

'MORLET ESTATE' OUR NAPA VALLEY FIRST GROWTH

by Jodie Morlet



MORLET

Family Vineyards

Fall Newsletter 2018

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*G*rowing up in California, I dreamed of dancing on Broadway, so my days were consumed with school and afternoon ballet, tap and jazz lessons. I still remember the entire tap routine to an Irish Jig which I performed when I was eight years old! Beginning at that same age,



*Before a tap show,
Sacramento, 1976*

I visited my father and stepmother every other weekend. My stepmother's parents were French, and remarkably, my step-grandmother Marcelle Vigiuié was a first cousin to Luc's grandmother Geneviève Morlet!

Each summer, my father and his wife vacationed in France, first stopping in Champagne to spend time with Luc's family. On one of their trips, they brought

each of the Morlet boys a cowboy hat, along with a picturesque photo of our west coast. From that moment on, Luc took English classes and dreamed of living in California.

Year after year, I longed to see the beautiful French countryside which my father described. As my hopes of becoming a professional dancer began to fade, I started to spend more time studying the French language than practicing a *grand jeté* or *fouetté* turn.

In 1987,

*Luc dreams
of California,
Avenay-Val-
D'Or, 1979*



Our 'Morlet Estate' label depicts the 1880 Castner winery and 1853 farmhouse

Luc's father took him to Vinexpo in Bordeaux. Started in 1981, it is one of the largest exhibitions for wine professionals from around the world. One of the exhibits featured the Christian Brothers Winery in St. Helena (now the Culinary Institute of America, or CIA). As Luc admired the image of Greystone cellars, he imagined himself living in California among the palm trees near the CIA.

After completing his graduate studies, Luc became the winemaker at Château Dauzac, a classified Margaux growth, where he perfected his skills making Bordeaux wines under the guidance of consultant Jacques Boissenot and Professor Pascal Ribéreau-Gayon. During this time,

he had many opportunities to taste the five First Growths: Châteaux Lafite Rothschild, Latour and Mouton Rothschild from Pauillac, Château Haut-Brion from Pessac-Léognan, and Château Margaux. If Luc and I hadn't met, he might still be working in Bordeaux to this day!

DREAMS REALLY DO COME TRUE

I began teaching elementary school after receiving my Master's degree in Education. My dream of visiting France was realized when I traveled to Paris in the summer of 1994 with my stepmother. She introduced me to Luc, and we quickly became friends. After two years of corresponding with each other, Luc decided to apply for jobs in the Golden State. Seventeen years after he had been given his cowboy hat, his dream of living in California came true! In 1996, he was hired as the winemaker at Newton Vineyard on Spring Mountain where he worked with consultant Michel Rolland as well as Paul Pontallier of Château Margaux. (We were married the following year.) He was selected as the winemaker for Peter Michael Winery in 2001, where he continued crafting the Bordeaux-inspired 'Les Pavots'

and created 'L'Esprit des Pavots.' (Luc remains the consulting winemaker, where he is involved with the renowned 'Au Paradis' coming from the winery's Oakville Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard.)

Soon after joining me in California, Luc discovered that there is something very special about a strip of land in the St. Helena Appellation which includes Colgin's Tychson Hill vineyard, Grace Family and Vineyard 29 (and what is now our winery's estate!). When he first barrel tasted Colgin's Tychson Hill Cabernet Sauvignon, he was amazed by the outstanding quality of the wine from the young vineyard's third leaf, which already expressed both beautiful character and noble tannins.

Luc began crafting our Morlet Family Vineyards wines in 2006 from vineyards in the Napa Valley and on the Sonoma Coast. Each vintage, he made our wines where he was employed as a winemaker, but he always hoped that one day we would have a winery of our own.

A SHIPBUILDER BECOMES A VINTNER

The story of our winery begins almost 200 years ago with the son of a German shipbuilder. William Henry "W. H." Castner was born in 1829 in Maine and spent his youth as a shipwright apprentice. In 1852, he married Sarah Clementine "Clemy" Soule. Over the years, Clemy gave birth to six children. Their eldest son, William Henry "Billy" Castner, Jr., would later partner with his father in their wine business.

W. H. embarked on the treacherous 162-day voyage around Cape Horn to San Francisco. In 1863, he began



W. H. and Clemy Castner, Circa 1870

building ships for the Pacific Mail Steamship Company and his family joined him in the city. They soon relocated to Vallejo where W. H.

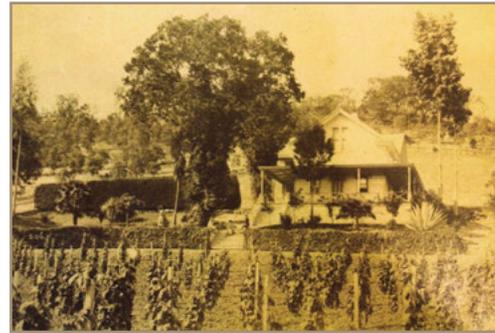
worked at the Mare Island Navy Yard.

Approximately twenty years before W. H. Castner moved to San Francisco, Dr. Edward Turner Bale was granted 17,962 acres of farmland as a result of his marriage to a niece of General Mariano Vallejo. *Rancho Carne Humana* stretched from modern day Rutherford to Tubbs Lane in Calistoga. Caroline, one of Dr. Bale's daughters, married Prussian immigrant Charles Krug in 1860. She brought 560 acres of land to the marriage, and Charles soon planted a 23-acre vineyard and built his first cellar.

In 1870, Charles sold 48.25 acres of his farmland to W. H. Castner. Ten of those acres were located west of the current Saint Helena Highway (where our winery is), while the other acres extended down to the Napa River. W. H. later purchased more acres from Krug, as well as from his neighbor John C. Weinberger.



Left: Napa County Property Ownership Map showing "Castner, W. H." property bordering C. Krug, 1876. Right: The Castner family's farmhouse and vineyard, Circa 1887



BEST IN THE VICINITY

In the early 1870s, the Castner family moved to their St. Helena property. They remodeled the 1853 farmhouse into their family's home. The land was planted with fruit and nut trees, corn, blackberries, raspberries and wine grapes. In 1875, W. H. expanded his vineyard by planting more Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel and Riesling vines. Five years later, he began construction of his winery, a "neat stone barn" measuring 44 feet on each side with a 20-foot wood extension.

In 1890, the St. Helena Star newspaper published, "Mr. Castner will have the best grape crop, both for quantity and quality, in the vicinity." Despite the fact that St. Helena was being widely praised for its beauty and quality of wines, Napa Valley grapes had not yet attained the same prestige as French wines. As the price of California wine fell, Billy began to operate a wholesale and retail liquor store in San Francisco with the purpose of trying to secure the best market possible. Unfortunately, just as father and son were at the height of their 35,000-gallon annual production, the phylloxera epidemic wiped out all 60 acres of their vineyards. From 1892 through 1898, W. H. was forced to sell his various parcels.

OUR CHARMING ESTATE

The original Castner winery, farmhouse and adjoining land changed ownership throughout the Prohibition era, and the stone building was eventually converted to a

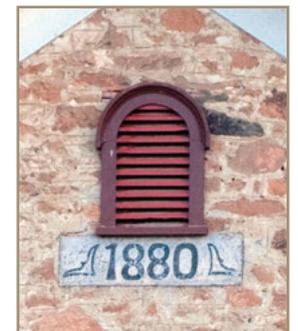
residence in the early 1950s. In 2006, the owner at the time planted the lower Foothills portion of the vineyard, but just three years later, decided to put the property on the market.

While Luc was driving on Hwy 29 returning from our 'Mon Chevalier' vineyard in Knights Valley, he saw the "For Sale" sign, installed just a few feet from the CIA. As he fondly remembered his dream

of living near those exact palm trees, he was even more thrilled with the prospect of having a winery and vineyard just south of Tychson Hill. So, he immediately called our real estate agent! Luc was already in love with the terroir, while I was soon enamored with the charming buildings. After a year and a half working to secure a bank loan and obtain a small business administration loan, we finally closed escrow in August 2010. Asked by our bank to sell our home, we moved into the 1853 farmhouse with our children, Paul and Claire. We began the long and arduous process of converting the stone building into a modern gravity-flow winemaking facility, while respecting its historic character. Our first crop from the estate vineyard was in 2010, and we received our Final Occupancy Permit to operate the winery in January 2012.

THREE SIGNIFICANT ELEVATIONS AND MICRO-TERROIRS

Planted with 100% Cabernet Sauvignon, our St. Helena property is the exclusive fruit source for our 'Morlet



Left: The former Castner winery with the remnants of a vineyard, 1951 Right: The original 1880 stone plaque still remains on our winery

Estate' label. The twelve acres offer a variety of microclimates due to variations in degrees of slope and sun exposure. Further, the vineyard is divided into three sections with increasing elevations: The lower "Foothills," the middle "Hillside" and the highest "Ridge."

The cuttings for the Foothills originated from the famous *Bosché* vineyard, while Luc selected clones 4 and 337, along with a proprietary *sélection massale*, for the two higher sections. He planted rootstocks 101-14 and 3309, because they induce low to medium vigor.

The soils of our estate represent both volcanic and alluvial origins. The property is mapped as Hambright-Rock Outcrops, formed from lava that flowed from volcanic fissures which opened at the top of the uplifted mountain. However, in addition to these lava flows, the volcanic eruptions emitted super-heated water that vaporized upon entering the atmosphere above ground. This created dense clouds which rained down onto the lava and airborne volcanic ash. Flowing torrents, created by the combined rainwater and ash, picked up rocks as they rushed down the mountainside. Cooling and solidification resulted in rounded and semi-rounded gravel. The soils in these ash-beds are called Felta loams.

After completing a thorough analysis, soil scientist and viticulturist Dr. Paul Anamosa confirmed this phenomenon and described our estate as having "well-draining soils on mountain terraces, derived from weathered volcanic tuffa/ash (Hambright) mixed with uplifted river sediment and metamorphized rock (Felta)."

The porous cemented volcanic ash in our soils provides a higher mineral content, leading to a refined wine with great aging potential. Moreover, the subtle differences in the depth of the Hambright and Felta soils contribute to the complexity of our wine.

The 2-acre Foothills (planted by the previous owner)



The lower "Foothills"

this northeast-facing part of the vineyard provides an elegance and the *gras* for our estate Cabernet Sauvignon.

The 2-acre Hillside has a relatively steep slope of 25-29% and rests at 260-310 feet in elevation. A medium-sized crop (2 tons per acre) results from topsoil which is shallower than the Foothills section, but deeper than the Ridge portion of the estate. With shade only in the very late afternoon, but the same exposure as Foothills, this area of the vineyard brings concentration and freshness, providing the *core* of the wine.

Situated from 340-440 feet in elevation with a northern aspect and a 22-25% slope, the 1.5-acre Ridge has only six to eight inches of topsoil. Here, vines struggle the most, resulting in the smallest yield (1 ½ tons per acre). Furthermore, full sun exposure causes the fruit to ripen earlier than Foothills and Hillside, leading to a highly structured and concentrated wine while providing the *frame* for 'Morlet Estate.'

A NAPA VALLEY "FIRST GROWTH"

'Morlet Estate' has consistently been praised for its premium quality and French style. When describing our 2013 and 2014 vintages, Robert M. Parker, Jr. remarked that the wine "comes across like a first-growth Pauillac." Jeb Dunnuck recently concurred as he stated that our 2015 estate Cabernet Sauvignon possesses a "Château Latour-like character."

Deep garnet-purple in color, 'Morlet Estate' is characterized by its expressive aromatics of red and black cherry, blackberry, and red and black currant, with floral notes over hints of bay leaves and tobacco leaf. Medium to full-bodied with great structure and an impeccably seamless

has an elevation of 240-250 feet and a 5% slope. Containing the most alluvial and deepest topsoil of the estate, this section leads to rounder and softer tannins and generates a medium vigor of the vines as well as a medium-sized crop (2 ½ tons per acre). With full sun-exposure,

character, this stunning wine boasts beautiful and refined tannins, exhibiting layers of chocolate, mocha, espresso, crème de cassis and pain grillé, displaying excellent minerality with a long and rich finish. 'Morlet Estate' will age gracefully for decades to come.

Last month, Luc and I celebrated our 21st wedding anniversary at the Fairmont Grand Del Mar's signature restaurant, Addison, featuring acclaimed Relais & Châteaux Grand Chef William Bradley's artisanal cuisine. Luc selected a 1995 Château Lafite Rothschild to mark the special occasion. The label of this great producer had served as our inspiration for our own estate label. As we sat reminiscing about the past two decades with Rafael Sanchez, the Director of Wine and Beverage, Luc described the wine as being

intense and complex, while remaining vibrant and fresh. It was exactly how he anticipates our Cabernet Sauvignon to be after aging for over 20 years. Mr. Sanchez agreed by adding that Luc's wines are "powerful, yet refined and are crafted to last."

Looking ahead, we have future plans to dig a cave, add a commercial kitchen and install

an indoor crush pad. Our fingers are crossed that we will discover W. H. Castner's original wine cave. Although its existence is referenced in historical documents, it was sealed after Prohibition and has yet to be found. We will keep you posted on the cave exploration! In the meantime, we invite you to enjoy our Napa Valley First Growth, the 2015 'Morlet Estate,' which Antonio Galloni declared, "is an absolutely gorgeous wine that captures all the personality and pedigree of St. Helena's Northern Corridor," further exclaiming, "This is one of the most distinctive Cabernets in Napa Valley!" ...*A Votre Santé!*



The steeper "Hillside"



View from "Ridge" facing Mount St. Helena

Fall 2018 Release



2015

'FORCE DE LA NATURE'

OAKVILLE, NAPA VALLEY
CABERNET FRANC

This wine captures the strong, rich and dense character of the Cabernet Franc grapes from our vineyard on the world-renowned Oakville Bench. Bottled only during outstanding vintages, this massive wine pays homage to Luc's great-grandfather, Gaston Morlet, who had a reputation for being a force of nature in his native Avenay-Val-D'Or. His pioneering spirit remains one of the forces behind our family's passion for making the best wines possible. Crafted from 100% Cabernet Franc grapes, this wine truly is a 'Force of Nature' or 'Force de la Nature.'

Jeb Dunnuck 100 points: *The 2015 'Force de la Nature' is one of the finest expressions of Cabernet Franc out there. Reminding me of a young 1998 Cheval Blanc with its massive core of dark fruits, chocolate, and spring flower notes, this beauty hits the palate with full body, ultra-fine tannin, a huge mid-palate, and a seamless, weightless texture that keeps you coming back to the glass. It's an incredible wine from this great, great estate. — JebDunnuck.com, June 2018*

Lisa Perrotti-Brown 100 points: *The 2015 'Force de la Nature' reveals a deep garnet-purple color and nose of crushed mulberries, black plums and black cherries with touches of pencil shavings, tapenade, underbrush, moss and dusty earth. Medium to full-bodied, the palate is taut and packed with vibrant red and black fruit flavors, framed by firm, grainy tannins and a lively backbone, finishing with wonderful length and depth. — Robert Parker's Wine Advocate, October 2017*



2015

'PASSIONNÉMENT'

OAKVILLE, NAPA VALLEY
CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Crafted with the passionate, uncompromised and ongoing pursuit of quality, this judicious blend comes from the finest barrels of our manicured vineyards on the Oakville Bench and on the foothills of Knights Valley and St. Helena. As the French say, "Je t'aime, un peu, beaucoup, passionnément!" (I love you, a little, a lot, passionately!) This special wine is dedicated to my wife, Jodie Morlet. It is 'Passionately' or 'Passionnément.'

Doug Wilder 100 points: *The nose is dense licorice and mixed dark berries with notes of mint and beautifully present plum. The palate leaves the taster wanting for nothing from beginning to finish. A totally pure expression of gorgeously sculpted and energetically polished blackberry, plum, currant and spice. A fitting follow-up to the 100-point 2009. — Purely Domestic Wine Report, April 2018*

Jeb Dunnuck 99 points: *Flirting with perfection, the 2015 'Passionnément' has a Léoville Las Case-like regalness in its crème de cassis, graphite, camphor, charcoal, and gravelly minerality. Full-bodied, incredibly concentrated, yet pure, structured, and on point... This [is a] sensational Cabernet Sauvignon. — JebDunnuck.com, June 2018*



2015

'MON CHEVALIER'

KNIGHTS VALLEY
CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Located on the foothills of Knights Valley, near Calistoga, our vineyard, comprised of rocky and loamy clay Red Hills soil, benefits from its proximity to Mount St. Helena, whose warm and windy climate is ideal for the long ripening of the red Bordeaux varietals: Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Malbec and Petit Verdot. Handcrafted using classical winemaking techniques, this special wine is dedicated to our son, Paul Morlet. It is 'My Knight' or 'Mon Chevalier.' (90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Cabernet Franc, 3% Malbec, 1% Petit Verdot)

Jeb Dunnuck 98 points: *The 2015 'Mon Chevalier' is a black fruited, powerful 2015 that just fills the mouth with fruit. Blueberries, plums, violets, chocolate, and savory herb notes all emerge from this full-bodied, big, meaty, licorice-laced effort that, like all of Luc's wines, stays balanced, graceful and pure. — JebDunnuck.com, June 2018*

Doug Wilder 98 points: *The nose is assertively rich and holds a density seldom experienced filled with cranberry, graphite and black fig displaying exceptional acid tension. The palate is a vibrantly pure liquid berry and black tree fruits with profound concentration. — Purely Domestic Wine Report, April 2018*



2015

'CŒUR DE VALLÉE'

OAKVILLE, NAPA VALLEY
CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Located on the world-renowned Oakville Bench, in the heart of the Napa Valley, our vineyard is planted with Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. The vines benefit from gravelly and loamy Bale deep soil in this warm yet temperate climate. Handcrafted using classical winemaking techniques, this wine is dedicated to Drs. Richard Johnson and Nancy Hampel who have always demonstrated their kindness of heart. It is 'Heart of the Valley' or 'Cœur de Vallée.' (95% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet Franc)

Doug Wilder 98 points: *The nose is a broader black fruit with notes of savory and spice and supple notes of caramel and mocha. The palate is more structured with concentrated and polished fresh blackberry, plum and notes of walnut. — Purely Domestic Wine Report, April 2018*

Jeb Dunnuck 97 points: *The 2015 'Cœur de Vallée' offers a dense yet also plush, blockbuster style in its huge black, blue, and purple fruits, violets, chocolate, and mineral-like aromas and flavors. As with the 2014, this cuvée is one of the more opulent, sexy wines in the lineup and is classic Napa Valley all the way. — JebDunnuck.com, June 2018*

MORLET

Family Vineyards



MANICURED
VINEYARDS,
CLASSICAL
WINEMAKING
& CREATIVE
ARTISANSHIP



2015

'MORLET ESTATE'

ST. HELENA, NAPA VALLEY
CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Our unique estate lies on the western foothills, just north of the town of St. Helena. Shallow loamy topsoil and rocky subsoil of the Hambright and Felta series, as well as full sun exposure, create superb conditions for our Cabernet Sauvignon vines. Respecting its historic 1880 charm, we restored the pre-Prohibition stone winery, which is illustrated on the label. Handcrafted using classical winemaking techniques and reminiscent of a true First Growth, this wine represents the precious memory of a very special place.

Antonio Galloni 98 points: *The 2015 'Morlet Estate' is an absolutely gorgeous wine that captures all the personality and pedigree of St. Helena's Northern Corridor. Bright red cherry, red plum, mint and rose petal notes give the 2015 its signature brightness and aromatic lift. Rich and resonant on the palate, but distinctly medium in body, the Morlet Estate is pure class. A rush of red-toned fruit builds into the beautifully persistent finish. This is one of the most distinctive Cabernets in Napa Valley. The purity of the flavors is striking. — Vinous, July 2018*

Jeb Dunnuck 96+ points: *More masculine and austere, with a Château Latour-like character, the 2015 'Morlet Estate' gives up darker fruits, crushed rock, and ample lead pencil-like notions to go with a full-bodied, concentrated, structured feel on the palate. With building tannin and obvious minerality, it's going to handsomely reward patience. — JebDunnuck.com, June 2018*



2012

'LA PROPORTION DORÉE'

SONOMA COUNTY
PROPRIETARY WHITE
BORDEAUX-STYLE BLEND

We first bottled this harmonious blend of the three classic white Bordeaux varietals in 2014. Now, four years after bottling, the much-anticipated time has arrived for the library release of this unique cuvée, which was inspired from the finest producers of Pessac-Léognan. The Sémillon, Sauvignon Blanc and Muscadelle come from dry-farmed vineyards in the Golden State's Sonoma County. Classical winemaking techniques such as *sur lies élevage* (aging on the lees) and *bâtonnage* (stirring) contribute to this true *vin de garde*. As in architectural arts, it is 'The Golden Ratio' or 'La Proportion Dorée.' (66% Sémillon, 32% Sauvignon Blanc, 2% Muscadelle)

Robert M. Parker, Jr. 98 points: *The 2012 'La Proportion Dorée' reveals an exquisite perfume, a stunningly full-bodied, multi-dimensional mouthfeel, and many of the same fruit and flowery characteristics found in the 2013... It appears that no one will let it linger in their cellar given how compelling it is at present. — The Wine Advocate, December 2014*

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