

## A PASSION FOR PINOT

by Jodie Morlet



# MORLET

*Family Vineyards*

*Spring Newsletter 2015*

ISSUE II

### DEVELOPING THE PASSION

Luc was born into a family who had been farming Pinot Noir for generations. Each relative held a tremendous respect for this varietal, referring to it as 'Cépage Noble' or 'Noble Grape.' Over time, Luc's grandfather Pierre Morlet even created his own field selection, which the family still speaks of with pride to this day.

Known for their award-winning Champagnes of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, Luc's family has always made a small amount of still wines as well. The family's red wine is selected from the best and oldest blocks of their vineyards and is their 'Avenay Rouge' label within the Côteaux Champenois appellation. Made with the *Saignée* technique, this wine represents the Morlet family's commitment to achieving the best Pinot Noir possible.

The Burgundian concept of 'climat' (A small and usually wall-enclosed vineyard block which is recognized as an individual *terroir* due to its unique microclimate and soil) was first explained to Luc by his family's neighbor in Avenay, Viscount Philippe Liger-Belair, who was the President of the French

national association of wine brokers. The Liger-Belair family has owned the famous La Romanée at Vosne-Romanée for several generations. The history surrounding this fabulous site fascinated Luc, who was able to visit it on several occasions throughout his childhood.

Growing up, Luc enjoyed helping



*View of the Pacific from the Second Ridge*

his grandparents in their garden. When he was seventeen, he spent one morning tilling the soil. To thank him, Luc's grand-mère prepared lunch while his grand-père entered the family's cave to select a *vin ordinaire*. Not being able to read the label, he returned with what he thought was an everyday drinking wine and poured himself a glass. Upon further inspection, Luc's father Eric was shocked to dis-

cover that the opened bottle was actually a 1978 Musigny 'Vieilles Vignes!' Although saddened by his father's deteriorating eyesight, Eric gladly poured a glass for himself, one for his mother and ... one for Luc! Luc was amazed by this *literally* blind tasting which left a profound mark on him of what a truly great Pinot Noir could be.

The following year, Luc began an internship at the Maison Chanson Père & Fils in Beaune. While working for this world-renowned Burgundy producer, Luc was also able to experience other Premiers Crus such as Le Clos des Mouches, Les Marconnets and Clos du Roi. Luc continued to develop his passion and skills for handcrafting outstanding Pinot Noirs. (Being paid partially in cash and partially in wine, didn't hurt either!) Several years later, while in graduate school, Luc had the amazing opportunity to take courses taught by the late Professeur Feuillat from the Dijon Wine Institute. Here, Luc's academic knowledge of Burgundian wine-making grew, enhancing everything he had learned from his previous hands-on experiences.

### THE QUEST FOR A NOBLE SITE

Five years after moving to California, Luc was named as the Winemaker for Peter Michael Winery. While Luc helped to develop the 'Seaview' Pinot Noir vineyard, he was introduced to the Nobles family, who has been farming their own coastal vineyard, the 'Nobles Ranch,' for four generations. In 2006,

Luc created our Morlet Family Vineyards label and began his quest for a noble site for the noble Pinot Noir grape. Possessing a very thin skin and delicate flavor profile, this varietal is challenging to grow and fickle in nature. Thus, it is extremely sensitive to any small variation in *terroir*, which, for Luc, is what makes working with this varietal so rewarding. According to Luc, the ideal vineyard would be located on a hillside, in the warmest spot of an overall cool area, and planted with mature vines in sedimentary soil. The Nobles Ranch fulfilled all of these requirements. Both literally and figuratively, Luc had found the noble hillsides, or 'Côteaux Nobles!'

### THREE 'CLIMATS' AND THREE PINOTS

We craft three distinct Pinot Noirs from this vineyard, which is located on the eastern slope of the second ridge from the Pacific Ocean (One hour north of the town of Jenner, past the Gualala River). Now the Fort Ross-Seaview AVA, Luc has referred to this special area as the true Sonoma Coast, because it benefits from both a cool maritime influence and a sunny mountain climate. The vineyard was planted more than twenty-five years ago with *selections massales*, or 'Suitcase Clones' which are considered to have some of the highest pedigrees in Burgundy. The beautiful hillside vineyard is above the fog layer, stretching from 1,300 to 1,600 feet of elevation, and benefits from the morning sunrays without exposure to the extreme afternoon heat. The *Gold Ridge* soil is of a sedimentary origin which is typical for the area. However, the depth of the loamy topsoil and the cementation levels of the sandy loamy subsoil vary greatly. Combined with slightly different sun exposures, each of our three vineyard blocks creates a unique *climat*.

Our Pinot Noirs embody refinement and subtlety, while displaying their own intense personalities. Luc's challenge and joy each vintage is to allow the wines to express these differences. More than inland locations, coastal vineyards are exposed to

greater climatic variations. Some seasons are early and hot, while others are late and very mild. Luc applies one of his favorite quotations, by French Diplomat Étienne-François de Choiseul, to his winemaking philosophy when hand-crafting our coastal Pinot Noirs: « *La véritable finesse est la vérité dite quelquefois avec force et toujours avec grâce.* » In other words, 'True finesse is about expressing the authenticity of the site, sometimes with power and always with grace.'

While Luc strongly believes that great wine cannot be made without great fruit, it is his humble and tender hand-guiding throughout the winemaking process which allows for the best expression of *terroir*. Picked by hand at night or early in the morning, the fruit is placed into small lugs which only accommodate six clusters high so that no fruit is ever bruised. The Pinot Noir grapes then make the three hour journey to our winery safely inside

### Our Noble Trio



one of our refrigerated trucks. After the cluster sorting is completed, the fruit is carefully destemmed. From there, the berries go onto the 'Le Trieur' sorting table that Luc designed in 2002. The grapes are then meticulously sorted by hand, berry per berry. Only after being placed in either small open-top stainless steel tanks or in open top Puncheons (*demi-muids* barrels), is the natural fermentation allowed to begin. Throughout the maceration process, the fruit is gently punched down twice per day. Once completed, each small lot is kept separate as the wine is racked into only the finest French barrels for the remainder of the *élevage*.

### THE PASSION CONTINUES

Dr. Ken and Margret Lossing, long-time supporters of our wines, recently visited our winery and shared a bottle of 1917 Hospices de Beaune 'Cuvée Estienne' with Luc and me. With nine vintages of Pinot Noir under the Morlet Family Vineyards label, and many more going back to his days at Peter Michael Winery or in France, Luc continues to be inspired by such remarkable experiences. (Although he is not recommending that anyone wait almost a century to enjoy our wines!) Luc's non-interventionist approach results in unfinned and unfiltered wines which are harmonious in their intensity, richness, complexity and refinement. Robert M. Parker, Jr. perfectly captured Luc's unique ability when he recently declared, 'Morlet is not only a fabulous winemaking talent, he knows how to bring the French *savoir faire* of complexity, elegance and precision to the ripe, concentrated, intense fruit of California.' We invite you to experience our passion for Pinot Noir... A Votre Santé!

### CÔTEAUX NOBLES

Coming from the block with a northern exposure, the 'Côteaux Nobles' tends to be our most feminine expression of Pinot Noir, with intense aromas of fresh raspberry and griotte wild cherry followed by notes of forest floor and spicy elderberry. With a lighter yet round mid-palate, it is always the most elegant and expressive, even while young.



*Picking 'Côteaux Nobles' at First Light, October 2006*



*'En Famille' Macerates in Demi-Muids Puncheons*



*Small Clusters & Tiny Berries from the 'Joli Cœur' Block*

## EN FAMILLE

Coming from the block with a south-eastern exposure and deeper topsoil, the structure and density of the 'En Famille' tend to be between that of our other two Pinot Noirs. Aromas of fresh raspberry and griotte wild cherry intertwine with more complex notes of fresh leather and hay. Open, mid-bodied and approachable at the time of release, this wine quickly develops a greater complexity on the nose and ages beautifully over time.

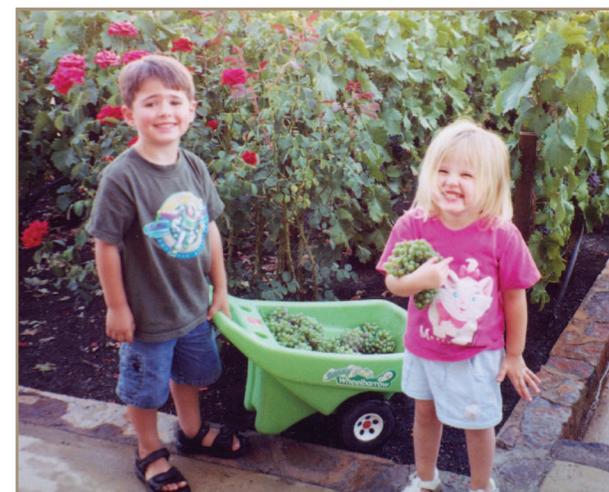
## JOLI CŒUR

The 'Joli Cœur' comes from the central block of the property, which has an eastern exposure. The shallow topsoil causes the roots to quickly reach the sandstone subsoil, resulting in a more masculine expression of the varietal. Blacker fruit aromas are accompanied by mineral notes such as graphite. Characterized by density, richness and depth, this wine can be a little reserved in its youth, but shines a few years after its release and has the most ageing potential of the three.



## INTRODUCING 'LES PETITS MORLET'

We are excited to announce the inaugural release of « Les Petits Morlet ». Growing up in the Napa Valley as the children of a fifth-generation French Winemaker, Paul and Claire Morlet had little choice but to spend much of their childhood exploring vineyards. From the time they could walk, Luc shared his knowledge and passion about viticulture and winemaking with them. Claire first viewed the Pisoni vineyards from atop her dad's shoulders, and at the age of five, Paul proclaimed that he saw a bear while he waited for his father to finish sampling Peter Michael Winery's 'Les Pavots' vineyard! Their youthful enthusiasm and appreciation for their father's talents continued to grow as they both entered their teenage years.



*Paul and Claire Morlet use their wheelbarrow to help with the green harvest (crop thinning) St. Helena, 2004*

This most recent addition to the Morlet Family Vineyards portfolio represents a judicious blend of different barrels. Embodying the youthful character and energy of newly planted vines, this special cuvée from Napa Valley is the offspring of our mature Cabernet Sauvignon bottling. Displaying a very intense bouquet of black currant, candied red and black cherries and mocha, intermixed with hints of blond tobacco leaves and earthy notes of leather and toasted red pepper, this 2012 vintage possesses youthful, yet sweet tannins and is characterized by its overall richness, suave character and approachability. Named in honor of our children, Paul and Claire, « Les Petits Morlet » represents their passion, talents, optimism and future.

## Spring 2015 Release



2013

### 'MA DOUCE'

FORT ROSS - SEAVIEW  
CHARDONNAY

Located on the Sonoma Coast, on the second ridge from the Pacific Ocean, this unique hillside vineyard benefits from both the cool maritime breeze (douce brise) and the mild and sunny mountain climate, creating ideal conditions for the Chardonnay. Handcrafted using classical winemaking techniques, this wine is dedicated to Jodie Morlet. It is 'My Sweet' or 'Ma Douce.'

**Robert Parker 94-96 points:** *The 2013 Chardonnay Ma Douce displays floral notes intermixed with notions of tangerines, nectarines, beeswax and honeysuckle. Full-bodied and rich, but more subtle than its 2012 counterpart, this beauty was made from the Old Wente clone of Chardonnay. Drink now-2023. -The Wine Advocate, December 2014*



2013

### 'MA PRINCESSE'

RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY  
CHARDONNAY

Located on the river bench of Sonoma County's Russian River Valley, this hillside vineyard benefits from ideal conditions for the Chardonnay vines. The cuttings came from the Old Wente, the field selection renowned for its excellent quality and richness. This concentration originates from the petite size of the berries. Handcrafted using classical winemaking techniques, this special wine is dedicated to our daughter, Claire Morlet. It is 'My Princess' or 'Ma Princesse.'

**Robert Parker 96-98 points:** *The 2013 Chardonnay Ma Princesse offers up scents of honeyed peach, poached pears, brioche, honeysuckle and caramelized citrus. Full-bodied with a Bâtard-Montrachet-like richness and intensity as well as background minerality, this profound white wine should drink well for 10+ years. -The Wine Advocate, December 2014*



2013

### 'COUP DE CŒUR'

SONOMA COUNTY  
CHARDONNAY

Each vintage, the tasting of individual lots of Chardonnay reveals a strictly limited number of barrels of truly outstanding features. These selected barrels are then judiciously blended to compose this unique cuvée. Handcrafted using classical winemaking techniques, it is our 'Heart's Astonishment' or 'Coup de Cœur.'

**Robert Parker 96-99 points:** *Of all the Morlet Chardonnays, the most minerality is found in the 2013 Chardonnay Coup de Cœur which offers up copious notes of orange blossoms, pineapples, mangoes, honeysuckle and subtle vanilla as well as toast. Full and rich with great acidity and a wet stone-like underlying minerality, it should drink well for a decade or more. -The Wine Advocate, December 2014*



2013

### 'CÔTEAUX NOBLES'

FORT ROSS - SEAVIEW  
PINOT NOIR

The distinction of 'noble' for the most interesting of grape varieties is extended to one of the rare sites whose natural conditions are ideal for growing excellent Pinot Noir. Located on the Sonoma Coast, on the Eastern slope (Côte) of the second ridge from the Pacific Ocean (Eaux), this unique hillside vineyard (Côteau) benefits from both the cool maritime breeze and the mild and sunny mountain climate. Handcrafted using classical winemaking techniques, this wine is also a tribute to the Nobles family who has been farming this land for four generations. It is the 'Noble Hillside' or 'Côteaux Nobles.'

**Robert Parker 95-97 points:** *Production is slightly smaller for the three 2013 Pinot Noirs, which are some of the finest Pinot Noirs I have ever tasted from California. The 2013 Pinot Noir Coteaux Nobles reminds me of the 1991 Leroy Romanée St.-Vivant from barrel (I remember it well). Copious notes of sweet black cherries, earth, forest floor, new saddle leather and spice box emerge from this concentrated, full-bodied, profound Pinot Noir. It should drink well for 10-15 years. This awesome Pinot Noir is a tribute to Morlet's brilliance. -The Wine Advocate, December 2014*



2013

### 'EN FAMILLE'

FORT ROSS - SEAVIEW  
PINOT NOIR

For generations our family has been growing the Pinot Noir grape in France. Each harvest, we love to celebrate this time-honored commitment while our children stomp a small vat of Pinot Noir from California's Sonoma Coast. Handcrafted by using classical winemaking techniques, this special wine is dedicated to our grandparents, parents and relatives from both countries. As for any family celebration or casual gathering, this wine is to be appreciated 'En Famille.'

**Robert Parker 93-95 points:** *The 2013 Pinot Noir En Famille displays wild strawberry and red and black cherries, as if it wants to be a red Corton. There are also dusty, loamy soil, kirsch, spice and subtle background oak characteristics. It should drink well for a decade or more. -The Wine Advocate, December 2014*



2013

### 'JOLI CŒUR'

FORT ROSS - SEAVIEW  
PINOT NOIR

This Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir is made from the very best section of the excellent 'Côteaux Nobles' hillside vineyard which is located on the eastern slope of the second ridge from the Pacific Ocean. This great and beautiful (Joli) plot is at the very center of the ranch, its heart (Cœur). Handcrafted by using classical winemaking techniques, this unique wine is also named after the typically seductive character of the Pinot Noir grape. It is the 'Charming Character' or 'Joli Cœur.'

**Robert Parker 95-97 points:** *Another prodigious effort is the 2013 Pinot Noir Joli Cœur. This outrageously rich wine tastes like Pinot Noir blood with notes of bouquet garni, forest floor, black and red fruits. A seamless, full-bodied, opulent, complex Pinot Noir with terrific purity, depth and precision, this stunning effort will age easily for 15+ years. -The Wine Advocate, December 2014*



2013

### 'LA PROPORTION DORÉE'

SONOMA COUNTY  
PROPRIETARY WHITE  
BORDEAUX-STYLE BLEND

(67% Sémillon, 31% Sauvignon Blanc, 2% Muscadelle)

A harmonious blend of the three classic white Bordeaux varieties grown in the Golden State's Sonoma County, this unique cuvée was handcrafted using classical winemaking techniques inspired from the finest producers of Pessac-Léognan. As in architectural arts, it is 'The Golden Ratio' or 'La Proportion Dorée.'

**Robert Parker 95 points:** *One of the finest blends of its kind, the La Proportion Dorée (Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc and a dollop of Muscadelle) reminds me of a California version of the limited production Château Haut-Brion Blanc... The 2013 Proprietary White La Proportion Dorée is composed of 67% Semillon, 31% Sauvignon Blanc and 2% Muscadelle from 29-year-old, dry-farmed vineyards. There is only a single cluster per shoot, which results in tiny yields. The wine is barrel-fermented with frequent lees stirring. A killer white, it is full-bodied with notes of caramelized lemon candy, honeysuckle, candle wax, flowers and tropical fruit marmalade. -The Wine Advocate, December 2014*

# MORLET

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