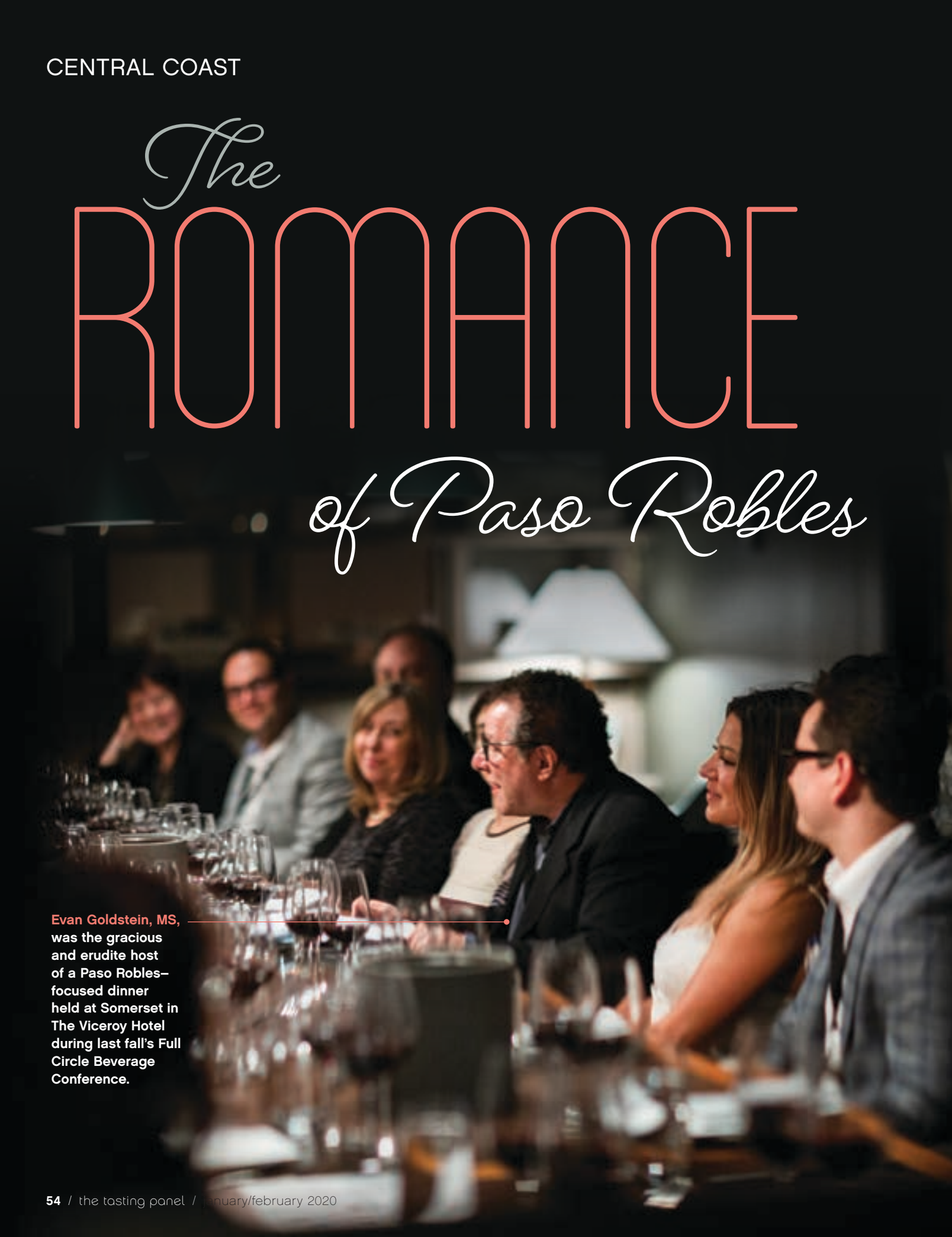


*The*  
**ROMANCE**  
*of Paso Robles*



**Evan Goldstein, MS,** was the gracious and erudite host of a Paso Robles-focused dinner held at Somerset in The Viceroy Hotel during last fall's Full Circle Beverage Conference.




 MASTER SOMMELIER EVAN GOLDSTEIN PUTS THE SPOTLIGHT ON THE REGION'S CABERNETS AT A WINE DINNER IN CHICAGO

STORY BY MERIDITH MAY AND RUTH TOBIAS / PHOTOS BY REBECCA PEPLINSKI

*“Paso Robles is near and dear to my heart,”*

Master Sommelier Evan Goldstein recently declared to a group of wine professionals who attended his sold-out Full Circle Beverage Conference in Chicago last September. “I’ve been following California’s wine industry for decades and the prominence of the state’s most noteworthy grape: Cabernet Sauvignon. But it’s Paso Robles that has made among the most impressive advancements in style, technique, and character for Cab and red Bordeaux varieties. Thanks to an intricate tapestry of some 40 terroir formations, including its iconic high-pH calcareous soil and great swings of day-to-night temperatures, this unique region—California’s largest geographic appellation—continues to build on its world-class quality.”



**Michelle Brinning of Cellar 55 in Vancouver, WA, with Tasting Panel and SOMM Journal Publisher and Editorial Director Meridith May.**



## DAOU VINEYARDS & WINERY



**Katherine Daou serves as Brand Ambassador and Social Media Manager for her family's estate.**

The revered André Tchelistcheff once called Daou Mountain “a jewel of ecological elements.” That’s where DAOU Vineyards & Winery is perched—on top of the world as far as Paso Robles locations go. Situated in the Adelaida District—which is defined by its calcareous clay soil as well as a cool microclimate born of its elevation and relative proximity to the coast—it showcases wines with depth, texture, and remarkable color.

The Daou family oversees 115 planted acres, 68% of which are dedicated to Cabernet Sauvignon (red and white Bordeaux grapes comprise the remainder). Winemaker and industry leader Daniel Daou’s experience in that iconic region led him to Paso Robles; during the dinner, his daughter Katherine gave some background on the strategies that have driven his success there. “My dad has created a proprietary process that allows him to extract a high level of phenolics that provide elegance, power, and balance,” she said. “Paso Robles has given my family such an amazing opportunity.”

**DAOU 2016 Soul of a Lion** With silky tannins and deep black fruit, this wine expresses its chalky terroir. Elegant notes of garrigue, dark chocolate, and sage meld with black plum and exotic spice as the fruit and balanced acidity gracefully glide through the finish. A Cabernet Sauvignon–dominant blend with Cabernet Franc and some Petit Verdot, it was named after a book Katherine Daou’s grandfather wrote for the family about the trials and tribulations he overcame in his native Lebanon. “If you think about how a lion is stoic and elegant in its movement, that’s how you can interpret this wine,” Daou remarked. —*Meridith May*

**DAOU 2013 Soul of a Lion** According to our dinner guests, it may be in its prime, but it still has years to evolve. With a nod to Old World characteristics, this red exhibits earth, fennel, violets, and baking spices. The 2013 vintage “was one of the driest years on record,” noted DAOU National Sales Manager Josh Lavis. “Small berries and concentration of flavor are the result.” —*M.M.*

To showcase this admirable ascent, the **Paso Robles CAB Collective** brought in wines for a dinner hosted by Goldstein at Somerset in The Viceroy Hotel (the event was sponsored by *The Tasting Panel’s* sister publication, *The SOMM Journal*). “My customers adore these bold reds from Paso Robles,” said Nancy Sabatini, owner of Illinois-based retailer Mainstreet Wine & Spirits. “We carry all the wines on this table.” Fellow guest Michelle Brinning, President/owner of Cellar 55 in Portland, noted that “J. Lohr was the first wine we carried, and now Paso Cabs have become popular in the store.”

Danielle Kuzinich, Wine Director at San Francisco wine bar The Hidden Vine, is another longtime fan of Paso Robles. Of the wines featured at the dinner, which also appear on her list, she said, “Paso Cabs have become the forefront of conversation—they are the rising star of California.”



**Master Sommelier Madeline Triffon of Plum Market.**



**Guests Sophie Yoneoka and Nicholas Prevolos of The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, CO.**

## J. LOHR VINEYARDS & WINES



**J. Lohr red winemaker Brenden Wood (right) with Evan Davis of Spec's Wines, Spirits & Finer Foods in Austin, TX, and Nancy Sabatini of Mainstreet Wines & Spirits in Countryside, IL.**

"J. Lohr is a comfort label in the best sense of the word," said Master Sommelier Madeline Triffon of this pioneering Paso brand—a compliment that surely comforted red winemaker Brenden Wood as he kept one eye on the pre-harvest conditions back home. "I was just looking at my weather app: It was 100 degrees today, and it'll be 55 tonight," he told the group. "That extreme diurnal fluctuation contributes to the ripeness [as well as] the freshness and acidity in our wines."

Though the 2019 growing season had been a fine one in the region, Wood's watchfulness made sense given the tricky vintages of the two expressions that he and Sales Manager Doug Burch were on hand to present. With respect to the Hilltop Cabernet, Wood admitted, "2017 was a nail-biter"; due to an extreme heat wave in August, "We thought that the fruit wouldn't hold up." As for 2015, he explained, an unusually cool spring meant that "a lot of flowering shattered. But Merlot was not affected as much, and the low yields were a blessing"—especially for J. Lohr's Right Bank-inspired blend Pom.

**J. Lohr 2017 Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon** Exudes a combination of freshness and brilliant acidity, with a blueberry-pie ripeness that shines as earth and espresso form the palate's base. Grown at an elevation of 2,000 feet on calcareous soil, it's a blend of 95% Cabernet Sauvignon and 4% Petit Verdot with a splash of Malbec. —*M.M.*

**J. Lohr 2015 Cuvée Pom** A tribute to the Grand Cru wines of Pomerol on Bordeaux's Right Bank, this Merlot-dominant red (90%) includes some Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec. Concentrated, savory, and broad, with aromas and flavors of black plum, it features chalky tannins that go from dry to satiny as the wine opens up with an earthy charm. Triffon commented, "I love its gentle ripeness and long, smooth mouthfeel." —*M.M.*

## OPOLO VINEYARDS



**Opolo Vineyards Sales Manager Jeff Faber.**

Though Opolo Vineyards Sales Manager Jeff Faber admitted that he'd been "so excited to raid the larder for this evening," he wasn't inclined to go into too much technical detail about the limited-production bottles he'd brought to show the group. That's because, in his view, "Paso is the essence of romance"—a place that defies analysis in favor of pure experience, where "you can throw tasting descriptions over your shoulder" and simply enjoy wine in the present moment, whatever it may entail. Indeed, he explained, Opolo winemakers Chris Rougeot and James Schreiner craft several Bordeaux blends as well as varietal Cabernets "not only to reflect the region but also [to offer options] that would be interesting to different people doing different things."

Opolo's estate encompasses nearly 300 acres of vineyard planted in the mid-1990s by proprietors Rick Quinn and Dave Nichols, who were neighbors before they were partners—a fact that neatly illustrated Faber's point about the magic of Paso, in Goldstein's opinion: "There is such a sense of communal activity there," he said. "It's not first generation, but it feels like it, because everyone wants everyone else to do well." With that, Faber led the guests in a toast: "Opolo!" they cheered.

### **Opolo 2014 Willow Creek District Cabernet Sauvignon**

Aromas of ripe, expressive red and blue fruit precede a spicy entry that leads to heather and black-cherry liqueur. Seasoned by oregano, cedar and cinnamon make an entrance midway. Faber pointed out that Opolo wines always strive to be a true expression of the region. "Our wines communicate their 'where' through the glass. Each wine is . . . a celebration." —*M.M.*

**Opolo 2014 Reserve Rhapsody** Spiced cherries zing alongside fresh acidity in this blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Malbec sourced from the winery's top vineyard sites. Bright and vibrant floral tones play with toasted oak to create a pleasant, savory quality that tingles the tongue with white pepper. Caramel sweetens the ginger spice on the finish. —*M.M.* ■■