

BEHIND THE
NAMES:
A LOVE STORY

by Jodie Morlet

In February 1970, Luc Gaston Pierre Eugène Morlet was born in Epernay, France. Two weeks later, and half a world away, I arrived in Sacramento, California. No one could have imagined that thirty-five years later, Morlet Family Vineyards would be born.

Luc's family has hand-crafted Champagnes for five generations. Auguste Morlet, his great-great grandfather, was an orphan and planted the first vines for the family. Auguste's son Gaston was known as a «Force de la Nature» and founded the Val d'Or Cellars which remains a cooperative winery in the Champagne-Ardennes town Avenay-Val-d'Or to this day. Wanting to create a family legacy, Gaston named the family's label after his only child Pierre, who was Luc's grandfather. In 1968, Pierre's son Eric married Marie-Thérèse Gressier. They had three sons, of which Luc is the eldest.

I come from a family of educators. My mother, father, aunts and grandmother all were elementary, middle school and high school teachers. My parents, Michael Hauser and Linda Valine, separated when I was 1½ years old.

My mother later married a man who was, yes, a teacher! Richard Edwards helped to raise me from the time that I was a toddler. My father married Marcy Viguie, whose parents were both French, but even more remarkable is that her mother (my step-grandmother)



MORLET
Family Vineyards



Luc and Jodie Morlet restored a pre-Prohibition winery in St. Helena, built in 1880, as their family's winery. The estate is planted with Cabernet Sauvignon.

and Luc's paternal grandmother were cousins. It is here that our story together begins.

While Luc spent his childhood clearing rocks from vineyards, hand-tunneling caves with his father and brothers, and sipping Champagne (left behind in the glasses of customers), I spent my time growing up playing sports, taking dance classes, splitting time between two households and drinking ... soda.

Fall Newsletter 2014

ISSUE I

Following in his grandfather and father's footsteps, Luc went to the Ecole Viticole de Champagne for his viticulture degree. Luc then traveled to the Université des Sciences de Reims to earn his DNO (BS) and DESS (MS) in Œnologie. Luc's professional viticultural and winemaking experience began during graduate school with internships in Burgundy,

Bordeaux, Champagne and the Southwest of France. These included the Maison Chanson Père & Fils in Beaune and the Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique (INRA) in Bordeaux. Upon completion of graduate school, Luc's first full-time position was as the Assistant-Winemaker for the Val d'Or Champagne Cellars. In 1994, Luc became the 'Régisseur' (Winemaker) at Château Dauzac, a classified

Margaux growth, and continued to perfect his skills making Bordeaux style wines under the guidance of consultant Jacques Boissenot. Luc went back to school, earning an MBA in Wine Business from the Ecole Supérieure de Commerce de Dijon in Burgundy.

I was co-Valedictorian in 1988 at El Camino High School in Sacramento and then became a Bruin at UCLA. (I am still happy to pour wines for USC alumni, though!) After completing my BA in Child Psychology and Developmental Disabilities, I obtained an M.Ed. in Teacher Education. During graduate school, I had the amazing opportunity to student-



Clockwise from top left:

Luc plows with his father in Aÿ, France

Jodie tap dances with her mother (her "shadow") in a variety show, Sacramento, California

Luc and Jodie in front of the sightseeing plane, Epernay, France - June 1994

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teach at the UCLA Lab School. Learning from such great educators as Madeline Hunter, I was excited to begin teaching full-time.

One year after completing graduate school, Marcy invited me to travel to France. Not wanting a life-long dream of seeing Paris and the Loire Valley to pass me by, I hopped on a plane. There to greet me at Charles de Gaulle airport was Luc. (For those of you who have been hosted by

Luc at the winery, please note that I did NOT go to France in search of a husband!) As soon as Luc saw me, he felt a « Coup de Cœur » and was immediately smitten. Luc drove me to his family's home in Champagne, and this young Californian girl, who had never had anything containing alcohol, was introduced to a family whose entire world revolved around wine! I learned that the first relative of the Viguie and Morlet families who had immigrated to the United States had been an accomplished chef. Abel Pierre Aimé Coutanceau began his career in New York and finally settled at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco, no doubt preparing many a « Bouquet Garni » along the way.

After touring the Champagne region together by car and small plane for a few days, Luc and I developed an instant friendship. As my time in France ended, Luc was determined to keep in touch. After two years of sending love letters « Billet Doux », exchanging phone calls and a couple of visits to each other's countries, Luc was enamored by my « Joli Cœur » and decided to move to California for his sweetheart « Ma Douce ». With enough money to purchase a sleeping bag, a floor lamp and to cover his first month's rent in a studio apartment, Luc set off for America.

In 1996, Newton Vineyard of Napa Valley hired Luc as Director of Viticulture and Oenology in replacement of John Kongsgaard, with whom Luc had the opportunity to work through the first vintage. While there, he crafted the highly rated and famous "Chardonnay Unfiltered" (1996 through 2000). Also teaming up with renowned Bordeaux consultant Michel Rolland, Luc enhanced the four Bordeaux varietal estate on Spring Mountain and created the first Bordeaux blend ever at Newton Vineyard (Le Grand Vin, 1999).

In August 1997, Luc and I were married in Napa, and I began teaching first grade in St. Helena. A little over a year after our marriage, we welcomed our first child, Paul Michael Eric Morlet « Mon Chevalier ». Paul was born in October 1998 – right in the middle of harvest! In 2000, Luc and I welcomed our second child, Claire Ann-Marie Morlet « Ma Princesse », who was also born in October! Soon afterward, Luc joined the team at Peter Michael Winery of Knights Valley as the Winemaker. Luc's expertise in Bordeaux and Burgundy style viticulture and winemaking lent itself well to the Peter Michael mission of handcrafting classical wines from mountain vineyards, in limited quantity. Luc's technical leadership helped the Peter Michael Winery to improve upon its already acclaimed wines (2001 through 2005).



*Left: Wedding photo on the Japanese bridge
at Newton Vineyard — August 1997*

*Below: Claire, Luc, Jodie, Paul & Chocolate,
St. Helena, California*

While Paul was still an infant, I formed The Morlet Selection, Inc. and began importing Luc's family's Champagnes from France. Pierre Morlet Champagnes are now crafted by Luc's younger brother, Paulin Morlet. Over the years, the company has grown to include the importation and distribution of exclusive French oak barrels from two of the best Coopers in Bordeaux (Tonnellerie Vincent Darnajou) and Burgundy (Tonnellerie Gauthier Frères). When Paul and Claire were older, I eventually went back to teaching full-time. By the end of 2005, we were in a position to refinance our home in St. Helena and put a down payment on a property in Knights Valley. After monitoring the weather pattern for two years, Luc decided to plant the hillside estate with Cabernet Sauvignon.

In 2006, Luc's desire to begin his own wine label reached fruition. He remained at Peter Michael Winery as the Consultant Winemaker, succeeded by his youngest brother, Nicolas Morlet. Luc and I first created the Morlet Family Vineyards portfolio by taking out a home equity loan in order to secure long-term leases on vineyards. Luc selected only the highest quality of vineyards, including the Beckstoffer – To Kalon Vineyard, to which «Cœur de Vallée» pays tribute, and began handcrafting vineyard designated wines such as the «Côteaux Nobles» Pinot Noir and unique cuvées like the «La Proportion Dorée» white Bordeaux-

style blend. Passionate for both the expression of the 'terroirs' as well as for the continuous pursuit of the ultimate quality, Luc calls his winemaking philosophy 'neo-classic laissez-faire without compromise.' In other words, Luc describes it as a non-interventionist winemaking style driven by an ongoing search for quality improvement. With 30 vintages under his belt and with his own zest for innovation, Luc uses century old principles and classic Burgundy and Bordeaux methods, while adapting to California's natural conditions.

In August 2010, Luc and I sold our home in order to purchase a charming estate, just north of the town of St. Helena.

We restored the historic farmhouse, built in 1853, and converted the stone building, built in 1880, into our family's winery. This latter facility was originally the Castner Winery until its closure during Prohibition. Located in the beautiful St. Helena Appellation, the estate is planted with Cabernet Sauvignon and is the exclusive fruit source for our «Morlet Estate» label. I retired from teaching in June of 2011 in order to work as the General Manager for the winery. The first harvest at the "new-old" winery, as Luc likes to describe it, was the 2012 vintage.

After seventeen years of marriage, Luc and I still love each other «Passionnément». Paul and Claire «Les Petits Morlets» help their parents with the winery whenever they are not busy with school or extracurricular activities. Our family will continue working closely together «En Famille» throughout future vineyard development, locating and restoring historic wine caves and building new ones, but that's another part of the story . . . A Votre Santé!



Fall 2014 Release



2012

'CŒUR DE VALLÉE'

BECKSTOFFER-TO KALON
OAKVILLE, NAPA VALLEY
CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Few vineyard sites truly have a strong and unique personality. The famous Beckstoffer-To Kalon vineyard lies on the Oakville bench, in the Napa Valley. Planted on this prime location, the French varietal Cabernet Sauvignon has become the flagship of this region, and has brought her a worldwide recognition. We named this wine 'Cœur de Vallée' to honor this unique site and its wonderful companions, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. Handcrafted by classical winemaking techniques, this wine represents the vibrant heart of a very special place. (75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Cabernet Franc)

Robert Parker 96-100 points: *A wine that may merit a three digit score is the 2012 Cœur de Vallée. . . A seamless piece of haute couture as winemaking goes, crème de cassis, spring flower, blueberry liqueur, charcoal ember and graphite notes are all present in this complex, full-bodied, multidimensional, flawlessly constructed 2012. Drink this gorgeous effort over the next 25+ years. —The Wine Advocate, October 2013*



2012

'PASSIONNÉMENT'

NAPA VALLEY
CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Crafted with the passionate, uncompromised & ongoing pursuit of quality, this judicious blend draws on only the finest barrels featuring the close interaction of beautiful vineyards located on the Oakville bench of Napa Valley and our manicured vineyards 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!) Handcrafted by using classical winemaking techniques, this special wine is dedicated to my wife, Jodie Morlet. It is 'Passionately' or 'Passionnément.' (100% Cabernet Sauvignon)

Robert Parker 94-97 points: *The 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Passionnément is lush and opulent with gorgeous fruit, super ripeness, and plenty of black currant, blackberry, vanillin, toast and licorice characteristics. It is front end-loaded with enough gorgeous depth, stuffing and richness to ensure 20 years of longevity. —The Wine Advocate, October 2013*



2012

'MON CHEVALIER'

KNIGHTS VALLEY
CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Located on the hillsides of Knights Valley, near Calistoga, our vineyard benefits from its proximity to Mount St. Helena, whose warm and windy climate is ideal for the long ripening of the Bordeaux red varieties. Handcrafted by using classical winemaking techniques, this special wine is dedicated to our son, Paul Morlet. It is 'My Knight' or 'Mon Chevalier.' (86% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Cabernet Franc, 3% Merlot, 2% Malbec, 1% Petit Verdot)

Robert Parker 93-96 points: *Another killer effort from Luc Morlet is the 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Mon Chevalier (. . . from Knights*

Valley). This beautiful wine displays a deep ruby/purple color, lots of minerality and plenty of blackberry and blueberry fruit intermixed with hints of menthol and Christmas fruitcake. The minerality is much more noticeable in this wine. . . —The Wine Advocate, October 2013



2012

'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, rocky alluvial subsoil and full sun exposure create the ideal 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 by using classical winemaking techniques and with the uncompromised and ongoing pursuit of quality, this wine represents the precious memory of a very special place. (100% Cabernet Sauvignon)

Robert Parker 93-95 points: *As one might expect, the 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon is even richer than the 2011. Luc Morlet did a serious crop-thinning because of the potential for an enormous crop size, and the result is a perfumed, deep ruby/purple-colored 2012 offering notes of lead pencil shavings, licorice, charcoal, wood smoke, earth, black currants and blackberries. This opulent, full-bodied beauty is loaded with goodies. Drink it over the next 20 years. —The Wine Advocate, October 2013*



2012

'FORCE DE LA NATURE'

BECKSTOFFER-TO KALON
OAKVILLE, NAPA VALLEY
CABERNET FRANC

This wine captures the strong, rich and dense character of the Cabernet Franc grapes from the famous Beckstoffer - To Kalon vineyard in Oakville. This wine, bottled only during outstanding vintages, 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 has remained one of the forces behind generations of our family passionately growing grapes and making the best wines possible. Crafted from 100% Cabernet Franc grapes, this wine is truly a 'Force of Nature' or 'Force de la Nature.' (100% Cabernet Franc)

Robert Parker 96-100 points: *In five or six years, the best wine may well be the prodigious 2012 Cabernet Franc Force de la Nature, a 100% Cabernet Franc from the Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard. This brilliant effort boasts an ethereal personality along with an amazing combination of blue, red and black fruits, an assortment of floral notes, a seamless integration of acidity, alcohol, tannin and wood, and sensational concentration as well as texture. A spectacular red wine, it should drink well young yet age for two decades. —The Wine Advocate, October 2013*

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2012

'BOUQUET GARNI'

BENNETT VALLEY
SYRAH

This wine is made from an exceptional hillside vineyard in Bennett Valley, where natural conditions are ideal for Syrah. Handcrafted by using classical winemaking techniques of Vallée du Rhone, this wine reveals a complex and spicy bouquet. Named after the famous culinary bundle to honor our first relative who emigrated from France to the USA, Abel Pierre Aimé Coutanceau, who was, by profession, an accomplished chef, it is the 'Garnished Bouquet' or 'Bouquet Garni.' (100% Syrah)

Robert Parker 94-96 points: *A prodigious wine in the making, the 2012 Syrah Bouquet Garni possesses more concentration as well as enormous fruit and extract, velvety, sweet tannin, adequate acidity and a long finish dominated by floral and blackberry notes. It will offer plenty of enjoyment over the next 10-12+ years. —The Wine Advocate, December 2013*

THE VINTAGE AND HARVEST OF 2012

by Luc Morlet

"Gourmet & Gourmand" is a perfect descriptive for this incredible vintage which winemakers and collectors alike will long remember! Thanks to a fortunate set of natural circumstances, 2012 was a one-of-a-kind vintage where both abundance and high quality found a common path. After two consecutive growing seasons where cooler-than-average weather conditions had given vines low growth and small crops to bear, the vines were naturally conditioned to respond with vigorous growth and abundant yield. An ideal spring bud break followed by an even blooming and fruit set and warm and dry summer days provided the vines with the ideal conditions to release their energy and produce an enormous crop size. Therefore, rigorous and timely mannered thinning of the crop was paramount to best control its exuberance and secure the highest quality. A long Indian summer including a few heat spikes providently enabled the flavors development, concentration of the berries and ripening of the tannins. Additional sets of daily punch downs were crucial to increase the proper extraction. The Morlet Family Vineyards 2012 Cabernet Sauvignons display character, intensity and richness with very luscious tannins and sensational texture. Cheers!

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