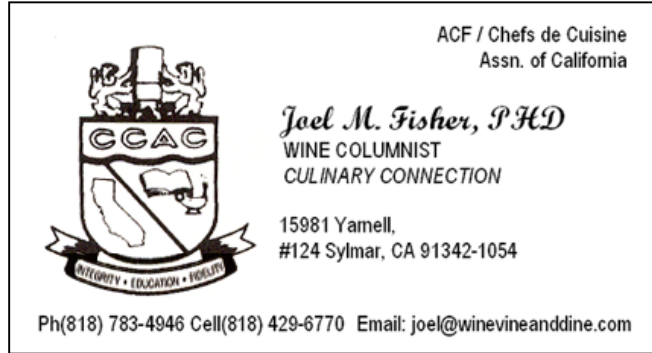


FROM THE GRAPEVINE

BY [JOEL M. FISHER](#)



October 2004

NEW BEGINNINGS

I recently had the pleasure of attending the [Paso Robles Vintners'](#) first annual "Paso Robles Wine University" event. More than 80 members of the trade and media participated in the program, which featured classes on viticulture, wine tasting and blending. The sessions were held at three different venues around town. A barbeque dinner and grand tasting hosted by the esteemed Jerry Lohr of [J. Lohr Vineyards and Wines](#) brought the event to a roaring close.

Several wine educators from across the nation and myself had been invited to the University by Mr. Lohr himself after a spirited discussion panel on Paso Robles wines at the Society of Wine Educators Conference this summer, held in the Sonoma town of Rohnert Park. The extraordinarily generous Mr. Lohr not only sponsored our registration fee, he also invited us to join his winery sales staff for a kick-off dinner at [McPhee's Grill](#) in Templeton, California.

One of my Art Institute students attended the two-day student University program, for which she found the highlights to be learning about Mr. Lohr's perspective on viticulture and stomping grapes for the crush. She thought the event well worth her time and money. I also had a fantastic time learning and networking. Kudos to the Paso Robles Vintners and Growers Association for a wonderful inaugural event! Here's to many more.

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I was thrilled to discover that [Tablas Creek Vineyard](#) was hosting the Viticulture 101 session I attended. This gorgeous winery is owned by legendary wine importer Robert Haas and by the Perrin family, proprietors of the famed **Chateau Beaucastel** – which according to a sign that greeted session attendees, resides a mere 9,000 miles away in Chateauneuf-du-Pape. In 2000 I had the privilege of visiting Beaucastel, and am pleased to see their continued success in the U.S.

Neil Collins is the winemaker and vineyard manager for Tablas Creek, which is located in lovely west Paso Robles. Collins is a former chef trained in England who transitioned

to wineries in the 1980s. He spent a year in France at Beaucastel, then joined Tablas Creek in time for the 1998 vintage. Collins has been instrumental in helping lead the winery towards organic farming, making Tablas Creek one of the first certified organic vineyards in the region, and is a driving force behind the vineyard's various seminars. He is also quite active in the Rhone Rangers organization and in the Hospice du Rhone charity.

The viticulture session itself was quite fun. We got to blend Syrah clones from Tablas Creek. Let's just say that some of our blends came out better than others, but all improved over time!

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On my way to the Paso Robles Wine University I visited my friends at [Casa de Caballos Winery](#), the beautiful facility where Tom and Sheila Morgan do such a good job of combining their love of horses and grapes. We did a quick tasting to help Scott Tobin – the Morgans' assistant, head of the Casa de Caballos wine club and Sheila's son– choose what to pour at the University's Thursday-night grand tasting. Their *2002 Merlot* proved interesting. At first I wasn't sure if I liked the bottle, which has 13.9% alcohol, but by the end of our session it was my favorite. The wine displayed good fruit and a smooth finish that opened nicely. Also notable was the *2002 ForgetMeNot*, which as a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot was loaded with fruit and bore the color of black cherries. The *2001 ForgetMeNot* was a gold-medal winner at the 2004 Jerry Mead New World International Competition, and this nice vintage looks to be following in its footsteps.

Scott is in the midst of undertaking his own creations for Casa de Caballos. He has a blend of Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot in the barrel, which will be called *Integrity*. His second venture will be a Rhone-varietal Viognier. I look forward to trying both wines next year.

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Like the Morgans, there are many other wine lovers pursuing their passion in retirement in the Paso Robles area. My hosts during the University event were Steve and Alice Cass, who hold 160 acres off East Highway 46. A former stockbroker, Steve and his wife have planted a variety of grapes (with an emphasis on Rhone varietals) and are building a new winery. Craig Smith, who designed the J. Lohr tasting room, designed their Tuscan-style house and winery facility, which will feature a tasting room, kitchen for winery events and picnic areas.

Another financial-industry refugee is Steve Anglin, who after working in Nissan's corporate finance division for almost two decades founded a winery with his wife Stephanie in 2003. Determined to do something special, they are emphasizing Syrah and other Rhone varietals in their blends. Their first releases included a *2003 Viognier*, a *2002 Rose of Syrah* and a *2002 Syrah-Santa Barbara County*. This year the Anglins hope

to produce between 1,500 and 2,000 cases. For you Southern Californians, their tasting room is nearby in Redondo Beach!

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All in all, great talents continue to emerge in the Paso Robles region. Forget Napa Valley snobbery –Paso Robles wines are well worth exploring. You won't be disappointed!

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