

# The Wine Corner

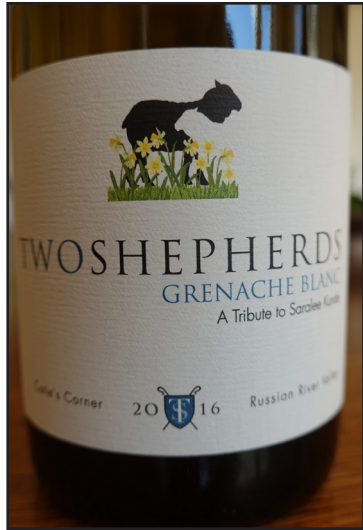
## Best of the Rhone Rangers

By Pierre DuMont

They're back in the saddle again. The Rhone Rangers is a trade organization of California wineries that feature wines made from the grapes of France's Rhone region – Syrah, Petite Sirah, Grenache, Carignan, Mourvedre for red wines Viognier, Marsanne, Roussanne, Grenache Blanc for whites. They used to put on a big tasting in the Bay Area but this year the event was held in Paso Robles – home to many of the best Rhone producers.

They gathered at the convention center where nearly 80 wineries poured over 300 different wines. For those getting tired of Cabernet, Zinfandel and Chardonnay, these wines are a treat. They are also often better values than California's more famous varietals. While so many excellent wines were poured, at the end of the day, the following wines were the most memorable of the tasting. They represent the cream of the crop of America's Rhone style wines.

the Mourvedre. love the overall precision here and the big round mouth-feel. The finish is long and satisfying. The wine is delicious now but will age for a decade.



• **2016 Two Shepherds Grenache Blanc**

Nice to see this relatively rare grape bottled on its own. Light gold in color it has fantastic aromas and flavors of tropical fruits, spice box and mineral to go with a medium-bodied, fresh and lively palate feel that builds in richness through the mid palate and finish. A perfect aperitif.

• **2017 Cypher "Phoenix"**

This is a blend of Syrah, Petite Sirah and Mourvedre. It is a big rich effort that's loaded with black fruits, chocolate, licorice and leather. This flows to a full-bodied, voluptuous wine that has solid mid-palate concentration and outstanding length. This is built to last a long time.

• **2016 Kaleidos "Morpheus"**

This is roughly two thirds Syrah and one third Grenache. It has an intense array of black fruits, mint, wild herbs and minerality all emerging from the glass. Full-bodied, rich and concentrated with monster fruit balanced by excellent acidity. Serve this blockbuster with a grilled butterflyed leg of lamb.

• **2016 Seven Oxen "Cassidy"**

Seventy percent Grenache mixed with Mourvedre this blend shows a lot of finesse rather than pure power. It has cherry and cranberry aromas with lithe berry fruit on the palate. It is an elegant, focused wine that is sure to charm.



• **2017 Kita Grenache Camp 4 Vineyard**

This lovely wine hails from the Santa Ynez Valley in southern California. It offers up beautiful raspberry, flower, and licorice aromas and flavors with brilliant purity. It is a concentrated, rich wine that has nothing out of place, beautiful acidity and a great finish.

• **2016 Austin Hope Syrah/Mourvedre**

The Hope family is one of Paso Robles finest producers and a perennial favorite of mine. This has peat moss, earth, black fruits and a bit of "animal" from

• **2017 L'Aventure Cote A Cote**

For many years I have been impressed by the wines Frenchman Stephan Asseo crafts in Paso Robles. This blend of Grenache, Syrah and Mourvedre is beautiful in every way, with loads of cherry, blueberry, spice and flowers, it flows onto the palate with a voluptuous, decadent texture, fantastic purity and serious length. It is absolutely delicious now but I see no reason it won't evolve gracefully for a decade.

• **2017 Brecon Estate Syrah**

This Syrah has brilliantly pure blueberry, raspberry and herb aromas and flavors to go with a medium-bodied ripe and textured mouth-feel. Clean, balanced and elegant it's a beautifully done Syrah meant for drinking over the next 7 to 8 years.

• **2016 Steinbeck Viognier**

This wine is juicy and lively with classic white flowers, peach and citrus qualities, this medium-bodied white shows the inherent richness of the variety with full, round texture that finishes nicely. This wine should be consumed over the next two years.

• **2016 Still Waters Syrah El Pomar District**

This wine boasts a dense ruby/purple color in addition to deep chewy blackberry fruit mixed with flowers and earthy notes. Dense and supple with sweet tannin, it will provide delicious drinking over the next 6-8 years.

• **2017 Summerwood Syrah Reserve**

This winery is a perennial favorite of mine. The Reserve Syrah is an opaque, purple colored wine of tremendous intensity as well as a big, smoky, blackberry scented nose with hints of anise and chocolate. Dense, opulent and voluptuous, it is a hedonistic Syrah that should last over a decade.

• **2016 Four Lanterns "Shades"**

This wine is 100% Mourvedre a distinctive varietal whose native home is the Bandol region in southern France. I wish more people bottled it by itself as it is an attractive and distinctive varietal. This is medium bodied and balanced with juicy acidity it shows black cherry fruit with an earthy, musty underlying smell. It has meaty, savory aromas and flavors as well as solid richness and length. I would not hold it in the cellar for too long but it is delicious now.

• **2017 Brecon Estate Syrah**

I would guess they used some new oak in the barrel aging of this wine as it sports a lovely vanilla scent on the nose. Inky purple in color it possesses excellent blueberry fruit intermixed with licorice and earth flavors. Moderately tannic, full bodied and concentrated it should have many years ahead of it.

• **2017 McKahn Family Cellars Syrah**

This wine hails from the Spring Mountain district of Napa Valley and only 50 cases were produced. It has the finesse and elegance of a cool-climate Syrah. Blueberry, cherry and flowers mixed with saddle leather and earth. The gorgeous perfumed nose is a dead ringer for a Cote Rotie at a third the price. Nice job.

• **2017 Tooth and Nail "The Stand"**

This Paso Robles wine is mostly Petite Sirah with a bit of Syrah mixed in. It has vanilla and blueberry aromas, full-bodied dark fruit flavors and an exuberant typically California personality with its up-front fruit and precociousness. It is well-balanced and has the tannin for long term aging. Break out the BBQ and throw on some burgers.

• **2016 TH Vineyards "The Hedge" Syrah Reserve**

Lots of toasty, sweet oak on the nose with hints of cedar and tobacco. Big full and powerful berry fruit on the palate with a firm solid structure and great balance. This blockbuster wine should hold up well for well over a decade.

• **2017 Paper Street "The Narrator"**

This wine is produced in Paso Robles by J. Dusi Winery owned by a long term family in the area. It has a sweet blackberry, tar and licorice-dominated nose, full body, big tannins and a tough-textured but rich finish. A blend of Grenache, Syrah and Mourvedre it is opulent and layered with a long, satisfying finish. Would be great with a long-braised lamb shoulder.

• **2015 Derby Syrah Vineyard Select Derby Vineyard**

50% new oak gives a lovely sweet vanilla nose that is followed by cherries and plums. Loads of berry/currant fruit with a touch of spice and earth. Big body with good balance on the palate and enough tannins for moderate aging.

• **2015 Vigo Syrah**

This Paso Robles winery was new to me and I am glad to make its acquaintance. It has the lovely aroma of a fresh baked blackberry pie with jammy fruit and a luscious round mouthfeel. It possesses sufficient acid to keep it from being cloying and the finish is clean and smooth.

• **2018 Troon Cotes du Kubli**

A real charmer made from a blend of Viognier, Marsanne and Roussanne. A honey yellow color it smells of honeysuckle and apricots. The Viognier gives it a huge rich weight in the mouth and enormous body for a white wine. The grapes come from the Applegate Valley in Oregon and the winery is located in Grant's Pass Oregon.

• **2018 Lindquist Syrah Central Coast**

Bob Lindquist in one of the pioneers of Rhone style wines in California and the founder of Qupe Vineyards. His new venture carries on the tradition of making solid, beautifully crafted Syrahs that remind one of France's Hermitage wines. This has earth, leather and minerals mixed in the dark berry fruit. It is beautifully structured and built to last for decades.

• **2017 Concur "Random Harvest"**

This wine is a "kitchen sink" blend of Cabernet, Grenache, Mourvedre, Syrah and Petite Sirah from Paso Robles. It offers up a fantastic bouquet of blackberries, plum, and violets to go with a sweetly fruity, supple and decadently textured profile on the palate. Despite the upfront nature here it stays beautifully fresh and focused on the finish.

• **2014 Montemar Syrah**

Just 51 cases of this wine were made by this small winery based in Lompoc, CA. The Syrah shows an elegant, perfumed profile with plenty of black fruits, herbs and black pepper to go with a medium-bodied, round, mouth filling texture on the palate. Clean, balanced and fresh it should last for a decade.

• **2015 Epoch Estate Blend**

The wine is crafted from Syrah, Mourvedre, Grenache, with a splash of Tempranillo and Zinfandel. Lush and beautifully fresh with plenty of plum, blueberry, mint and roses on the nose, it flows onto the palate with a full-bodied, seamless and focused texture. Youthful and lively it should drink well for many years.



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