

USA, California, Paso Robles: Spotlight on Epoch Estate Wines

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Quality continues on an upward trajectory at Epoch Estate Wines in Paso Robles, where longtime winemaker Jordan Fiorentini crafts Rhône-based white and red blends. In addition to recent releases, this report looks back on a decade of two cuvées, the Block B Syrah and Sensibility Grenache. A gentle stylistic shift is perceptible across the last decade, as ripeness and new oak have been dialed back and increased fermentation and maturation in concrete and foudre has reigned in some of the exuberance of earlier vintages. Later vintages offer a bit less alcoholic warmth, notably supple textures and increased aromatic expression and purity. Whole cluster use is deftly employed and integrated, and these wines gain more precision with each vintage.



Fiorentini joined Epoch after earning a master's degree in viticulture from UC Davis and spending time at Araujo, Chalk Hill and Antinori in Italy. She runs operations in the winery and oversees viticulture at Epoch's three estate vineyards: the limestone-rich Paderewski vineyard, planted in 2004; Catapult vineyard, planted in 2008 on mixed clay, silt and shale; and York Mountain, planted in 2015 on sand and sandstone. All three vineyards are farmed biodynamically, although they are not certified. "Demeter costs so much money," Fiorentini explains. "We want to do it because it's right for the property."

Although the recently released 2018 and 2019 vintages share similar growing degree days and technical data, they offer surprisingly different expressions. The 2018s are open and hedonistic, with full, ripe fruits and abundant but approachable tannins, while the 2019s are bright and juicy with lighter frames and layered, precise aromatics. "2018 was a mild year with some heat waves and significant diurnal shifts," Fiorentini recalls. "Higher springtime temperatures can cause more tannins to develop sooner, and 2018 had a warm spring. We started picking September 4 and had to pick fast because we had heat coming in. 2019 was mild throughout, with an even longer growing season and less diurnal swings. Spring was cool, so the wines didn't develop as much tannin; and hangtime was longer, so the pHs are higher. We started picking September 5, but in 2019 there was no real push from heat, and we glided through harvest."



I was surprised by the slow maturation of the last decade of Block B Syrah and Sensibility Grenache, which have barely budged in bottle and promise continued evolution in the cellar. Perhaps even more impressive is the consistency of quality across vintages. With full control from vine to glass, Fiorentini has managed to meet the challenges of each season, from the very warm 2014 vintage, to the unexpectedly cool season of 2019. She's also one of the few female winemakers I have the pleasure of meeting with each year in Paso Robles. If you don't have any Epoch in your cellar, it's time to start collecting—these wines deserve your attention!