *Syrah* has lost some of its baby fat (and baby tannin) and is maturing into a remarkable wine, with an ideal balance of fruit, mineral, spice and structure. We expect it to drink well for at least the next decade.

Suggested Food Pairings: The 2006 *Syrah* is a wonderful food wine. It is particularly good with red meats, such as grilled steaks, but it also delicious when paired with spicy sausages or cassoulet.

Wine Pairing: Fish with Fennel

This simple Mediterranean fish preparation pairs well with Grenache Blanc or Roussanne, or blends of those. Try it with one of the fresh, vibrant whites from 2008: *Grenache Blanc*, *Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc*, *Roussanne* or *Côtes de Tablas Blanc*.

Ingredients:

1 lb. meaty, flaky white fish (like cod)
1 bulb fennel, sliced
1 shallot, sliced
4 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
4 small plum tomatoes, peeled and diced
2 tbsp olive oil
1 1/2 cups dry white wine
juice of 1/2 lemon
1 large sprig parsley, chopped
fresh-ground black pepper
salt

Heat olive oil over medium heat in a large saucepan.

Add garlic and saute for 2 minutes.

Add wine and turn heat up to medium-high. Boil for 3 minutes.

Add tomatoes and boil for 2 minutes.

Submerge fillets in bottom of saucepan; add salt and pepper to taste.

Cover, reduce heat to low and cook until fish flakes easily -- about 10 minutes.

Add lemon juice, and correct seasonings.

Ladle into bowls, top with parsley, and serve with crusty bread for dipping.

Tablas at Home: Coming Events at the Vineyard and in Paso Robles

Saturday, April 10
Blending Seminar

10:00 AM

If you love Rhône varietals, join us for our annual blending seminar. Jason Haas and winemaker Neil Collins will lead a barrel tasting of the individual varietals (both reds and whites), and give you the opportunity to get to know each varietal on its own and what each contributes to a blend. You'll then be set loose with graduated cylinders to produce your own blend, and compare it to our signature *Esprit* and *Esprit Blanc* blends. The cost is \$30 for VINSiders and \$40 for guests.

Friday, May 21
Winemaker Dinner at Cass House

7:00 PM

We're kicking off wine festival weekend with a Friday evening winemaker dinner at the wonderful Cass House Inn & Restaurant in Cayucos, CA. The five-course, six-wine dinner is just \$96, and limited to forty reservations. For reservations, or more information, contact Cass House at 805.995.3669.

Sunday, May 23
Wine Festival Open House

10:00 AM

On the Sunday of Wine Festival, we will be welcoming Chef Jeff Scott back to the vineyard for our now annual salmon brunch and *Rosé* launch. Come early on Sunday and enjoy different cured salmons, homemade bread and salads, and pair them with the newly released *Rosé*. We will serve the food from 10:00 am until it's gone, but we don't expect it to last past 11:30am, so come early! This event is \$20 for VINSiders and \$30 for guests (the \$30 includes the tasting fee for non-VINSiders). Plus, take home the 2009 *Rosé* at a 5% discount that day only. No reservations are necessary.

Sunday, July 18
Vertical *Esprit* Tasting and Lunch

11:00 AM

One of the highlights of our year is the day when we get together with our winemaking team to taste back through all the back vintages of the red *Esprit de Beaucastel*. (We've written up the results of these tasting for our blog twice, in 2006 and again in 2009.) For the first time, we open up this opportunity to our fans, and will taste all eight vintages of *Esprit de Beaucastel*: 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008. We'll conclude the event with a lunch paired for the wines, and will make available small quantities of the library *Esprit* wines for sale that day to guests. The cost is \$55 for VINSiders and \$70 for guests, and will include lunch immediately following the tasting.

Friday, July 16
Festival Mozaic *Notable Encounter*
Hearst Castle

6:30 PM

This special event, in conjunction with Festival Mozaic, pairs sumptuous hors d'oeuvres and Tablas Creek wines with a Pacific sunset on the glorious Neptune Terrace of Hearst Castle, followed by a concert showcasing works written while William Randolph Hearst was in residence at the Castle (1919-1947). Coach transportation to San Simeon from San Luis Obispo and North County locations is available for an additional charge. Tickets are available to Festival Mozaic Series subscribers. For more information, or to buy tickets, contact Festival Mozaic at festivalmozaic.com or 805.781.3009.

Saturday, August 21
Pig Roast

6:00 PM

At Tablas Creek, we love terrific parties, especially when they involve great food, charming company, and, of course, wonderful wines. To that end, we're hosting our annual pig roast to celebrate the beginning of harvest and the newly released 2008 *Mourvèdre*. Join us for roast pork with all the accompaniments. This is a casual outdoor party, just right for summer in the vineyard. The cost is \$65 for VINSiders and \$75 for guests. Space is limited and reservations are essential -- this is one of our most popular events and sells out quickly!

To make reservations or get more information about any of these events, please contact Nicole Getty at 805.237.1231 x39, or events@tablascreek.com.

Tablas on Tour: National Events

🍷 April 15-18, 2010

Texas Hill Country Food and Wine Festival
Austin, Texas
www.texaswineandfood.org
512-249-6300

🍷 April 17, 2010

Earth Day Food & Wine Festival
Paso Robles, California
www.earthdayfoodandwine.com
805.369.2288

🍷 April 29 - May 1, 2010

Hospice du Rhône
Paso Robles, California
www.hospicedurhone.org
805.784.9543

🍷 May 15, 2010

A Culinary Evening with California Winemasters
Los Angeles, California
www.californiawinemasters.org
323.655.8525

🍷 May 21-23, 2010

Paso Robles Wine Festival
Paso Robles, California
www.pasowine.com
805.239.8463

🍷 June 11-12, 2010

Smithsonian "Savoring Sustainable Seafood",
sponsored by the Rhone Rangers
Washington, DC
www.residentassociates.org
202.633.3030

🍷 June 26, 2010

Santa Barbara Wine Festival
Santa Barbara, California
www.sbwinefest.blogspot.com
805.682.4711 x443

🍷 July 13-14, 2010

Rhone Rangers Tasting
Seattle, Washington
www.rhonerangers.org
800.467.0163

🍷 www.tablascreek.com 🍷 phone: 805.237.1231 🍷 fax: 805.237.1314 🍷 email: info@tablascreek.com 🍷



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9339 Adelaida Road
Paso Robles, CA 93446



TABLAS
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VINEYARD
