



Paso Robles: Looking at the 2018s

by JEB DUNNUCK



SEPTEMBER 3, 2020

This report wraps up the 2018 Central Coast coverage and focuses on Paso Robles and San Luis Obispo County. This region has been on an incredible qualitative roll over the past decade, and 2018 is another beautiful vintage that is unquestionably in the same league as 2012 through 2017, all of which are loaded with beautiful wines.

Looking at the growing season for Paso Robles, 2018 saw a cooler start and end to the growing season, with a warmer than average July and early August. If you add up the growing degree days, it actually shows a warmer year, but the cooler end of August and September drove the style of these wines, and the result is plenty of concentration with terrific aromatics, higher acidities, and slightly lower alcohol levels. This is a great combination for a warm region like Paso Robles. The wines are **darker, structured, and lively, with beautiful purity of fruit**, yet still have ample concentration and classic Paso Robles opulence. There were no heat spikes or notable rain events during harvest, and winemakers were able to harvest at will. The result is that while the vintage character is certainly present in the wines, the winemaker and house style is also front and center, making it slightly hard to make sweeping statements on the wines. For example, the 2018s from Stephan Asseo's l'Aventure are structured and in need of bottle age, while the 2018s from Justin Smith's Saxum Vineyard have loads of upfront charm and accessibility. Nevertheless, as a whole, I think this will be a vintage that's going to reward 2-3 years of bottle age and they should age beautifully. In addition, yields are up there (similar to 2017), so there should be plenty of wine to go around.

Lastly, while I try to keep these reports regionally focused, there is always some overlap, and this report includes a handful of releases from throughout the Central Coast and Santa Barbara County.

Paso Robles: California's Most Dynamic Region?

The argument could be made that Paso Robles is the most dynamic and up and coming region in California today. The number of new and exciting producers is hard to keep up with, they've created numerous new AVAs focused on climate and soils, new vineyards are being planted regularly, and they continue to experiment with new varieties. This drive and focus shows in the

wines. In addition, Paso Robles's culture of being open and incredibly supportive of one another is unique in the world of wine and, in my view, unquestionably has helped propel Paso Robles into the list of world-class wine regions.

I've tried to group producers below to give some high-level guidance, but this is far from an inclusive list.

Benchmark Producers:

Adelaida, Alta Colina, Booker, Epoch, Herman Story, l'Aventure, Law Estate, Linne Calodo, McPrice Myers, Saxum, Tablas Creek, TH Estate, Torrin, and Villa Creek

Up and Coming Producers:

Aaron, Benom, Bodega de Edgar, Brencon, Caliza, Clos Solene, Daou Vineyards, Downstream, Fulldraw Vineyard, Jada Vineyard, Ledge, Leverage, Lost Blues, My Favorite Neighbor, Nicora, ONX Wines, Paix Sur Terre, Patrimony, Pec & Burl, Pharaoh Moans, Seduire, and Turtle Rock

The 2019s

Looking ahead at the 2019s, this was another cooler year and the wines show plenty of similarities to the 2018s, with vibrant, fresh, yet still concentrated profiles. I'll review these in-depth next year, but Paso Robles's string of superlative vintages doesn't appear to be in any danger of being broken.

As always, happy hunting!

Jeb

<u>Vintage</u>	<u>Wine</u>	<u>Color</u>	<u>Rating</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Reviews</u>
2017	<u>Calera Pinot Noir Jensen Vineyard</u>		99	\$100	1

My favorite in the lineup, the 2017 Pinot Noir Jensen Vineyard is stunning in every way. Gorgeous black raspberry fruits, lots of floral, scorched earth, and sappy herb aromatics, medium to full-bodied richness, flawless balance, and a great finish all make for one of the most captivating Pinot Noirs in the vintage. It's brilliant today yet should easily evolve for 15 years or more.

<u>Vintage</u>	<u>Wine</u>	<u>Color</u>	<u>Rating</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Reviews</u>
2017	<p>Calera Pinot Noir Mills Vineyard</p> <p>The 2017 Pinot Noir Mills Vineyard is slightly deeper colored (it's still translucent) and offers a gorgeous nose of ripe redcurrants, cherries, spring flowers, sappy forest floor, and ample spice nuances. With medium to full body, beautiful depth of fruit, and a seamless texture, it's another stunning Pinot Noir from this team that I'd be happy to have in the cellar.</p>		97	\$75	1
2017	<p>Calera Pinot Noir Selleck Vineyard</p> <p>More sappy herbs, spring flowers, forest floor, and assorted red fruits emerge from the 2017 Pinot Noir Selleck Vineyard, which has a bloody, iron-like character, medium to full-bodied richness, beautiful tannins, and flawless balance. It's a rich, concentrated, yet already complex beauty to drink over the coming 10-15 years.</p>		95+	\$100	1
2017	<p>Calera Pinot Noir Reed Vineyard</p> <p>Sappy herbs, flowers, forest floor, sour cherries, and raspberry notes all emerge from the 2017 Pinot Noir Reed Vineyard. This lively, elegant Pinot Noir has nicely integrated acidity, beautiful balance, and a great finish.</p>		95	\$75	1

<u>Vintage</u>	<u>Wine</u>	<u>Color</u>	<u>Rating</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Reviews</u>
2017	<p><u>Calera Pinot Noir De Villiers Vineyard</u></p> <p>Deeper ruby, the 2017 Pinot Noir De Villiers Vineyard reveals more black raspberry, saffras, tea, and spicy notes. It's medium-bodied, with a juicy, elegant style and a great finish.</p>		95	\$75	1
2017	<p><u>Calera Pinot Noir Ryan Vineyard</u></p> <p>Lots of dried herbs, leather, redcurrants, and a touch of saffras emerge from the medium-bodied 2017 Pinot Noir Ryan Vineyard. With a rounded, elegant texture, beautiful acidity, and a terrific, lengthy finish, it opens up nicely with time in the glass and is just a complex, nuanced beauty to enjoy over the coming decade.</p>		94	\$75	1
2017	<p><u>Calera Pinot Noir Muns Vineyard</u></p> <p>Clean strawberry and mulberry fruits as well as lots of flower notes emerge from the 2017 Pinot Noir Muns Vineyard, which is medium-bodied and has an attractive elegance in its texture, light tannins, and great finish. A beautiful, elegant wine, it will keep for a solid decade.</p>		93	\$50	1
2017	<p><u>Calera Pinot Noir Central Coast</u></p> <p>The 2017 Pinot Noir Central Coast comes from multiple vineyards throughout the Central Coast and has a touch of the elegance and purity found in the top cuvées. Impressive black raspberry fruits, white flowers, spice, and a subtle salty minerality all emerge from the glass, and it's beautifully textured,</p>		93	\$30	1

Vintage **Wine** **Color** **Rating** **Price** **Reviews**

balanced, and just a joy to drink. It's well worth its going rate and should be snatched up by readers.

2018 [Calera Chardonnay Mt. Harlan](#) 92 \$55 1

The 2018 Chardonnay Mt. Harlan is a solid step up over the Viognier and offers a classy bouquet of spiced apple, white flowers, and brioche, with a terrific sense of chalky minerality. Medium-bodied and elegant, with a vibrant, pure texture, it's beautifully done and a serious Chardonnay to enjoy over the coming 7-8 years.

2017 [Calera Chardonnay Central Coast](#) 88 \$25 1

A larger production cuvée from this estate, the 2017 Chardonnay Central Coast has juicy tropical notes as well as a touch of brioche, medium body, nicely integrated acidity, and a clean, undeniably delicious style ideal for drinking over the coming year or three.

2017 [Calera Viognier Mt. Harlan](#) 87 \$35

Brought up in a mix of neutral barrels, stainless steel, and concrete, the 2017 Viognier Mt. Harlan reveals a medium gold color as well as attractive citrus and pineapple aromatics, medium-bodied richness, and a lively, elegant texture. Drink it over the coming year.