



## California Central Coast Wine Tour

# Class II – Cabernet Sauvignon

The second part of our Central Coast Wine Tour included visits to three wineries in Paso Robles: Chumeia Vineyards, Pretty Smith Vineyards & Winery, and Eberle Winery. We had a chance to check out beautiful properties and tasting rooms as we learned about the “king” of red wine – Cabernet Sauvignon.

### **Chumeia Vineyards**

During our visit at Chumeia Vineyards, we spoke with winemaker Lee Nesbit in the spacious gardens outside the tasting room. Lee began the conversation by explaining the name of his winery. Chumeia is ancient Greek for the word alchemy, which Lee equates with turning something abundant (like base metal) into something precious (like gold). He relates this directly to winemaking – as a winemaker, he takes something abundant (grapes) and transforms them into something precious (wine). One of his favorite creations is Cabernet Sauvignon, and Chumeia Vineyards produces three different Cabernets.

Lee describes Cabernet Sauvignon as a dark wine, with rich complex flavors. Some common aromas include cherry and strawberry, and Lee pointed out that chocolate flavors are “dead giveaways.” He explained that in wine production, winemakers try to use small grapes, which have high skin to juice ratios. Since the color of red wine comes from the skins, this helps produce darker wines.

Next, Lee helped us begin to demystify tannins. “I’ve heard wine described as being bitter,” said Lee. “But probably a more accurate term is astringency. Astringency comes from tannins.” Lee explained that tannins are compounds that develop from the skins, seeds and stems of grapes, as well as from the oak barrels that are sometimes used to age wine. A conversation about Cabernet Sauvignon usually leads to talking about tannins, and Lee explained that the two are inseparable. “Tannins to Cabernet are like fish to water,” said Lee.

Although he is partial to his own Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon, Lee told us about what to expect from Cabernet Sauvignons from different regions. Cabernet Sauvignon is grown all over the world – it is one of the main wine grapes grown in Bordeaux, but it is also planted throughout California, Mexico, Oregon and Chile. He told us to expect different characteristics in wines from warm climates, like Paso Robles, than in wines from cool climates, like Napa Valley. While a Paso Robles Cabernet might

have bright fruit aromas of cherry and strawberry, the Napa Valley Cabernet is more likely to have dark forest aromas like plum and cassis.

We ended our visit with a discussion about aging and consuming wine. Lee advised us that since wine is subjective, there is no such thing as a “bad wine.” It’s all a matter of personal taste. The same goes for aging - there is no “right” amount of time to age wine, and Lee urged us to “discover wine for ourselves.” Lee did advise us, however, that when storing wine, we should keep temperatures consistent, and keep the wine out of direct sunlight. His words were deliberate: “Radical changes in temperature, or sunlight, which is evil, will destroy your wine.”

### **Pretty Smith Vineyards & Winery**

Lisa Pretty describes her operation, Pretty Smith Vineyards & Winery, as a “one-woman show.” She is in charge of everything at the vineyard, where she specializes in Bordeaux varietals and blends. We began our visit by talking to Lisa about soil and growing conditions in the Paso Robles area. Pretty Smith Vineyards is located north of Paso Robles in the small town of San Miguel, right next to the Salinas River bed. Over the years, Lisa has found that her soil is best suited to Bordeaux grapes. She grows Sémillon and Sauvignon Blanc, two of the most common white Bordeaux grapes, and five original red Bordeaux varietals: Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec and Petit Verdot. “Here at Pretty Smith I’m really lucky,” commented Lisa. “I have a vineyard that was planted back in 1980, and most of the vines have stayed extremely healthy.” Lisa showed us the trunks of her Cabernet Sauvignon vines, which were strong and large. She explained that the trunk holds all of the nutrients and water that the grapes need to grow, so having healthy, old trunks gives her an advantage in grape growing.

“Cabernet is one of those grapes that I think everybody loves,” said Lisa as we sat down outside of the tasting room. She listed off some common flavors associated with Cabernet Sauvignon, including fruits like cherry and darker flavors like anise, chocolate and tobacco. She advised us that while some aromas (leather, tobacco, etc.) might not sound attractive, a wine that incorporates those flavors is a wonderful thing to experience.

Lisa was helpful in guiding us through the wine tasting process. To enhance the tasting experience, Lisa advised us to always smell a wine first. “What many of us view as our taste is actually our aroma experience coming through via our sense of smell,” she explained. Smelling the wine can tell us a lot about the experience we are going to have when we get the wine in our mouth. Once we are ready to taste, Lisa suggests taking only a small sip of wine, since moving that small amount of wine around the mouth and letting it touch all the parts of the tongue will help enhance the flavors. This practice also warms up the wine, which brings out more flavors.

Before we departed, Lisa gave us some tips about serving wine. Lisa pointed out that it's important to serve red wine at the correct temperature. Too hot, and the taste of the alcohol will overpower other flavors. Too cool, and the wine will be closed, and the aromas and flavors won't be released. Although she recognizes that serving temperature varies based on personal preference, she recommends serving Cabernet Sauvignon at about 68 degrees Fahrenheit. Lisa left us with perhaps the most important lesson about drinking wine: "If it tastes good to you, then it's a good wine."

## **Eberle Winery**

The tasting room at Eberle Winery is one of the most popular in Paso Robles. As we chatted with Gary Eberle, the founder and winemaker, he revealed that Eberle Winery sells over 50% of their wine right out of the tasting room. Cabernet Sauvignon is Gary's favorite wine. "It's never boring," he explained. "As it oxidizes in the glass, the aromas and the character of the wine change drastically." He noted that it's possible to taste a Cabernet Sauvignon, then taste it again fifteen minutes later and experience a completely different wine. According to Gary, Cabernet Sauvignon should be very dark, with aromas of cassis and black cherry.

Gary was eager to talk to us about the caves at Eberle Winery. Eberle is one of the only wineries in the United States where every single barrel aged wine is aged in a cave. He explained that caves are ideal for storing wine since there is no air movement, and air temperature and humidity are always stable. We had a great time exploring the caves, which include a special V.I.P. tasting area where visitors can learn about pairing wine with cheese.

Garry DeRose, the wine club administrator at Eberle, is in charge of these cheese pairing events, and spoke to us about food pairings for Cabernet Sauvignon. He suggested pairing the wine with Danish bleu cheese or Stilton, and described a delicious meal of steak with melted bleu cheese as his ideal pairing. Gary Eberle agreed, but warned us that because of Cabernet Sauvignon's intense flavors, it isn't as good a food wine as other red varietals like Syrah, Pinot Noir or Zinfandel.

We ended the visit with a few more tips from the experts. Garry showed us what he calls "joker glasses" and advised us to discard these small glasses and instead use full size glasses. This makes for better swirling, and thus better release of aromas. Gary Eberle left us with the advice that we shouldn't be intimidated by wine. "Wine is something that makes food taste better, and makes mother-in-laws palatable," he joked. He reiterated a common theme: "If you like it, it's good, and you don't need an expert to tell you what's a good bottle of wine."

## **Fun Facts about Cabernet Sauvignon**

Cabernet Sauvignon is the most planted varietal in the Paso Robles appellation, making up over 35% of all plantings.

In Australia, Cabernet Sauvignon is often blended with Syrah.

It takes six to eight bunches of Cabernet grapes to make one bottle of wine.

Many people who are allergic to red wines like Cabernet Sauvignon are specifically unable to synthesize and break down tannins.

Cabernet Sauvignon recently surpassed Zinfandel as the most widely planted red wine grape in California.