

'FORCE TRANQUILLE'
THE QUIET STRENGTH
BEHIND OUR NEWEST
CABERNET FRANC

by Jodie Morlet



MORLET
Family Vineyards

Spring Newsletter 2022

ISSUE XVI

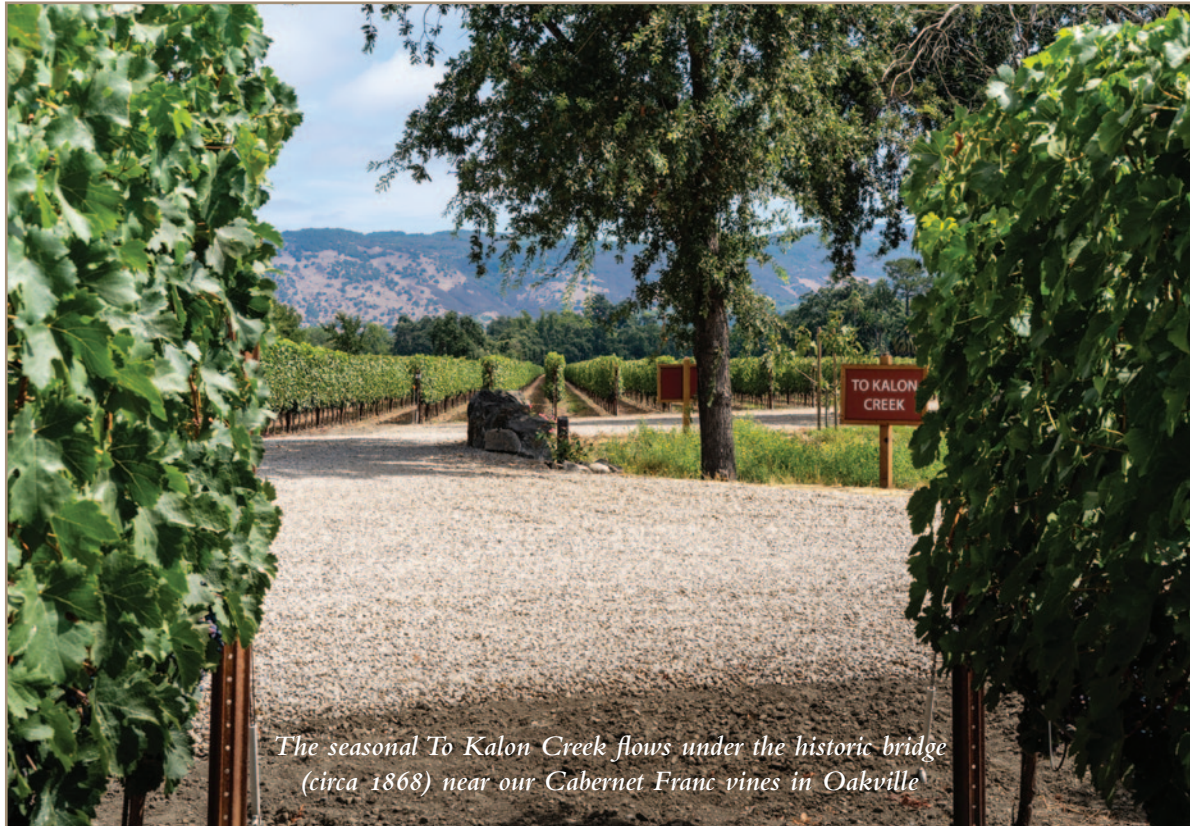
*L*uc and I first met in the summer of 1994. With four years of high school French under my belt, but with absolutely no experience drinking wine, I set off to fulfill my lifelong dream of visiting France. My step-grandmother and Luc's paternal grandmother were first cousins, so Luc was enlisted as my chauffeur from Charles de Gaulle airport to his family's home and winery in Champagne.

The year before, we had both finished our master's degrees, his DESS in Oenology from the Université des Sciences de Reims and my M.Ed. in teacher education from UCLA. (Luc would later go on to earn an MBA in wine business from the Burgundy School of Business in Dijon.) I had just completed my first year of teaching, and Luc was wrapping up his role as the assistant winemaker for Val d'Or Champagne Cellars, as he would soon leave for a winemaking position in Bordeaux.

Upon our arrival, Luc's mother Marie-Thérèse greeted us with flutes of Pierre Morlet Champagne. I took a sip to be respect-

ful, and when she came back around to top off each glass, I declined by saying, "Merci, mais je n'aime pas le goût." Proud of my ability to recall so many French words from my teenage years, I assumed that it would

JUST LIKE WATER



The seasonal To Kalon Creek flows under the historic bridge (circa 1868) near our Cabernet Franc vines in Oakville

be understood that I was trying to politely explain that I didn't need any more poured for me, because I didn't like the taste. Before I knew it, Luc's mother disappeared into the cellar and returned with another flute for me. I took a sip, followed by my simple French phrase. No sooner had

I finished speaking than Marie-Thérèse returned with a third full flute of Champagne. After five or six glasses had been presented to me, I realized that Mme Morlet had been opening bottles from their portfolio (*brut, demi-sec, multi-vintage, rosé, millésimé* etc.) because she believed that I had a picky palate! Mortified that I might be perceived as such

an ungrateful guest, I clarified, "C'est l'alcool auquel je n'ai pas l'habitude." (It's the alcohol that I'm not used to.) Luc's mother immediately declared in French, "This is Champagne... It's just like water... There's no alcohol in it!"

I knew that Luc was a nice young man, but I really thought that his family was crazy! I could not imagine living in a world where individuals enjoyed their sparkling creations as frequently as I drank water. (For the record, Luc also perceived that I was a nice young lady, but equally crazy, for how could someone not drink wine?!)

Over the course of the next year and a half, I realized that I couldn't live in a world without Luc and that his mother was one of the most hard-working and hospitable individuals that I would

have the privilege of knowing. It is therefore with great pleasure that I write this newsletter to introduce the newest wine to our portfolio, named in honor of my mother-in-law, Marie-Thérèse Morlet.

AND SO IT BEGINS



Luc spends time in the vineyards with his mother, 1971

Before Luc could walk, he was strapped to his mother's back as she tied the vines in the family's Grand Cru and Premier Cru Pinot Noir and Chardonnay vineyards. It comes as no surprise that Luc grew up with an intuitive understanding of viticulture and chose to dedicate his life to pursuing excellence in winemaking.

While Luc was working on his first viticulture degree, he visited several high-end producers on the Right Bank, each of whose wines consist of a great deal of Cabernet Franc. Luc's most memorable visit was to Château Cheval Blanc, one of only four Saint-Émilion estates to hold the Premier Grand Cru Classé (A) distinction. One half of the vineyard, which borders Pomerol, is planted to Cabernet Franc. Luc was immediately struck by the uniqueness and the singular expression of the Cabernet Franc-dominant wine, as well as the ethereal character of the varietal.

Luc went on to become the winemaker for Château Dauzac, a Classified Margaux Growth, where, under the guidance of technical director Michel Gaillard and consultant Jacques Boissenot, he perfected his skills making red Bordeaux wines of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Petit Verdot. Still, he dreamed of crafting a wine that would highlight Cabernet Franc. That opportunity would come years later, after he moved to the United States to join me in California.

OUR HEART OF THE VALLEY

Luc and I founded Morlet Family Vineyards in 2006. With Cheval Blanc still in mind, Luc was in search of the perfect vineyard for our Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc wines.

Cabernet Sauvignon is the offspring of Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc, which resulted from a cross-pollination between the white and red varieties. Although visibly different in shape, the leaves of both Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon are five-lobed.



Blocks B and F of our 'Cœur de Vallée' vineyard are planted exclusively to Cabernet Franc

The clusters of both varieties are small to medium in size with small, round and blue-black-colored berries, yet the Cabernet Franc's winged bunches are elongated and often more compact.

Cabernet Franc is the more finicky of these varieties. Too rich of an environment causes the vines to be overly vigorous and produce an undesired herbaceousness. On the contrary, if the soil lacks nutrients and water, the overstressed vines lead to a light-colored, jammy wine. In 2007, Luc secured a long-term lease with the famous Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard. Our Cabernet Franc portion of the vineyard was planted on Bales Series 104. This clay-loam combination is essential, because the clay increases the water retention capacity of the soil and therefore provides the vines with a better resistance to *stress hydrique*.

Luc began making our 'Cœur de Vallée' label in 2007, which is typically comprised of 75% Cabernet Sauvignon. The remainder of the blend is Cabernet Franc, for the depth and complexity it brings to the bouquet, with elements of toasted coffee beans, espresso and mocha. The varietal also completes the wine's structure with more linear and age-worthy tannins. Robert M. Parker, Jr. described this "gorgeous" wine as a "mind-blowing effort" that is "sensational, extraordinary, awesome and

magnificent." Antonio Galloni called it the most "elegant" of our Cabernets and a "tremendous wine." When tasting our "world-class" 2018 vintage, Jeb Dunnuck recounted that he "kept thinking of a great 1982 Bordeaux while tasting this beauty, as those show a similar level of class, richness and balance."

Having received such overwhelming praise for his ability to include Cabernet Franc in a blend, Luc decided to create a wine that would highlight the varietal exclusively. So, beginning with 2010, he added 'Force de la Nature' to our portfolio, and it wasn't long before the 2013, 2015 and 2016 vintages received 100 points from Robert Parker's Wine Advocate! Mr. Parker proclaimed, "It is a *tour de force* as well as a *force de la nature* from the Oakville Corridor." He commended the 2013 vintage as "an ethereal wine that goes beyond just being majestic" and stated that with this "remarkable" and "amazing" wine, "Luc Morlet has certainly proven once again his incredible talents and knowledge of great vineyard sites." Jeb Dunnuck also awarded the 2015 vintage 100 points and exclaimed that the wine "is one of the finest expressions of Cabernet Franc out there" reminding him of "a young 1998 Cheval Blanc!" He concluded that it is "an incredible wine from this great, great estate." Lisa Perrotti-Brown concurred that Luc's "spectacular" 2016 'Force de la Nature' "continues to set the bar sky-high for Napa Valley Cabernet Franc."

Luc and I had always longed to have our own vineyard in Oakville, so that, in conjunction with our 'Mon Chevalier' Knights Valley and 'Morlet Estate' St. Helena vineyards, all of our red Bordeaux varietal wines would be 100% estate grown. After years of searching, we were able to purchase a 24-acre property on the renowned Oakville Bench. By gaining independence from the grower, Luc had complete autonomy in making long-



Cabernet Franc (left) & Cabernet Sauvignon (right) are related, yet different, 'Cœur de Vallée' vineyard, 2019

term decisions to grow the ultimate quality of fruit. We named the property 'Cœur de Vallée' in reference to our Oakville wine of the same name.

Our vineyard borders the banks of the To Kalon Creek, which flows under the historic bridge (circa 1868) on the property. The Alluvial (A), Creek (C), Doctors' (D) and Eagle's Nest (E) blocks are planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, while the Bridge (B) and Force (F) blocks are devoted to Cabernet Franc. The vines benefit from an abundance of well-draining 40–60% gravelly soils, derived from an alluvial fan. A mapping of the geological soil profile confirmed that the majority of our vineyard is the same as To Kalon. Our Cabernet Sauvignon in blocks A, C and D is on 103 Bale Series (loamy topsoil on loamy subsoil) and the Cabernet Franc in block B is on 104 Bale Series (loamy topsoil on clay-loamy subsoil). Portions of E and F are on the Cole Series (loamy topsoil on silt-loamy subsoil).

With a strong sense of stewardship for the land, Luc implemented organic and sustainable farming methods. High density planting (2,200 vines per acre) results in competition among the vines. The rectangular 3 ¼ by 6 foot spacing facilitates proper airflow, thus naturally limiting pest and fungus development.

Beginning with the 2018 vintage, our 'Cœur de Vallée' and 'Force de la Nature' wines hail solely from our vineyard located in the heart of the Napa Valley.

A STUNNING DEBUT

Jeb Dunnuck announced, "Hats off to winemaker Luc Morlet, who unquestionably has a magic touch with both Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc!" Luc only crafts the 100% Cabernet Franc 'Force de la Nature' during outstanding vintages when the varietal can shine on its own, and with the exception of the 2011 vintage, 'Cœur de Vallée' has never exceeded 25% of Cabernet Franc. A few years ago, Luc felt that it was time to create a wine that demonstrates how truly special this varietal can be each year.



Château Cheval Blanc was Luc's inspiration for our 'Force Tranquille'

Château Cheval Blanc is comprised of approximately 60% Cabernet Franc and 40% Merlot (with a small amount of Cabernet Sauvignon). Oakville's climate is significantly warmer than the Right Bank, so Luc knew that Cabernet Sauvignon would be the ideal companion to his predominantly Cabernet Franc-based wine.

We are excited to introduce the 2019 'Force Tranquille'! Antonio Galloni bestowed 98 points to this inaugural vintage, which is composed of 85% Cabernet Franc and 15% Cabernet Sauvignon. He affirmed, "It's a stunning debut. Dark shades of fruit intermingled with spice, dried herbs, leather and coffee lend soaring complexity. Franc can be magical in Oakville, as it is here. Superb."

Last fall, we hosted Kreis Beall, co-founder of Blackberry Farm, one of America's most celebrated luxury resorts and culinary jewels, situated in the Great Smoky Mountains. We paired our 2019 'Force Tranquille' with Bocuse d'Or winning Chef Philip Tessier's bacon-wrapped venison. The seamless texture of the wine, along with the softness and sweetness of the tannins, perfectly complemented the tenderness and complexity of the gamey dish.

Luc and Vincent Darnajou recently conducted a blind comparative tasting. (Vincent's father Pierre was the master cooper for Château Pétrus prior to starting his own cooperage in 1976, and we have been the family's U.S. representative since 2007. For two generations, the wines of Château Cheval Blanc have gone through their *élevage* in Darnajou barrels.) The tasting included the 2018 vintage of this great wine, along with many top French producers, such as the '18 Château Trotte-Vieille. Vincent believes that his barrels bring the flesh (mid-palate) and horizontality to Cabernet Franc, and he determined that our 2019 'Force



Hosting Kreis Beall of Blackberry Farm and featuring the cuisine of internationally acclaimed Chef Philip Tessier

Tranquille' held its own next to these esteemed wines.

We invite you to share Luc's passion for Cabernet Franc and enjoy the inaugural vintage of our stunning 'Force Tranquille' from Oakville. *A Votre Santé!*



Marie-Thérèse Gressier was born on June 20, 1942 in Coulogne, France. The urban infrastructure of the town, located at the very northern part of the country near Calais, was destroyed during the Second World War. The family was forced to live in barracks, and Marie-

Thérèse and her three older brothers, Michel, Jean and André, suffered from hunger. The brothers were sent daily to gather firewood. Fearful of land mines, their parents sent the boys out one at a time, in case tragedy struck. Thankfully, all three boys survived, but the effects of malnourishment took its toll on each member of the family for years to come.

As a young adult, Marie-Thérèse worked as a lab tech at a paper pulp mill. Due to the hazardous conditions that led to lung issues, the employees were sent to wine country each summer to benefit from fresh air. During one annual retreat, Marie-Thérèse was enlisted to care for the children at the Manoir de Montflambert. She met Eric Morlet, who was tending to one of his family's vineyards in Mutigny, just adjacent to the majestic manor.

Eric and Marie-Thérèse were married in 1968. Two years later, Luc was born, followed by sons Paulin and Nicolas. Over the years, Marie-Thérèse did whatever was necessary for the family and business, from working in the vineyards to managing all of the sales and hospitality for Champagne Pierre Morlet. Each harvest, she prepared three-course lunches and dinners for the 35-member picking crew, while handling the bookkeeping for the winery. Throughout her life, she has consistently demonstrated a spirit of humility. She has always possessed an unwavering commitment to details, and her courage and dedicated work ethic remains one of the forces behind our family's passion for crafting the best wines possible. It is an absolute honor to name 'Force Tranquille' as a tribute to the quiet strength of Luc's remarkable mother, Marie-Thérèse Morlet.



2019

'FORCE
TRANQUILLE'

OAKVILLE, NAPA VALLEY
CABERNET FRANC

Located in the world-renowned Oakville appellation, in the heart of the Napa Valley, the To Kalon Creek meanders through our property. The combination of gravelly and clay-loamy Bale soil and gravelly silt-loamy Cole soil consistently reveals the complexity and subtlety of the Cabernet Franc varietal, in this warm yet temperate climate. This special wine pays homage to Luc's mother, Marie-Thérèse Morlet, who has always displayed an unwavering commitment to details, amazing courage and a genuine spirit of humility. Her dedicated work ethic remains one of the forces behind our family's passion for crafting the best wines possible. Handcrafted using classical winemaking techniques, it is 'Quiet Strength' or 'Force Tranquille.'

Antonio Galloni 98 points: *A new wine in this range, the 2019 'Force Tranquille' is a Cabernet Franc-based blend that incorporates a touch of Cabernet Sauvignon, both from 'Cœur de Vallée.' It's a stunning debut. Dark shades of fruit intermingled with spice, dried herbs, leather and coffee lend soaring complexity. Franc can be magical in Oakville, as it is here. Superb. - Vinous, Jan. 2022*



2019

'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 in the Oakville appellation 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 'Passionnement.'

Antonio Galloni 98 points: *A selection of the best barrels in the cellar, the 2019 'Passionnement' possesses tremendous resonance and tons of sheer volume. Crushed raspberry, black cherry, blood orange, spice and lavender flow as this extroverted, flamboyant wine shows off its racy curves and super inviting personality. The 'Passionnement' marries power, opulence and gravitas. - Vinous, Jan. 2022*



2019

'CŒUR DE VALLÉE'

OAKVILLE, NAPA VALLEY
CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Located in the world-renowned Oakville appellation, in the heart of the Napa Valley, our vineyard lies within an alluvial fan and borders the banks of the To Kalon Creek. The Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc vines benefit from gravelly and loamy Bale 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.'

Antonio Galloni 95 points: *The 2019 'Cœur de Vallée' is soft, racy and gracious. It presents gorgeous savory aromatics to play off its mid-weight structure and understated personality. Black cherry, mocha, leather, spice and menthol grace this understated Cabernet. This soft, open-knit Cabernet is already quite accessible and delicious. - Vinous, Jan. 2022*

Located in the world-renowned Oakville appellation, in the heart of the Napa Valley, the To Kalon Creek meanders through our property. The combination of gravelly and clay-loamy Bale soil and gravelly silt-loamy Cole soil consistently reveals the complexity and subtlety of the Cabernet Franc varietal, in this warm yet temperate climate. This special wine pays homage to Luc's mother, Marie-Thérèse Morlet, who has always displayed an unwavering commitment to details, amazing courage and a genuine spirit of humility. Her dedicated work ethic remains one of the forces behind our family's passion for crafting the best wines possible. Handcrafted using classical winemaking techniques, it is 'Quiet Strength' or 'Force Tranquille.'



2020

'LA PROPORTION
DORÉE'

SONOMA COUNTY
PROPRIETARY
WHITE BORDEAUX-
STYLE BLEND

A harmonious blend of the three classic white Bordeaux varietals, this unique cuvée 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 *élevage sur lies* (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.'

Winemaker Notes: *The 2020 'La Proportion Dorée' is composed of 71% Sémillon, 28% Sauvignon Blanc and 1% Muscadelle. The intense and complex bouquet displays honeysuckle, ripe apple, white peach scents, pear tart and preserved lemons, followed by nuances of clover honey, paraffin wax, lime leaves, crushed rocks and honeycomb. The medium to full-bodied palate has a racy zest balancing the concentrated mid-palate and revealing layers of stone fruit and citrusy flavors with mineral accents and a long, savory finish. Despite all its richness and size, the 2020 vintage is elegant, seamless, and offers intensity with no sensation of weight or heaviness. This 2020 has a solid decade of longevity ahead. - Luc Morlet, Feb. 2022*



2020

'MA PRINCESSE'

RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY
CHARDONNAY

Located on the river bench of Sonoma County's Russian River, this vineyard benefits from Goldridge soil containing metamorphic rock. The cuttings come from the Old Wenté field selection, renowned for excellent quality and minerality. Its concentration originates from the typically petite size of the berries. Handcrafted using classical Burgundian winemaking techniques, this wine is dedicated to our daughter, Claire Morlet. It is 'My Princess' or 'Ma Princesse.'

Winemaker Notes: *With stunning notes of orange blossom, citrus oils, hazelnuts, toasted bread and vanilla bean, caramelized peach and lemon curd, with hints of florals, oyster shells, honeycomb, evergreen and dried chamomile. Time in the glass brings out a range of stone fruit flavors before brighter, more saline notes bring it all together. Deep, full-bodied and opulent, the palate is rich and lavish in its toasted nut and dry yellow stone fruit entry. This beauty shows some obvious minerality on the palate, with bright acidity, tons of classic fruit, and a great long finish. This wine will benefit from being cellared for another year and will age gracefully for at least a decade. - Luc Morlet, Feb. 2022*



2020

'MA DOUCE'

FORT ROSS - SEAVIEW
CHARDONNAY

Located on the Sonoma Coast, on the second ridge from the Pacific Ocean, this hillside vineyard is comprised of Goldridge soil and benefits from both the cool maritime breeze (*douce brise*) and the mild and sunny mountain climate. Handcrafted using classical Burgundian winemaking techniques, this wine is dedicated to my wife, Jodie Morlet. It is 'My Sweet' or 'Ma Douce.'

Spring 2022 Release

Winemaker Notes: *The 2020 'Ma Douce' is beautifully scented of lime blossoms, apricot, spice and dried flowers, with gorgeous notes of caramelized lemon, orange blossom, white flowers and a touch of marine-like salinity. As the wine keeps opening, nuances of beeswax, brioche and toasted almonds appear to an already very complex bouquet. Full-bodied, the palate bursts with intense citrus and mineral sparks, delivering fantastic tension and a satiny texture, finishing large, very long and invigorating. Creamy, powerful and resonant, this fantastic wine is ready at release time and will age beautifully over the next 7-10 years. - Luc Morlet, Feb. 2022*



2020

'EN FAMILLE'

FORT ROSS - SEAVIEW
PINOT NOIR

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

Winemaker Notes: *Fermented all in puncheons, the 2020 'En Famille' jumps out of the glass with gorgeous scents of cranberry jelly, raspberry preserves and Griottes cherries, leading to nuances of underbrush, dried lavender, piney notes and fresh leather. The medium to full-bodied palate is densely laden with red fruit preserves and earthy layers, supported by very finely grained tannins, finishing with a refreshing lift. With terrific balance, a solid mid-palate depth, and both building tannins and acidity, it benefits from one to two years of bottle age and will drink well for a decade. - Luc Morlet, Feb. 2022*



2020

'CÔTEAUX NOBLES'

FORT ROSS - SEAVIEW
PINOT NOIR

Located on the Sonoma Coast, on the eastern slope (Côte) of the second ridge from the Pacific Ocean, this hillside vineyard (Côteau) benefits from the cool maritime breeze and the mild and sunny mountain climate. The noble site's natural conditions are ideal for growing excellent Pinot Noir in the Goldridge soil. Handcrafted using classical Burgundian winemaking techniques, it is the 'Noble Hillside' or 'Côteaux Nobles.'

Winemaker Notes: *Medium ruby-purple colored, the 2020 'Côteaux Nobles' is the most overt of our Pinot Noirs and has a vibrant bouquet of ripe raspberries, Morello cherries and fresh mulberries, intertwined with sandalwood, sappy fig, baking spices and white chocolate with lifted floral notes of roses and candied violets. The medium to full-bodied palate bursts with red berries and herbal accents, supported by soft, silky tannins and racy freshness, finishing long and fragrant with a distinct salty minerality and subtle marine-like influence. Enjoyable now and for the next seven years. Luc Morlet, Feb. 2022*

MORLET

Family Vineyards



MANICURED
VINEYARDS,
CLASSICAL
WINEMAKING
& CREATIVE
ARTISANSHIP