

MILESTONES

The Purest Expression

JUSTIN VINEYARDS & WINERY CELEBRATES 30 YEARS AS A LEADING
PRODUCER OF CABERNET SAUVIGNON IN PASO ROBLES

by Michelle Ball

PHOTO COURTESY OF JUSTIN VINEYARDS & WINERY



Scott Shirley is the winemaker at JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery in Paso Robles.



Paso Robles' reputation for Cabernet Sauvignon may be impressive, but it's also relatively recent. The influx of talented producers and capital investments into the region over just the past two decades follows a path paved by a few early pioneers, including Justin Baldwin of JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery, who was among the first to demonstrate the area's enormous potential for producing world-class Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux-style blends.

In 1981, Baldwin purchased 160 acres in the Adelaida District on the western end of the broader Paso Robles AVA and planted Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc in proportions that mirrored those of Bordeaux's Left Bank. Released to great acclaim, the iconic JUSTIN ISOSCELES helped introduce Paso Robles to the world stage as a serious winegrowing appellation. Although the winery's flagship blend is predominantly Cabernet Sauvignon, and in many vintages could be labeled as such, its varietally designated reserve wines contain 100% of the grape.

After 30 years as a leading Cab producer, JUSTIN is releasing the inaugural vintage of its PLATINUM Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon. The 2015 PLATINUM Reserve is a blend of barrel-aged wines with the structure and concentration to endure another 24 months of aging in new French oak.

Under the guidance of winemaker Scott Shirley, JUSTIN now produces three tiers of reserve wine. This isn't as easy as it sounds, given that Cabernet Sauvignon is often blended with other grapes for balance in terms of aroma, flavor, acidity, and/or overall structure. Luckily, Shirley is a master when it comes to coaxing out the personality of the fruit from each of the many vineyards that JUSTIN works with.

Shirley spent the early part of his career in Napa Valley, where he cut his teeth at Opus One and The Hess Collection. When Baldwin reached out in 2012 to offer him a winemaking position and the opportunity to collaborate on the design of JUSTIN's newest Paso Robles holdings, Shirley was intrigued by the thought of "being able to walk these vineyard blocks before they were planted, [knowing] that the soil, with all these limestone rocks, [is] so similar to Bordeaux," he says. "I thought, 'If I were a Cabernet Sauvignon vine, this is where I'd want to be planted.'"

In addition to overseeing its own estate vineyards, JUSTIN also works with growers throughout Paso Robles, sourcing fruit from nine out of 11 sub-AVAs. Shirley keeps every lot and fermentation separate to avoid premature field blends. "Nothing is picked for JUSTIN until I've walked through the vineyard block, tasted the fruit on the vine, and decided that the right balance of fruit, acidity, and tannin has been reached. Then, when I'm tasting the tanks to make drain and press decisions, I think back to how it tasted in the field," he explains, adding that he doesn't follow a prescribed methodology for fermentations. In other words, it's all a matter of finding the purest expression that each site can achieve. ■■