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Beyond booze: Where to shop, dine and stay in Paso Robles

By JENN HARRIS



Mel Melcon / Los Angeles Times

Carole MacDonal, center, owner of Il Cortile Italian restaurant in downtown Paso Robles, seats customers Wendy Mivarik and her husband, Bill. The Santa Margarita couple were celebrating their 25th anniversary.

The key to keeping upright during a day of spirit tastings is to stay hydrated and well fed. That's also the key to keeping your designated driver happy.

It's easy to see — and taste — a lot in Paso Robles' compact downtown area in a short time. And unlike upscale restaurants in Napa Valley, the restaurants here have white tablecloths — without the attitude. You can sit down to a meal at the fanciest eateries without having to change your walking shoes.

Artisan: Go for a light lunch and share house-made charcuterie and cheese, or stop for dinner after a day of tastings. Executive chef Chris Kobayashi's playful menu includes rabbit stroganoff; goat cheese and ale fondue; and wild boar tenderloin. If your distillery hopping has you in the mood for a cocktail, try the barrel-aged Negroni. Meal for two about \$70. 843 12th St., Paso Robles; (805) 237-8084, www.artisanpasoobles.com

Di Raimondo's Italian Market & Cheese Shop: If you're planning on a picnic lunch between tastings, stop here to pick up some Ossau Iraty, Fromager d'Affinois and Midnight Moon cheeses along with prosciutto, Paso Robles-made *salumi*, olives, crackers and dried fruit. Or you can grab a couple of seats and eat your picnic loot on the patio. Meal for two about \$25. 822 13th St., Paso Robles; (805) 238-1268, www.pasocheese.com.

Il Cortile Ristorante: It's upscale, classic Italian, owned by chef Santos MacDonal and his wife and partner, Carole. Handmade pasta is topped with delicate shavings of *bottarga*, best enjoyed on the patio with a glass of wine. Meal for two about \$60. 608 12th St., No. 101, Paso Robles; (805) 226-0300, www.ilcortileristorante.com.

La Cosecha Bar & Restaurant: This is MacDonal's tapas restaurant, just down the street from Il Cortile. Order an entree if you must, but if you have time to linger, try a couple of shared plates. The pork cheeks are braised and served with pickled vegetables; the charcuterie plate features house pâté; and you can't go wrong with the *pastelitos catracho* (Honduran-style empanadas). Meal for two about \$90. 835 12th St., Paso Robles; (805) 237-0019, www.lacosechabr.com.

Pier 46 Seafood: It's Paso Robles-adjacent but worth the three-minute drive for some of the best fish tacos outside of Ensenada, Mexico. Crispy nuggets of fish are topped with crunchy cabbage, shredded pepper jack cheese, cilantro, slivers of onion and a creamy, spicy sauce. You'll also find fish and chips, cioppino and clam chowder. Meal for two about \$30. 1131 Rossi Road, Templeton; (805) 434-1950, www.pier46seafood.com.

My designated driver deserved to have just as much fun as I did. This can only mean one thing: shopping. Here are some options offering antiques, clothing and even artisanal soaps.

Reminisce Antiques Etc., 1344 Pine St., Paso Robles; (805) 239-1001, www.reminiscepasorobles.blogspot.com. You'll find multiple vendors in one large space, so you can spend hours treasure hunting. Shop vintage leather bags, artwork, trunks, light fixtures and patio furniture.

General Store Paso Robles, 841 12th St., Paso Robles; (805) 226-5757, www.generalstorepr.com. Browse artisanal jam, honey, seasonings and hot sauce, along with small-batch beauty products. And if you need to buy gifts for friends back home, you'll find jewelry, tote bags and plenty of chocolate.

Rabbit Hole, 1244 Pine St., Paso Robles; (805) 286-4692, www.rabbitridgewinery.com. Wine paraphernalia, wine tasting, clothing and greeting cards that will keep you occupied for half an hour, laughing so hard you cry a little.

If you go

THE BEST WAY TO PASO ROBLES

From Los Angeles, take Interstate 5 to California Highway 46; it's about a 3 1/2 -hour drive. If you've got time to kill, the 101 Freeway is more scenic.

WHERE TO STAY

La Bellasera Hotel & Suites, 206 Alexa Court, Paso Robles; (805) 238-2834, www.labellasera.com. This hotel is convenient for those visiting wineries and distilleries off California 46. It's a short drive or Uber ride to downtown Paso Robles. Doubles from \$199.

Paso Robles Inn, 1103 Spring St.; (805) 238-2660 or (800) 676-1713, www.pasoroblesinn.com. A downtown fixture for decades. Rooms for two generally \$159-\$269, lower in summer.

TO LEARN MORE

Distillers of SLO County, www.facebook.com/SLODistillers

Travel Paso Robles Alliance, www.travelpaso.com