

MEET 10 SEXY ITALIANS

If you don't already have plans for tonight, why not try 10 approachable wines from Italy, plus hors d'oeuvres — all for \$20. From 6 to 7:30 p.m. at 100 King Restaurant, 100 King St. in Old Town Alexandria. Tickets at the door; RSVP online at www.clubbv.org.

SCOTT GREENBERG *Vine Guy*

What's in a (nām)?

The wines of Paso Robles

I am sitting at dinner with a half-dozen winemakers from Paso Robles, in town for a whistle-stop wine tasting, debating the pronunciation of the up-and-coming central California wine region. We all agree on how to say the first part (pass-oh), but it's the second word that's the

subject of profound amusement. One of the winemakers is insisting that the "Robles" part is pronounced rrow-blayss, rolling the r several times for good measure and carrying the "s" on the end for an extra second. Definitely a trendy interpretation.

Another good-natured vintner is insisting that it's pronounced row-bless. Period. Not open for debate. A third is siding with my interpretation of row-bulls. It isn't until I point out that I actually grew up in the central valley of California that heads start nodding in unison when I say that those in the know simply call it "Paso."

No matter what you call it or how you pronounce it, Paso Robles is not only on the winemaking map, it is starting to define it. Noted wine critic Robert Parker Jr. went as far as to say in his August 2004 newsletter that, "It is not too far fetched to say that within a decade all of these sectors (in Paso Robles) will be as prestigious and hallowed a viticultural region as Napa and Sonoma."

High praise, indeed.

Located just about 200 miles north of Los Angeles — and nearly equally as far south from San Francisco on California's central coast — Paso Robles is the largest geographic wine region in the state. Established in 1983 and modified in 1997, its rolling hills and flatlands play host to more than 26,000 acres of vineyards planted to 40 different grape varieties. Almost 100 wineries have come to Paso to take advantage of the significant diurnal temperature variation (the change in temperature between the warmest and coolest parts of the day), assorted soils and diverse micro climates.

Although cabernet sauvignon and merlot thrive in Paso, the central coast is gaining a reputation for French Rhone varieties, including syrah, viognier, roussanne and marsanne. There's even a strong zinfandel and petite sirah following in the region.

Here are a few of my favorites from the tasting. Some of these wines should be avail-

able in local wine shops, but if you have difficulty finding one, ask your favorite retailer to track down a bottle or two for you. Retail prices are approximate.

2006 Anglim Rosé Winery (\$15)

I love a good rosé, and with summer around the corner, I am going to stock up on this one. Made from 38 percent grenache, 33 percent syrah, 15 percent mourvedre and 14 percent viognier, this wine possesses plenty of pretty strawberry, bright plums and cherry/berry flavors to keep your tongue happy. The abundant acidity keeps the flavors light and bright and the finish crisp and clean. I can't wait to serve this as a well-chilled aperitif this summer.

2005 Orchid Hill Vineyard Viognier (\$21)

Wow — what a viognier. A seductive nose of acacia and nectarines leads to palate-pleasing flavors of creamy peaches and tropical fruits. A touch of wet stone on the rich, full finish lends remarkable depth and would pair well with simply grilled mahi mahi and a side of mango relish.



2005 Tablas Creek Vineyard "Côtes de Tablas Blanc" White Rhône Wine (\$22)

This traditional Rhone-style blend features viognier, roussanne, marsanne and grenache blanc. Its aromatic nose highlights scents of acacia flowers and wet stones, while the palate reveals lush flavors of apricot, peach, nectarines and hints of mineral underpinnings. Ample acidity keeps the fruit in check and provides a clean finish. A nice match for grilled halibut and roasted peppers.

2005 The Midlife Crisis Winery Zinfandel (\$21)

I love the name of this winery, and I am a fan of its zinfandel as well. Notes of dark strawberries and red plums tease the nose while full-throttled flavors of raspberry, red cherries and more plums satisfy the palate. Hints of black pepper sneak in on the medium finish and would make this a great choice to enjoy with lamb shish ka-bob.



2004 Edward Sellers Vineyards and Wines Cuvée des Cinq, Red Rhone Blend (\$42)

This limited bottling is made from a blend of grenache, mourvedre, syrah, counoise and cinsault. Scents of blackberry jam leap out of the glass and demand your attention. Wonderful, hefty notes of cherries, strawberries, tobacco and pepper play over the length of the tongue while the earthy, meaty finish is just looking for a leg of lamb to keep it company.

2005 Four Vines Winery "Peasant" Red Table Wine (\$33)

In wine speak, this is a "GSM" indicating a blend of grenache, syrah and mourvedre. And in this case, a splash of counoise for fun. Rich black plums and blackberry cobbler dominate the nose and the palate. Additional flavors of cherry cola and warm black licorice join in on the long, elegant finish and urge you on to your next sip. Great structure and balance make this wine a red-meat eater's dream — porterhouse, medium rare.



Do you have a favorite royalty of wine? E-mail me at scott@vineguy.com.

