

'MON CHEVALIER'  
A MAJESTIC SITE,  
OUR KNIGHT &  
CLASSIC CABERNET

by Jodie Morlet



MORLET  
*Family Vineyards*

*Fall Newsletter 2015*

ISSUE III

THE REALIZATION OF A DREAM

*O*n a beautiful Sunday morning one fall, Luc turned to me and reflected, "My family has vineyards in France; that legacy is enough for me. I don't need my own land in California. We'll save our money and buy you a big house." That same afternoon, we toured open houses in the Napa Valley, just for fun. In one of the homes, our young daughter asked if we were moving. I replied, "No, Mommy is just dreaming." Well, little did I know that my husband really had a different dream in mind. Four days later, I came home in the evening to find Luc surrounded by papers while sitting at our kitchen table. "Sit down," he

directed in a serious tone. "I have documents for you to sign. We are putting an offer on a property tomorrow so that I can plant a vineyard." You can imagine my surprise as I questioned, "But what about my big house?!" Shortly thereafter, our offer was accepted, and after refinancing our small home in town, we were able to make the down payment and close escrow. Luc's dream was about to become a reality. (Mine would have to wait.)



A MAJESTIC SETTING

Knights Valley has always had a certain *Je-ne-sais-quoi*. Robert Louis Stevenson was so inspired by the two months

*'Mon Chevalier' vineyard overlooking  
majestic Mount St. Helena*

of his honeymoon which he and his bride spent on the shoulder of Mount St. Helena in 1880, that three years later, he incorporated many of his notes on the surroundings into his novel *Treasure Island*. Luc's own strong connection with this special area developed when he first moved to the United States in 1996. While the winemaker at Newton Vineyard, Luc sourced fruit for the winery's famous Unfiltered Chardonnay label from the late William Turnbull's ranch, which is located on the western side of the valley. As he oversaw the farming during his routine visits, Luc often would eat lunch at a picnic table located on the

top of the property. There, overlooking majestic Mount St. Helena, he admired the overall beauty of the area and the manicured vineyard blocks of Peter Michael Winery, located just across the valley from where he sat.

After five years at Newton, Luc became the Winemaker for the very same winery he spent years admir-

ing from a distance . . . Peter Michael Winery! (He began his five year tenure in 2001, and has been the esteemed winery's Consultant Winemaker ever since 2006.) During his daily commute on Highway 128, Luc came across an ideal 12.6 acre parcel for sale and immediately fell in love with the site, which he learned had first been planted in the

1800's. Redeveloped in the 1970's as the Tanner Ranch, Luc found only eight of those Petite Syrah and Zinfandel vines remaining. With all of his experience working in the area, Luc knew that the property would have the potential to produce world-renowned wines.

STRONG NATURAL FORCES

Our Knights Valley estate overlooks beautiful Mount St. Helena. Reaching an elevation of 4,342 feet, this imposing mountain is evidence of geologic forces. From our land, we can see the plumes emerging from the nearby geysers. Our vineyard's



*Before vineyard development*

proximity to the mountain provides great air circulation, which is comprised of cool Pacific Ocean breezes through the Chalk Hill Gap as well as from the Napa Valley, along with warm and dry breezes coming from Lake County. Located between the two competing fog systems of Napa and Russian River Valleys, Knights Valley is typically cooler and windier than our St. Helena and Oakville vineyards. This weather pattern produces a longer ripening season which results in a more classic Bordeaux-like expression of our Cabernet Sauvignon. Thus, Luc includes Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Malbec and Petit Verdot in the wine he crafts from this vineyard.

#### OUR KNIGHT

We named the vineyard and its Cabernet Sauvignon wine «Mon Chevalier» ('My Knight' in French) in reference to the scenic valley in which our property is located as well as in honor of our son, Paul Morlet. Paul was (and still is) a loyal Star Wars fan. As a child, *I mean Jedi Knight*, Paul was Luc's young apprentice. Whether clearing rocks, digging drainage ditches, or *driving* a tractor with his dad, Paul was very much involved with the planting of his vineyard. However, the natural geologic forces may not have been the only forces at work in Knights Valley, as Paul believed that the "Force" was giving him the strength to do so much work! Now, as a teenager, Paul no longer relies on the "Force," but he does continue to help in the vineyard from time to time. Upon closer observation of our «Mon Chevalier» label, a subtle tribute to the role which Star Wars has played in Paul's life becomes apparent.

#### IDEAL CONDITIONS PRODUCE A POWERFUL AND COMPLEX WINE

Mapped by the official soil survey as being a Red Hills Clay Loam Series, our loamy soil is an ideal blend of silt, sand and clay. The surface horizon and upper subsoil have the texture of loam, while the lower subsoil contains substantially more clay. This translates into an age-worthy wine with power and richness, expressing more muscular tannins and mid-palate. The strong presence of the soft decomposing rhyolite (volcanic ash) provides excellent natural drainage and an enhanced sense of minerality to the wine. Located from 500 to 600 feet, our hillside vineyard combines the tenderness of the valley floor with the more masculine structure of the mountainside. Hence, Luc enjoys comparing the elevation of «Mon Chevalier» to the perfect cut of filet mignon.

The thorough preparation for planting consisted of the removal of all remaining roots and the ripping of the ground parallel, perpendicular and diagonally to the Bidwell Creek which follows along the eastern border of our property. Furthermore, the topsoil and upper subsoil were then plowed four feet deep in order to facilitate a deeper root development. High density planting (2,000 vines

per acre) results in competition among the vines, which in turn produces petite berries, tiny clusters, and an overall smaller crop. The rectangular 3/4 by 6 foot spacing facilitates proper airflow, naturally limiting pest and fungus development, while providing full sun exposure to the canopy. This perfect combination of soil, elevation and spacing en-



*Geological profile naturally visible from Bidwell Creek*



*Luc teaches his apprentice how to drive a tractor*



*Paul (wearing a Star Wars hat) works in a drainage ditch*

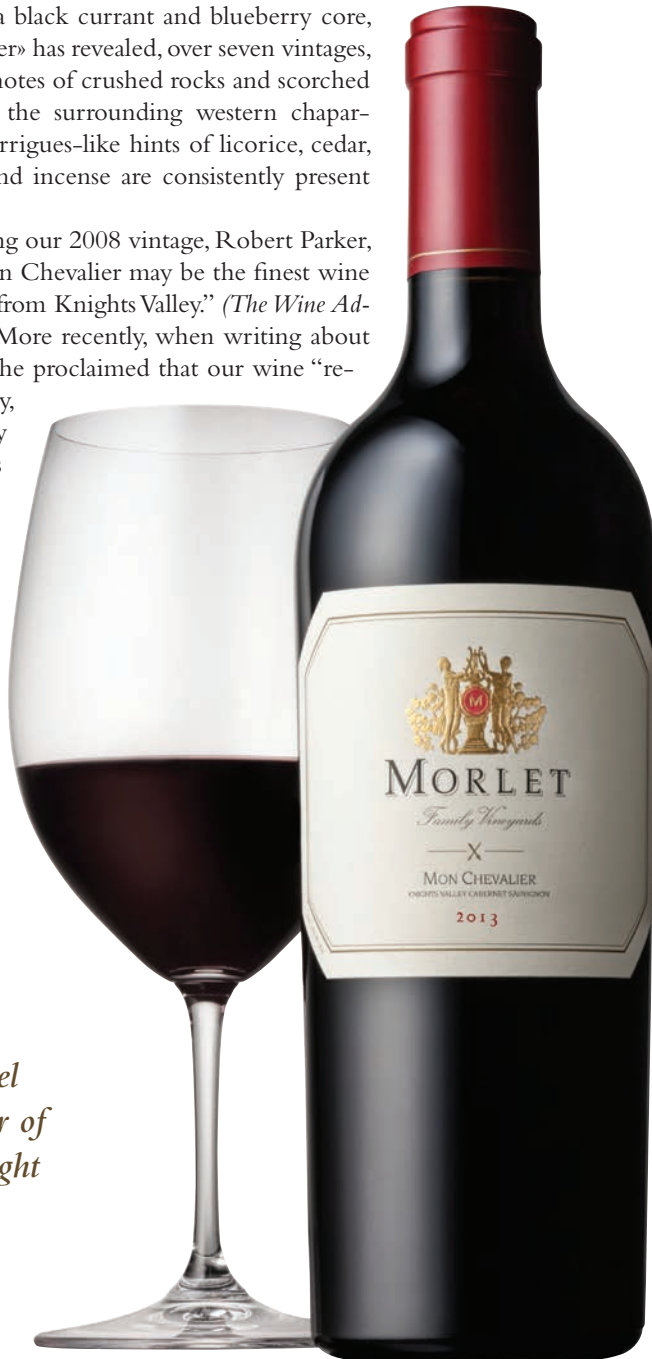


*Paul (wearing a Star Wars shirt) uses the "Force" to control the bulldozer*

sure the highest quality of fruit possible each year.

In addition to a black currant and blueberry core, our «Mon Chevalier» has revealed, over seven vintages, complex mineral notes of crushed rocks and scorched earth. Because of the surrounding western chaparral, intertwined garrigues-like hints of licorice, cedar, burning embers and incense are consistently present as well.

When describing our 2008 vintage, Robert Parker, Jr. exclaimed, “Mon Chevalier may be the finest wine I have ever tasted from Knights Valley.” (*The Wine Advocate*, Dec. 2010) More recently, when writing about our 2013 vintage, he proclaimed that our wine “reveals great intensity, and qualitatively ranks alongside its neighbor, the superb Les Pavots of Peter Michael Winery.” (*The Wine Advocate*, Oct. 2014)



*A label  
in honor of  
our knight*



*Proud of the vine he planted*



*Planting the Cabernet Sauvignon vines*

#### MORE DREAMS TO COME

After acquiring the Knights Valley property, I naively believed that once Luc had his own piece of land, he would be satisfied. Three more vineyards, one winery, seventeen wine labels and a handful of bank loans later, not to mention the upcoming search for the historic pre-Prohibition wine caves at our estate in St. Helena, our story continues. Thank you for sharing this journey with us. We invite you to enjoy the remarkable 2013 «Mon Chevalier»... A Votre Santé!



*Picking at first light, October 2014*

## Fall 2015 Release



2013

### 'FORCE DE LA NATURE'

CABERNET FRANC  
BECKSTOFFER TO KALON  
VINEYARD, NAPA VALLEY

This wine captures the strong, rich and dense character of the Cabernet Franc grapes from the famous Beckstoffer To Kalon vineyard in Oakville. Bottled only during outstanding vintages, this 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 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 truly is a 'Force of Nature,' or 'Force de la Nature.' (100% Cabernet Franc)

**Robert Parker 98-100 points:** *The nearly perfect Cabernet Franc Force de la Nature comes from a parcel of Cabernet Franc vines planted on the gravelly bench of the Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard. This cuvée is only produced in great vintages, which, of course, the 2012 and 2013 are. As with all of Luc Morlet's wines, there are no acid adjustments, no enzymes and no manipulation. A candidate for perfection when it is released in Fall, 2015, the 2013 Cabernet Franc Force de la Nature exhibits a dense purple hue as well as ethereal notes of blueberries, black raspberries, charcoal and forest floor. Full-bodied, opulent and sensation-ally concentrated, but light on its feet, this is Cabernet Franc at its great-est and may be the finest ever produced in Napa Valley.* —The Wine Advocate, October 2014



2013

### 'MON CHEVALIER'

CABERNET SAUVIGNON  
KNIGHTS VALLEY

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 these red varieties. Handcrafted by using classical wine-making 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 94-96 points:** *Made from 86% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Cabernet Franc, 3% Merlot and the rest Malbec and Petit Verdot... the 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon Mon Chevalier... reveals great intensity, and qualitatively ranks alongside its neighbor, the superb Les Pavots of Peter Michael. Sensational notes of licorice, blackberry, cassis, dark cherries, chocolate and crushed rocks are found in this beauty.* —The Wine Advocate, October 2014

# MORLET

Family Vineyards



2013

### 'CŒUR DE VALLÉE'

CABERNET SAUVIGNON  
BECKSTOFFER TO KALON  
VINEYARD, NAPA VALLEY

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

**Robert Parker 93-95 points:** *The 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon Cœur de Vallée is made from a blend of 75% Cabernet Sauvignon and 25% Cabernet Franc. While revealing some complexity... it is an impressive wine with great aromatics, and should turn out to be as strong as the 2012.* —The Wine Advocate, October 2014



2013

### 'PASSIONNÉMENT'

CABERNET SAUVIGNON  
NAPA VALLEY

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 93-95+ points:** *The 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon Passionnément is... full-bodied and dense with a boatload of tannin. Even though the berries in 2013 were smaller and yields were slightly less than in 2012, there are 300 cases of this beauty.* —The Wine Advocate, October 2014



2013

### 'MORLET ESTATE'

CABERNET SAUVIGNON  
ST. HELENA, NAPA VALLEY

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 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 91-94 points:** *The 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon Morlet Estate possesses slightly more intensity than the 2012... Lots of structure*

*and density as well as amazing intensity are found in the 2013, along with notes of scorched earth, a Graves-like personality with spicy oak, abundant blueberry and blackberry fruit... It needs a few more years to reveal all of its fabulous potential.* —The Wine Advocate, October 2014



2013

### 'BOUQUET GARNI'

SYRAH  
BENNETT VALLEY

This wine is made from an exceptional hillside vineyard located in Bennett Valley, where natural conditions are ideal for growing 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 95-98 points:** *Luc Morlet further demonstrates his genius with his Syrah called Bouquet Garni... which is bottled without fining or filtration. This 100% Syrah... tastes like it includes some Viognier in the blend (because of the floral and lavender notes). From the clay and rocky soils of Bennett Valley, this riveting wine boasts a dense purple color along with notes of fried lard, truffles and earth, and a full-bodied, powerful, rich personality. It may turn out even better than the 2012 Bouquet Garni, but both are compelling, world-class Syrahs with a French orientation to their styles.* —The Wine Advocate, December 2014

## THE VINTAGE AND HARVEST OF 2013

by Luc Morlet

"Superbly Classic" is how the 2013 vintage will be remembered. Following the abundant 2012 season and marked by the beginning of a multi-year drought, the smaller than usual crop consisted of tiny clusters with petite berries. The dry, sunny and hot ripening season did not experience any extreme heat spikes. This resulted in concentrated fruit packed with straight-forward tannins and acidic structure, which led to vibrant aromas and intense flavors. An overall freshness of our stunning 2013 Cabernets makes each of them a true *Vin de Garde* to be collected and aged for decades. Cheers!

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CLASSICAL  
WINEMAKING  
& CREATIVE  
ARTISANSHIP

2825 ST. HELENA HIGHWAY NORTH  
NAPA VALLEY  
ST. HELENA, CALIFORNIA 94574

TEL: (707) 967-8690

FAX: (707) 967-8590

MORLETWINES.COM