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Friday, Sep 14, 2007

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**Wine Notes: Harvest time at Adelaida Cellars in Paso Robles**

**Wine Notes: Winemaker's one shot a year**

By Janis Switzer

It's harvest time at Adelaida Cellars, and winemaker Terry Culton is overseeing what he calls "controlled chaos."

The recent stretch of 95-to 100-degree weather has accelerated the ripening of the 13 different varieties of grapes over 32 acres, and he and his crew are scrambling.

"I knew it was going to be early this year, but the grapes that came off early were surprising," Culton says. "We expected the pinot, but not the syrah as early as it was."

Culton's past experience, which includes work at six wineries in four vastly different regions, has prepared him well for the unexpected.

The psychology student-turned-winemaker experienced his first crush at Creston Manor in Paso Robles and was subsequently hired by famed Wild Horse Winery winemaker Ken Volk in 1991. As cellar master for Volk, Culton learned a lot about making wine and growing premium grapes.

"Ken Volk was a great mentor," Culton says. "He is a brilliant man who gave me responsibility."

It was in those early years at Wild Horse that Culton had his first exposure to fruit grown on the Hoffman Mountain Ranch, also known as HMR. Volk used pinot noir fruit from the West Side vineyard for many years, and it was prized for the calcareous character it picked up from the mountainous limestone soil where the vineyards were planted, about 2,000 feet above sea level.

After leaving Wild Horse in



TRIBUNE PHOTOS BY LAURA DICKINSON

Adelaida Cellars is starting its crush early in the season. Worker Cynthia Nixon, above, helps with the cabernet grape crush earlier this week. Top right, cellar worker Zachary Raines sterilizes the destemming machine, right.

*Click any image to enlarge.*



**ADELAIDA CELLARS**

**Where:** 5805 Adelaida Road, Paso Robles

**Contact:** 239-8980, [www.adelaida.com](http://www.adelaida.com) **Owners:** Don and Elizabeth Van Steenwyk

**Winemaker:** Terry Culton

**Cases produced:** 15,000

**Tasting room hours:** 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily

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The 10th annual Taste of Downtown Paso Robles will be from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday.

The event features 23 restaurants, along with 11 wineries and one brewery.

Ticket books are available for \$20 and include food-sample coupons for all of the participating restaurants and wine tastings at downtown tasting rooms and wineries in the park. Live music and Arte de Tiza (sidewalk chalk art) will round out the afternoon.

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1994, Culton went to work at Edmeades Winery in Mendocino County, then at Willamette Valley Vineyards in Oregon, and later at Calera Wine Co. in San Benito County. Culton came full circle in 2003, when he accepted the head winemaker position at Adelaida Cellars, which is now owner of the original HMR pinot noir vines.

As a cellar rat who used to top off barrels at the old HMR winery, Culton enjoys that he is back where he started.

"The fun thing for me is when I worked for Kenny at Wild Horse, the first pinot that I got introduced to was HMR," Culton reflects. "It's so fun to come back after all these years."

Pinot noir has since been a passion for Culton, and the vines planted at Adelaida's HMR vineyard are now almost 45 years old, giving him old vine grapes that are coveted for their intense flavors.

Culton praises Adelaida owners Don and Elizabeth Van Steenwyk for giving him complete control over the winemaking process. He also appreciates that the winery crew is a full-time, permanent staff that is paid salary and benefits. He says he sees the benefits himself.

"Our guys are paid year-round," Culton explains. "They work that whole vineyard — from pruning all the way through the whole year."

Culton says he rarely has to sort grapes from leaves and other debris during harvest.

"They take pride in it because it's their vineyard," he says.

A strong focus Culton brought to the vineyards of Adelaida was his interest in sustainable agriculture. The winery is not certified organic, but it doesn't use chemical pesticides or herbicides. It relies on cover crops, beneficial insects, sustainable practices and organic products.

Asked why and when he developed this focus, Culton says it was an evolution.

"There was no ray of light," he says. "It just seemed like the right thing to do."

For the first time in his career, Culton has complete control of both the vineyards and the winemaking process. And at this time of the year, as his grapes are fermenting and his barrels are being filled, he faces the most challenging time for a winemaker.

In blending his juices, he compares himself to a chef — with one notable exception.

"A chef gets to be out every night," he says, "but we only get one shot a year."

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