

Robin and Michelle Baggett's Alpha Omega Collective opens in Paso Robles

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Jason Tinacci

PASO ROBLES -- A former college baseball player is looking to hit a four-bagger. He's already got three hit wineries in his collective but thinks he sees his way clear to nab a fourth.

Robin Baggett, a two-time All-Conference catcher at his alma mater, Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo in the early '70s, has recently opened the Alpha Omega Collective (AOC), a newest addition to Paso Robles' bursting-at-its-britches downtown wine scene. It features an eclectic tasting experience under one roof: Alpha Omega's Bordeaux-inspired blends from Napa Valley, Tolosa's Burgundian-style wines from the San Luis Obispo (SLO) Coast AVA and Perinet, Mediterranean reds from Spain's Priorat region.

Napa-based vintners Robin and Michelle Baggett have skillfully merged the experience of their three wineries into the swanky AOC lounge overlooking Paso's historic park. This joins the initial AOC location in downtown Napa.

AOC's sleek black and gold theme that carries through Napa, Paso and soon to open Healdsburg location is created by Michelle, an interior designer by profession. "We incorporated elements of all three brands in our tasting rooms," she commented in an email exchange. The textured wallpaper by Phillip Jeffries is reminiscent of the sand dunes on the Central Coast while the stone materials reflect the rocky hillside in the Priorat region.

"Locals and industry alike have been super supportive," Robin Baggett commented on the Paso Robles location. "The team here did wonderful community work and we've had great feedback," he said during an interview at the Paso AOC.

Baggett drove in that afternoon from his namesake stadium in San Luis Obispo. Home to Cal Poly's Mustangs baseball team, the Baggett Stadium, which opened in 2001, is considered among the best collegiate baseball stadiums.

As founder and managing partner of AOC, Baggett has just brought the three wineries under one corporate structure which includes everything from winemaking to hospitality. "We are one big happy family," he announced cheerfully. "It was unanimous

to merge all together. We can now share data bases and employees so you get economies of scale.”

Why Paso Robles?

“As we understand it, Paso is the second most visited wine location in the country,” he said with a shrug and smile. “It’s quite amazing what Paso has accomplished in a short period of time. Napa is number one. Sonoma may say. ‘No, you’re not,’ but still Paso’s doing pretty good.”

But about that four-bagger — a home run. Baggett has long-term plans for wine production in Paso Robles.

“We’re looking at the Rhône varieties that grow here, which can be a good fit for the Collective,” he said in a moment of seriousness. Such moments do not come often to the jovial catcher-turned-lawyer-turned-vintner. Baggett is bustling with energy and enthusiasm. His is a larger-than-life entertaining persona, entertaining as he escorts us through a tasting of his Collective.

One does see his point. A Rhône-style winery would be a complete package for AOC: Alpha Omega’s Bordeaux-style wines, Tolosa’s Burgundian portfolio, Perinet’s Spanish blends and then you add a Rhône-centric lineup from Paso.

Although from a multi-generational Texas family, Baggett was born and raised in Salinas. He attended Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo on a baseball scholarship. But, as he says, “I always wanted to be a cowboy.” Which explains the historic Edna Valley ranch he acquired and where he began running cattle — briefly.

“I learned pretty quickly we weren’t going to make much money off it,” he mused. “So, we started to plant grapes in the ‘80s. All these cattle ranchers figured out same thing and started planting grapes too.”

Impressed by the valley's cool climate, renowned for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, Baggett along with two partners decided to create a wine brand. In 1998 they established Tolosa winery, named for the 18th-century Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa.

The Tolosa brand flourished and Baggett even served as president of the San Luis Obispo Vintners for five years back in the '90s. Edna Valley, now part of the newly established SLO Coast AVA, is a sub-appellation of the larger San Luis Obispo County AVA. The transverse valley blessed with cool marine air funneled in from the Pacific Ocean is prime territory for Burgundian varieties.

We tasted two 2019 Pinots, crafted by winemaker Fredric Delivert, the Pacific Wind and the flagship Primera, the latter paying homage to the first grapes planted at the Tolosa Mission. Both wines expressed supple and silky textures framed by delicious cranberry notes. Tolosa's Pinot and Chardonnay portfolio also includes wines from Santa Barbara, Monterey and Sonoma Counties.

"So how did Perinet come into the fold?" I asked.

"The people who built the winery in the Priorat region did a great job and had great vineyards but ran into the Great Recession in 2008 and '09 and banks came into play," Baggett explained. "The brand especially does well in these Collectives and we serve it at Tolosa."

Located just 20 miles from the Mediterranean, Priorat is on the radar of wine aficionados. "Priorat's been around since 1194 but almost died on the vine in '70s. It's making a comeback and some great wines are being made there."

Priorat is one of Spain's two regions (the other being Rioja) to be granted Denominació d'Origen Qualificada (DOQ) and is known for Garnatxa and Carinyena varieties planted on dry rocky soils in the region's challenging terraced vineyards.

Perinet embraces over 130 acres with 54 acres under vine in three vineyards planted to Merlot, Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon, in addition to the historical Garnatxa and Carinyena varieties.

“It’s a big winery and we’re only producing about five to 10,00 cases but that facility can do 50,000. It’s a very beautiful winery – they kinda overbuilt, and we’re actually using excess space to make wine for other people.”

Crafted by Antonio Sánchez-Ortiz the 2018 Perinet Pendants Carinyena was exuberant with strawberries and wild brush, produced from vineyards planted on steep hillsides. The flagship Perinet 1194 is named for the region’s historical year when the Cisterian monks first planted the vines. The 2017 vintage of 1194 expressed the earthiness of Carinyena and carried the floral notes of Garnatxa, with a splash of Syrah adding the deep hue to the blend.

Baggett now explored his Napa portfolio made by winemaker Matt Brain. We sampled the signature Alpha Omega Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon. The 2018 vintage was a blend of different vineyards sourced from 14 of Napa Valley’s 16 AVA’s. The Cordes Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon came strictly from the Atlas Peak AVA.

“We are one of only two wineries to get this fruit,” Baggett proudly noted about this coveted vineyard. While Alpha Omega has its estate vineyards, the Baggetts also lease vineyards and source fruit all around Napa Valley.

“I think at last count from 48 different vineyards,” he said. “We are always trying to find the latest and greatest. It’s like playing on a pro baseball team – you might get cut and some young kid is going to come up and take your place at shortstop. We’re always on the hunt for great vineyards.”

The hunt continues in Paso Robles.

https://napavalleyregister.com/wine/robin-and-michelle-baggetts-alpha-omega-collective-opens-in-paso-robles/article_a9945960-d8ae-11ed-86f8-0365ac594377.html