

# The Sky's the Limit: Carina Cellars Opens New Winery in Paso Robles

by Carolyn Turner

Before the Paso Robles appellation began to emerge from the shadows of Napa and Sonoma as competitive in quality, Carina Cellars owner David Hardee and winemaker Joey Tensley recognized the area for its ability to produce superior Rhone, Zinfandel and Bordeaux varietals. When Hardee started Carina Cellars in 2002 he would one day dream of owning his own vineyard, a reality which came to fruition in spring 2007, when he purchased Rancho del Cielo, the ranch in the sky.

Originally setting its roots in the Santa Ynez Valley, Carina Cellars opened its first tasting room in Los Olivos in the summer of 2004, sharing the space with Tensley's own label, Tensley Wines. Over the next five years Carina Cellars grew and flourished by sourcing fruit from exceptional Central Coast vineyards and creating Rhone wines that showcased terroir above all else. In 2005 Carina Cellars began sourcing some fruit from vineyards in Paso Robles, and when the wines produced turned out to be rich in flavor and very unique, the hunt was on to find a vineyard that would produce some of the finest Rhône wines in California.

Two years and 30 properties later, Hardee found what he was looking for in Rancho del Cielo, accurately named for the steep incline from 1475 to 1925 feet, earning it the title of one of the highest vineyards along coastal California. This 83-acre parcel of land is located high in the chalky Santa Lucia coastal hills four miles west of Paso Robles in the Adelaida region, named for an old 1800s farming community. This area enjoys unique soils and climate, and has a larger diurnal swing than any other appellation in California, which results



in an unusually wide range of microclimates. This allows winemakers a broad palate of wine components from which to blend deep complexity. The calcareous and chalky, rock soils are also unusual to California and are reminiscent of the esteemed Châteauneuf du Pâpe area of France. These conditions are perfect for grapes, as it challenges the vines to produce small berry clusters of marvelously concentrated grapes.

In the spring of 2007, with the help of vineyard manager Phil Stevens, Carina Cellars planted 16 acres of grapes including Syrah, Grenache, Mourvedre and Viognier. The first harvest of this estate fruit will come in the fall of 2010, thus producing wines which promise to show exceptional quality and terroir. More recently Carina Cellars celebrated the New Year by finishing construction of their new winery facility, and so moved their inventory and equipment from their old winery in Buellton. Carina Cellars fans will be happy to know that they intend to keep their roots in Santa Barbara and will continue to source fruit from several favorite vineyards, and will use the new estate fruit to supplement their wine portfolio.

The grand opening for Rancho del Cielo will happy at the end of February, after which the new tasting room will be open for tastings and winery tours Friday-Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., or by appointment during the week. Rancho del Cielo is located at 3525 Adelaida Road in Paso Robles. For appointments or directions, call (415) 309-2046. The Los Olivos tasting room is open daily from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and is located at 2900 Grand Avenue (next to Paninos). For more information or directions, call (805) 688-2459.

