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a husband's thoughts...

“ It went something like this: "Babe, your eyes look so good. Like...you seriously look younger. Did you put on makeup before bed or something?" ”

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Schaefer on Wine: Halter Ranch: Westside story

By Dennis Schaefer
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Back in the 1990s, Halter Ranch Vineyard, located in the heart of Paso Robles' Westside, at Adelaida Road and Vineyard Drive, was originally planted to provide grapes to award-winning JUSTIN Winery, just a few miles down the road. Then in 2000, Swiss entrepreneur Hans Wyss purchased the property. By 2010, the vineyard went from 30 acres under vine to 231. It's now the largest contiguous vineyard on the Westside, even after selling some acreage to neighboring Tablas Creek.

Eventually the siren song of vintner called out to Mr. Wyss. The state-of-the art, gravity-flow winery and aging caves were five years in the planning and three years in the making, finally completed in 2011, about the time winemaker Kevin Sass came on board from JUSTIN. Together, with general manager Skylar Stuck, they reworked the vineyard property, pulling out inappropriate varieties and virused plants and concentrating on Bordeaux and Rhone grapes. They have taken great care to safeguard the natural surroundings: preserving the ancient oaks and establishing a wildlife corridor, all while being certified as sustainable in their farming. It would seem all the elements are in place to make great wines. Some thoughts on their recent releases, all of which utilize only the estate-grown grapes.

- Halter Ranch Grenache Blanc, Paso Robles, Adelaida District 2014 (\$28): Grenache blanc has really started to come to the forefront on the Central Coast in the last decade as an intelligent alternative to chardonnay and sauvignon blanc. Distinctly different and usually made without the intrusion of new oak, it's quite refreshing. The Halter Ranch version shows some tropical and citrus aromas but also has a floral lilt. In the mouth, exotic flavors of lychee nut, Asian pear, honey, green melon and jasmine are intertwined, with a bit of lanolin in the background. Viscous and mouth-coating, it has a fine cut of acidity that makes it thirst-quenching, inviting another sip. Absolutely one of the best of its kind.

- Halter Ranch Cotes de Paso, Paso Robles 2012 (\$32): The Cotes du Rhone-style blend has a bright nose of berry fruit and spice, provided by the large dollop of grenache. On the palate, syrah brings weight and substance while mourvedre contributes meaty bass notes. Both red and black berry fruit easily intermingle, while the wood spice, from 16 months in used French barrels, is more subtle and intriguing. It's a good mouthful of red wine that shows complexity and myriad flavors as it opens up in the glass and then glides to a smooth and satisfying finish.

- Halter Ranch Syrah, Paso Robles 2012 (\$32): The syrah here is typically in the deep, darker and denser style. Dark plum, dark berry, candied violets and graham cracker pie crust along with a hint of chocolate are the voluminous aromatics. Well-rounded and dense in the mouth, the flavors show plum, blueberry, huckleberry and olallieberry as well as a slathering of baking spices. Well-balanced, it's showing very well right now, bursting with flavor immediately when popped and poured. You could age this wine, but why would you? It's lovely drinking right now.

- Halter Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles 2012 (\$35): The fun thing about this cabernet is that both malbec and petite verdot are in the blend; the latter is often seen in the mix, the former not so much. The classic nose of cassis and black currants gets a bit of a floral lift from malbec. It's rich and lengthy on the palate, and the dark fruit flavor profile of the nose now also includes blackberry fruit and is enriched by licorice, tobacco leaf and hints of pepper and wood spice. While the tannins are firm, providing a great backbone, the mouthfeel is lush and the finish



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lingers on, long after the last sip. Accessible now, it could age effortlessly for five to 10 years.

Wine expert Dennis Schaefer's column appears every other week in the Food section. Email him at food@newspress.com.

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