

On Top of

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Winemaker Daniel Daou of Daou Vineyards.

Daou. Mountain

One of Paso Robles's highest elevation vineyards is slated to reach even greater heights

Embarking on a journey to find perfection in terroir, Daniel and Georges Daou laid claim to a portion of some of the most coveted land in the western hills of Paso Robles. The property, called Hoffman Mountain, was first planted in the 1960s under the guidance of legendary enologist André Tschelistcheff. Today, the brothers Daou own 100-plus acres, with elevations as high as 2,000 feet. Twenty-five acres of Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux blenders (Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot) are under vine—among 75 plantable acres—in soil that is brimming with the highest levels of outcropped calcareous lime yet recorded in the proposed sub-appellation known as the Adelaida Hills.

Paso Robles

Smack-dab between Los Angeles and San Francisco, amid some of the Central Coast's most striking scenery, Paso Robles gives the appearance of a cow town. Drive the 101 freeway—about a half hour north of San Luis Obispo and a half hour south of the Monterey turn-off—and just off to the west you'll glimpse the Mid-State Fairgrounds, where rodeos fill the grandstands on a routine basis.

But take the nearest off-ramp and, whichever way you head, vineyards

will signal what has become the town's nurturing life's blood: wine. Paso Robles has become the third largest single appellation in California—614,000 acres—with plantings that have more than doubled in the past decade.

Predicting Cult-Ability

Why write about a winery whose first releases are not expected until 2010? Stand atop Daou Mountain and take in the view.

One of the few vineyards in the

western hillsides to face the high-walled wind channel known as the Templeton Gap, Daou's vines are subject to this area's windy signature, which produces grapes that are destined to develop thick skins, capture more acidity and demonstrate concentrated fruit structure in the resulting wine.

In addition to preferred positioning that delivers desirable southeast and southwest sun exposure and, at a mere 14-miles from the Pacific Ocean, demonstrable maritime influence, Daou Vineyards shares its steep, wooded hills with wildlife, while its hilltop ridges are so studded with eroded lime outcroppings that the vines struggle, even in their meticulously-farmed setting.

With vines spaced three feet apart and only eight spurs per vine allowed on low, 18-inch cordons, an even, balanced ripeness is already in the cards for the upcoming Daou wines, along with intense color and complex flavors.

With a following that is rapidly making believers out of top sommeliers and retail wine buyers, Daou is destined for the status of cult. The praises for the first vintage of La Capilla, Daou's premiere label, are many. Mark Thomas, Director of Wine for the Mirage Hotel in Las Vegas attests that "Daou Vineyards and La Capilla are already at the forefront of the next great wine growing region of California (in Paso Robles) and will be setting the future standards there with their wines."

Greg Schroeder, partner of wine store Amazing Grapes in Southern California, offers, "I'm staking my reputation right now and predicting that Daniel Daou will lead Paso Robles into international prominence with his soon-to-be world-class offerings."

And last month we quoted Dean Wachstetter, Director of Wine and sommelier at The Top of the World at the Stratosphere in Las Vegas as saying, "I would say that La Capilla is one of the Central Coast's best producers at this moment."

Soil Rich



Daniel Daou doesn't have to walk far to find rich outcroppings of calcareous lime on his property. Inset: Soils from left to right: Ayar, Balcom, Linne Calodo and Nacimiento.

Diverse soils make for complex wines. The highest percentages of calcareous lime sub-soils—an astounding amount—comprise the vineyard site, geologic conditions that the French have proved over centuries to produce healthier, balanced vine growth. In addition, Daou Vineyards is supported by Ayar, a deep, well-drained soil; Balcom, usually found in higher elevations and formed by weathered, soft calcareous shale and sandstone; Linne Calodo, a coveted shallow soil known to retain necessary levels of moisture; and Nacimiento, a well-drained soil found on mountainous uplands.

Up Front with Daniel Daou



La Capilla's new label. In its first year of production, it is predicted that more than 4,700 cases of this Paso Robles wine, the premiere label of Daou Vineyards, will sell out before the second vintage. The wines under the Daou Vineyards label are expected to be released in early 2010.

Raised in France, Daniel Daou received an early wine education, as do many Europeans. With a palate that originally associated greatness with complex Bordeaux, his thirst for elegance and balance in his winemaking endeavors led him to a new frontier for crafting world-class wines: Paso Robles.

While the Daou vines are reaching maturity, Daniel and Georges, with consultant Delphine Barboux-Laurent (currently the winemaker at Château Lascombes in Margaux and who crafted the superb L'Evangile 2000 from Bordeaux), have introduced the La Capilla label as a vanguard move into the market.

Daou takes cues from Delphine to adopt traditional French methods such as *battelage* and *délestage*, a type of cap management. Daou pumps out the must from the bottom of the fermentation tank into another large vessel. The cap drains for a few hours, and the bottom of this tank is re-sealed. The juice is then spilled back over the cap.

"This aerates the wine," explains Daou, "which allows for greater color, aromatics and flavor extraction from the skins, and often removes all the seeds during the process."

In addition, Daou sorts all the grapes by hand, berry by berry when they arrive from the vineyards. Long

fermentation and long maceration are part of the laborious routine to ensure a balanced wine. "It also fattens it up," he adds. For a creamy texture and soft palate, La Capilla is aged for 16-22 months in French oak.

"Winemaking is my chosen profession, my art and my passion," attests Daou, whose knowledge of technology may have initially propelled him to find his path and lifestyle amidst the vines.

Named (in Spanish translation) after the chapel on the hill at Hermitage—La Chapelle—in the Northern Rhône, the La Capilla wines are a series of deeply concentrated and balanced varietals from managed vineyard sites in Paso Robles, along with a Zinfandel sourced from Lodi.

The bell on the La Capilla label represents a Spanish chapel bell that dates back to 1740 and which will reside on the Paso Robles property.

In its first year of production, the initial 4,700-case lot of La Capilla is destined to sell out before the new release in early 2009. This is a tell-tale sign that palatable plans are in store for the future with La Capilla and Daou. Choosing ideal terroir and a dedication to quality viticultural practices will lead the brothers Daou to be recognized as leaders in the world of wine.

