

## TRADITION AND INNOVATION: SEEKING 'HARMONIE'

by Jodie Morlet



# MORLET

*Family Vineyards*



'Harmonie'  
The  
inspiration  
behind our  
logo

### APPLYING RESEARCH TO VITICULTURE

In school, Luc had a great affinity for math and science, and his curiosity led to a love for computers. Luc's first computer was a Commodore PET and he enjoyed using the Pascal, Fortran, Forth, BASIC and DOS languages to create his own programs.

While completing his viticultural degree at L'École Viticole de Champagne, Luc was selected for a highly sought-

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after summer internship at the INRA de Bordeaux in the Station Pathologie Végétale, where the research focused on *Botrytis* and the *Maladies de Dépérissement* of *eutypa*, *esca* and *armillaria*. Under the guidance of Pr. Bernadette Dubos, Luc conducted research on the use of chemicals and mathematical modeling in sustainable farming as well as the use of



*Luc inoculates Trichoderma Harzanium at the INRA, 1989*

the hyper-parasite *Trichoderma Harzanium* in organic farming. Impressed by his productivity, Pr. Dubos hired Luc to be an assistant for the remainder of the summer. Luc flew over the vineyards and noted which blocks were suffering. He then applied his organic remedy to help the diseased vines.



*Luc flies over diseased vineyards and administers an organic spray, Bordeaux 1989*

To this day, he remembers a quotation that was written on a wall in the lab: *On trouve beaucoup de chercheurs qui cherchent. Ici, on cherche les quelques chercheurs qui trouvent.* (One finds many scientists who search. Here, we seek the few scientists who find.)

Luc wrote his master's thesis based on his work at Champagne Duval-Leroy, where he used the cryo-selection of Champagne grapes to obtain optimum ripeness levels and to demonstrate the merit of the traditional pressing program. After being granted permission by the Institut National des Appellations

### PURSuing QUALITY IN CHAMPAGNE

Throughout the generations, Luc's family sought ways to increase their productivity and the quality of their Champagnes. They had a true DIY mindset, because their budget was often low. Luc's grandfather, Pierre, once joked that they needed to figure out how to turn a food can into a gold watch. Although Luc's father, Eric, never made any timepieces, he did build many devices, including three elevators to transport supplies between the winery's attic, cellars and caves. Luc recalls frequently helping his father weld those elevators until 3:00AM!

Eric wanted his sons to be mechanically inclined. When they were teenagers, he had the boys completely take apart the overhead tractor that the family had originally purchased in 1960. The boys were proud of their achievement until Eric told them to put the tractor back together again... in working order!

Luc's grandfather modeled a strong work ethic and an attention to detail. He instructed Luc to *mettre son cœur dans l'ouvrage* (put your heart in the work) and *aimer le travail bien fait* (love a job well done). When Luc was young, he helped prepare Champagne orders for fulfillment. If he didn't apply the case labels exactly straight, Pierre made him start over again. Luc began to develop an intrinsic desire to pursue the utmost in quality.

Pierre also encouraged his grandson to be creative, reminding him to *sois courageux mais pas téméraire* (be courageous but not reckless). When Luc was 7 years old, he used elderberry bushes found around his grandparents' summer home in the Lot region of France to invent his own beverages.

After becoming quite ill from drinking his concoctions, Luc never forgot the *mais pas téméraire* part again!



*Luc's first computer, 1982*

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d'Origine (INAO), Luc slightly froze the berries at a very precise temperature. Some grapes remained liquid, while others had the consistency of sorbet and still others were more like ice cubes. By applying pressure, only the juice from the berries with the highest sugar content was extracted.

Luc was involved in many more experimental programs early in his career. While working at Chanson Père et Fils in Beaune, he evaluated the effectiveness of Vinomatic tanks. These rotary fermenters contained vanes which slowly revolved and ensured contact between the grape skins and juice in order to increase tannin extraction. After moving to California, he continued to implement analytical procedures at Newton Vineyard and Peter Michael Winery, including those with various natural yeast strains as well as typical cooper trials.

#### CREATIVITY IN CALIFORNIA

While sorting grapes during harvest 2001 at Peter Michael Winery, Luc glanced down at his berry-stained hand and noticed a scar that he had received fourteen years earlier. He was immediately inspired to develop a way to execute berry per berry sorting in a more efficient manner. Throughout the 1987 harvest, Luc worked at Le Val d'Or Champagne Cellars in Avenay-Val-D'Or, France. One of his responsibilities was to brush and clean the filter which separated solids from waste water. The safety pin failed, and the stainless steel hood suddenly dropped, cutting his finger to the bone. As Luc recalled this injury which resulted in a permanent scar, he began to consider a different use for a wedge wire screen.

In his ongoing pursuit of quality, Luc developed the concept for Le Trieur™ in 2001. He used the first prototype of this sorting table, which was mounted directly to a berry-per-berry manual sorting table, during the 2002 harvest at Peter Michael Winery. The following year, Le



Luc shows the filter in Champagne that led to Le Trieur™

Trieur™ became an independent machine, similar to a sluice box on four springs, and operated by an off-centered cam. Using statistics that he gathered in several diverse vineyards, Luc designed the wedge wire screen to have a ¼ inch gap between the rods.

Removing nearly 100% of the shot berries and approximately 80% of the raisins, both extremes of the ripeness spectrum, Le Trieur™ proved to be an effective solution to berry sorting. This sorting machine was immediately in demand, and within a few years, over 250 were sold to high-end wineries in the Napa Valley and Sonoma County. Luc used his portion of the royalties to purchase much of our equipment when we began our own label in 2006.

#### THE BALANCE OF TRADITION AND INNOVATION

It is Luc's ability to combine proven traditional French winemaking techniques with his ongoing zest for innovation that has been behind the success of Morlet Family Vineyards. While Le Trieur™ allows the initial berry per berry sorting to be more efficient, all of our red grapes are then sorted individually by hand in order to maintain the highest quality of fruit possible.

Luc naturally ferments and macerates two-thirds of our red wines in small open top stainless steel tanks. As soon as the grapes are put into the top of the tanks by gravity, one pump-over is done to activate the natural yeast. From that point on, the French technique of punch-downs is used. This process allows for the evaporation of some of the alcohol, preserves freshness and results in a more fruit-driven wine.

The other third of the red grapes are put in open top puncheons. These barrels, which are 2<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> times the size of a normal barrel (159 gallons) are referred to as *demi-muids* when they are closed and used for aging, and *gueule-bée* when they are open top and used for fermentations. Punch-downs in *gueule-bée* barrels bring more aromatic complexity, aid in extraction and lead to rounder and softer tannins.

Luc invented the multi-functional Gyrobox™. At the end of the natural fermentation and maceration period,



Luc monitors Le Trieur™



A berry per berry sorting team of 10 individuals results in the highest quality of fruit possible

this device, operated with a forklift, drains the puncheons. Instead of pumping out the wine over the course of an hour, Luc's innovative design uses only gravity. This gentler method preserves the wine's aromatics and also reduces the time spent to only twenty minutes.

The natural fermentation of all of our white wines occurs in 60-gallon barrels. The Burgundian techniques of *élevage sur lies* (aging on the lees) and *bâtonnage* (stirring) develop complexity in the aromatics, flavor profile and the overall texture of the wine. These traditional methods contribute to the creation of a true *vin de garde* with graceful aging capability.

Luc institutes consistent quality control measures for our French oak barrels and our state of the art One by One™ corks from Portugal. In his continuing pursuit of excellence, he is always thinking of ways in which he can improve our farming methods and winemaking process. He is currently working on a design for a seed spreader to sow the cover crop seeds under the vines!

It is important to note that Luc does not chase the latest trends in winemaking solely because they are new. For example, Luc conducted trials at other wineries for two years using an optical sorter but concluded that although the sorting is faster, it can allow undesirable materials to go through while wasting perfectly good berries that are discarded. In addition, with as many varieties and varied *terroirs* with which Luc works, it would require him to spend a fair amount of time on the computer. Luc utilizes computers for business purposes, but he believes that his time



*Paul and Claire Morlet demonstrate a punch-down in an open top tank*

is better spent in the vineyards during harvest. So, our grapes continue to be sorted first by Le Trieur™ and then by hand.

Likewise, Luc has experienced the OXOline® and similar barrel stacking systems in Bordeaux; however, he is not a fan of fermenting red wines in standard 60-gallon barrels and spinning them throughout the process. He believes that the ratio of oak to juice in these smaller barrels is too high and that the spinning can overly extract wine from the seeds. Further, while it may take up to four barrels (240 gallons) of fermenting wine to result in one barrel, we only need one puncheon (159 gallons) to yield one barrel of wine.

Concrete wine tanks were used historically in Europe and the United States, and there has been a resurgence in more recent years. When Luc was growing up, his family utilized a few concrete wine tanks. Luc and his brothers routinely climbed inside to remove the tartrate that formed on the interior surfaces. Two boys would be inside (one scraping and one using the torch), while the third brother remained outside to ensure that his siblings were still breathing! Each time the vacuum cleaner bag filled, the boys rotated their roles. Feelings of claustrophobia still arise whenever Luc recalls those tanks, so I can guarantee



*One-third of our red wines naturally ferment and macerate in gueule-bée barrels*



*The Gyrobox™ drains a puncheon after fermentation and maceration are completed*

characteristics of each harvest. Aged exclusively in French oak barrels from selected artisan coopers, the wines are bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Luc's unwavering commitment to quality leads to small yields, attentive sorting, and the highest standard when blending. Thus, a very limited amount of each wine is ever produced.

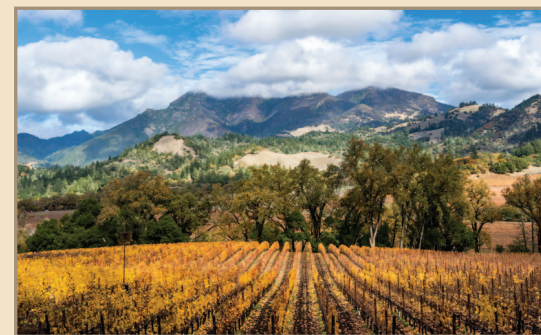
Just as Luc's expertise in *L'Art d'Assemblage* is demonstrated by his selection and blending of the "best of the best" barrels when crafting our 'Coup de Cœur' Chardonnay and 'Passionné' Cabernet Sauvignon, his overall wine-making talent is showcased as he perfectly balances traditional winemaking techniques and innovation. We invite you to open a bottle of one of our wines to experience the *Harmonie* in Luc's approach to winemaking. ...*A Votre Santé!*

that he will never experiment with concrete tanks for our wines!

#### THE INSPIRATION BEHIND OUR LOGO

When searching for the inspiration for our logo, Luc and I looked no further than our French antique mantel clock. *Harmonie* is composed of one woman playing a harp and another singing, and was sculpted by renowned French artist Mathurin Moreau. Awarded the medal of honor from the Paris Salon and elected mayor of the 19th *arrondissement*, Moreau's 'L'Océanie' is showcased in the courtyard of the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. (A sculpture by his nephews Louis Auguste Moreau and François Hippolyte Moreau entitled *Les Vendanges* is the inspiration behind our 'Les Petits Morlet' logo.)

Our estate vineyards are farmed organically year-round by our full-time staff. Every year, Luc adapts his neo-classic philosophy to the unique

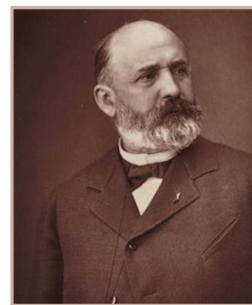


*'Mon Chevalier' Estate Vineyard, Knights Valley, Fall 2018*

*Beginning with the inaugural 2007 vintage, we named our 'Mon Chevalier' Knights Valley Cabernet Sauvignon in honor of our son, Paul. When he was young, he loved Star Wars, so naturally, we drew inspiration for the symbol on his wine label from a lightsaber! As Paul grew into his teenage years, he developed an interest in robotics. At his high school graduation, he received the Academic Excellence Award in Engineering for his achievements in the four-year program. Paul is currently a university junior majoring in mechanical engineering and spends his free time volunteering at robotics camps for middle school students.*

*Our Fall Release features the 2016 vintage of 'Mon Chevalier' which is a blend of 94% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Cabernet Franc, 1% Malbec and 1% Petit Verdot. Jeb Dunnuck recently exclaimed that this wine has a "gorgeous bouquet" and is a "rounded, supple, incredibly textured Cabernet Sauvignon with a great finish." He continued, "It's already terrific yet will keep for 20-25 years or more."*

*Paul definitely inherited Luc's aptitude for innovation, and we trust that you will enjoy the ninth vintage of 'Mon Chevalier!'*



*Mathurin Moreau, circa 1892*

## Fall 2019 Release



2016

### 'FORCE DE LA NATURE'

OAKVILLE, NAPA VALLEY  
CABERNET FRANC

This wine captures the robust, dense and rich character of the Cabernet Franc grapes from a vineyard located within the To Kalon Creek alluvial fan. 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.'

**Lisa Perrotti-Brown 100 points:** *The very deep purple-black colored 2016 'Force de la Nature' is a little closed to begin, emitting slowly releasing scents of kirsch, redcurrant jelly, crushed black berries and black raspberries plus a waft of chocolate box. Medium to full-bodied, the palate is wonderfully elegant, giving beautifully fine-grained tannins and just enough freshness to lift the perfumed fruit to a very long finish. Morlet's spectacular 'Force de la Nature' continues to set the bar sky-high for Napa Valley Cabernet Franc. — Robert Parker's Wine Advocate, October 2018*



2016

### '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. Handcrafted using classical winemaking techniques, this special wine is dedicated to our son, Paul Morlet. It is 'My Knight' or 'Mon Chevalier.'

**Lisa Perrotti-Brown 96+ points:** *The estate-grown 2016 'Mon Chevalier' is a blend of 94% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Cabernet Franc, 1% Malbec and 1% Petit Verdot. Very deep purple-black in color, it charges forth with intense notes of crushed black cherries, black berry preserves and cassis scents with touches of spearmint, Indian spices, espresso and dried lavender plus a waft of roses. Full-bodied, the palate reveals incredible restraint, slowly revealing earth and black fruit layers framed by firm, grainy tannins and just enough freshness, finishing very long and spicy. — Robert Parker's Wine Advocate, October 2018*



2016

### '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 series, as well as full sun exposure, create superb conditions for our Cabernet Sauvignon vines. Respecting its 1880 charm, we restored the pre-Prohibition stone winery 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.

**Jeb Dunnuck 97+ points:** *The 2016 'Morlet Estate' is always a more structured, masculine wine compared to the 'Passionnement' release. Opulent notes of black fruits, chocolate, smoked earth, and some obvious minerality all emerge from this full-bodied, structured, big-boned Cabernet Sauvignon that's going to benefit from 4-5 years of bottle age and keep for 2-3 decades. — JebDunnuck.com, June 2019*



2017

### 'COUP DE CŒUR'

SONOMA COAST  
CHARDONNAY

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

**Jeb Dunnuck 99 points:** *The borderline perfect 2017 'Coup de Cœur' comes from a selection of the best barrels and there are only 150 cases of this elixir. Aged in 40% new French oak, this exotic, powerful Chardonnay offers a heavenly bouquet of honeyed citrus, toasted brioche exotic flowers, and orange blossom. It's rich, voluptuous, and thrillingly textured, yet has good acidity, remarkable purity, a stacked mid-palate and a finish that won't quit. Count me impressed; California Chardonnay doesn't get much better. — JebDunnuck.com, June 2019*



2017

### 'JOLI CŒUR'

FORT ROSS - SEAVIEW  
PINOT NOIR

This Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir is made from the very best section of the 'Côteaux Nobles' vineyard, 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 using classical Burgundian winemaking techniques, we named this age-worthy wine after the French expression which references the intriguing and attractive character of Pinot Noir. It is the 'Charming Character' or 'Joli Cœur.'

**Jeb Dunnuck 98 points:** *From thinner, shale, east-facing slopes, 2017 'Joli Cœur' is wonderfully complete and balanced, with complexity, elegance, and power all present in this thrilling bottle of wine. Black raspberries, graphite, sandalwood, and crushed rock nuances all flow to a medium to full-bodied effort that has nothing out of place, polished tannins, and integrated acidity. This is one of those wines that builds and grows on you with time in the glass, and it's a remarkable effort in 2017. Drink it over the coming decade. — JebDunnuck.com, June 2019*



2017

### 'BOUQUET GARNI'

BENNETT VALLEY  
SYRAH

This wine is made from an exceptional hillside vineyard located in Bennett Valley, where natural conditions are perfect for growing Syrah in the Gouling cobbly clay loam soil. As a result of the co-fermentation of three field selections, this wine reveals a complex and spicy bouquet. Handcrafted using classical winemaking techniques of Vallée du Rhône, this unique wine is named after the famous culinary bundle to honor our first relative who emigrated from France to the USA, Abel Pierre Aimé Coutanceau, who was a pro-

fessional chef. It is the 'Garnished Bouquet' or 'Bouquet Garni.'

**Lisa Perrotti-Brown 94-96 points:** *The 2017 'Bouquet Garni' is composed of 100% Syrah from three clones planted on Gouling cobbly clay loam at 600 feet in elevation, fermented one-third in puncheons and two-thirds in stainless steel. Deep garnet-purple colored, it opens with warm red and black plums, Black Forest cake and wild blueberry scents with hints of black pepper, bay leaves and violets. Medium to full-bodied, it delivers loads of elegant, expressive black fruits in the mouth, with soft, rounded tannins and a compelling herbal lift on the long finish. — Robert Parker's Wine Advocate, October 2018*



2015

### 'LES PETITS MORLET'

NAPA VALLEY  
CABERNET SAUVIGNON

From a judicious blend of different barrels, this special cuvée from Napa Valley embodies the youthful character and energy of the newly planted vines and is the offspring of our mature Cabernet Sauvignon bottlings. Named in honor of our children, Paul & Claire, 'Les Petits Morlet' represents their passion, talents, optimism and future.

**Jeb Dunnuck 93 points:** *Slightly deeper colored than the '14, the 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon 'Les Petits Morlet' offers more black fruits, graphite, scorched earth, and tobacco. It's another full-bodied yet finesse-driven wine from this estate that has good acidity, ripe tannin, and plenty of class. As with the 2014, it will keep for over a decade. — JebDunnuck.com, June 2018*



2013

### '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, five 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 *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.'

**Robert M. Parker, Jr. 95 points:** *One of the finest blends of its kind, the 'La Proportion Dorée' reminds me of a California version of the limited production Château Haut-Brion Blanc. The 2013 is composed of 66% Sémillon, 32% 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. — Robert Parker's Wine Advocate, December 2014*

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