

Stephan Vineyards & L'Aventure Winery

L'AVENTURE NEWSLETTER

2011 VINTAGE & TASTING NOTES

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2011 was a unique vintage for L'Aventure for many reasons. It was the longest and coolest growing season in our winery's history. It also brought us a late frost which was then followed by weather induced shatter in June. All together the damage caused by these events resulted in roughly 50% normal yields.

Frost in April set the tone for this challenging year in the vineyards, resulting in the loss of 20% of our fruit. Among the red grapes, Grenache was particularly affected while our white grapes were lost nearly altogether, a paltry 3 barrels being saved (hope you got some...it was delicious!). Following in June, we experienced severe shatter (*coulure* in French), the consequence of weather conditions that cause the flowers not to pollinate. Shatter is triggered by periods of cold or unseasonably warm temperature, or both, which interrupt or slow photosynthesis, the final result being a diminished fruit set.

Add to these conditions a wet fall, with rain arriving first in mid October and then again in early November, and the tests of the vintage became overwhelming for many vintners. This was a year that measured one's business model, from



Guillaume, Beatrice, Stephan, Dave, Leanne, Marissa, Michael, Robert, Chandler, and Erik—Our Team at L'Aventure

vineyard integrity, to selection process, to quality mandate. Thus, in Stephan's 32nd harvest, he and his two right hands Dave and Guillaume called upon rigorous selection practices inside the winery as well as in the vineyards to maintain the quality standards Stephan demands for L'Aventure. These production decisions were complemented by stringent biodynamic viticultural practices to make the 2011 L'Aventure wines among the best of this year's class. These wines are elegantly styled, and reflect the very best offerings of this vintage.

Following are some wine makers notes on the wines.

L'Aventure Optimus 2011
50% Syrah, 33% Cabernet Sauvignon, 17% Petit Verdot
2,000 cases produced

Optimus sets the pace for the vintage with a delicious and classic blend. Purple hued, Optimus 2011 offers aromas of fresh blueberries, sharp cola, and a little anise. The attack is soft and round in the mouth. Firm acidity across the palate stands behind complex tobacco leaf, violet, and red and dark berry flavors. A soft finish, with some spicy wood notes, this wine is very characteristic of the vintage.

2011 VINTAGE TASTING NOTES

CONTINUED

L'Aventure Estate Cuvée 2011

48% Syrah, 28% Cabernet Sauvignon, 24% Petit Verdot

1,250 cases produced

A powerful spotlight for the vintage, Estate Cuvée 2011 attacks with plenty of push! Deep purple with an opaque, almost black center. Subtle cigar box aromas above, graphite below, dark fruit all around. The mouth is well balanced, with wood and alcohol integrated seamlessly with the dark purple, vinous fruit. Great acidity and elegant mineral and spice notes carry the wine to an immense finish that lasts....a long time! As always, our best effort.

L'Aventure Côte à Côte 2011

40% Syrah, 38% Mourvèdre, 22% Grenache
1,100 cases produced

Ruby in color. Intensely floral nose of violets, jasmine, and soft red fruit. A firm attack of vinous, mineral, citrus and soft, round, red fruit. Brilliant syrah flavors. Smoky, peppery, toasty finish with cardamom notes. This is an excellent Côte à Côte that will be enjoyed immensely at table.

L'Aventure Cuvée Chloé 2011

76% Syrah, 24% Grenache
144 cases produced, for members only

This is only the second vintage of a truly special cuvée which Stephan makes *en hommage* to his daughter Chloé. For this wine, Stephan takes the best of his Syrah from the McVey block and combines it with older hilltop plantings of Grenache. Garnett in color, candied violets and faint licorice in the nose, with a soft attack that is the epitome of elegance and subtlety, Cuvée Chloé is for those that really love a Rhône styled "pleasure wine". Red berries and salted cocoa flavors in the mouth, followed by pepper and minerals, guide this wine to a lengthy and soft finish that will make it an excellent choice for grilled meats, soft cow and goat cheeses. Enjoy!

L'Aventure Sibling 2011

42% Syrah, 38% Grenache, 20% Mourvèdre
155 cases Produced, for members only

Designed as a sister wine to our Côte à Côte, The Sibling has cemented its character in this, its third year of production. This wine has a purple core with a hint of magenta at the edge. Tea leaf, jammy dark fruit, a hint of fig, and scents of fresh violets and orange blossoms fill the nose. Soft and meaty black fruited syrah gives way to tobacco and vanilla in the palate with a mineral core riding through. The long finish slowly shifts from floral black fruit to just a hint of orange peel at the end.

L'Aventure Estate Cuvée Blanc 2012

40% Roussane, 33% Grenache Blanc, 25% Viognier

166 cases produced

Pale straw colored with green edges, the aromas of this wine burst from the glass. Classic L'Aventure stone fruit, green apples, and mineral share nose time with faint hints of marzipan. A balanced attack and well structured palate feature bright green apple, pear, and citrus notes.

L'Aventure Rosé 2012

Syrah 46%, Grenache 28%, Mourvèdre 20%, Petit Verdot 6%

600 cases produced

Unpretentiously, this wine presents itself like a Rosé de Provence, soft pink with just a hint of orange at the edge. The "holy trinity" of southern Rhône varieties contribute aromas of lilies of the field, fresh strawberries, peach, even jasmine. This is a sunny Paso summer in the glass! In the mouth the wine is equally soft and very crisp, displaying rosy-apple, strawberry-rhubarb, and lush pear flavors. **For the very first time Rosé is also available in Magnums!**

Please see our back page Dans Le Vignoble piece for more on 2012 vintage.



BUGS

Following Stephan's desire to be a biodynamic vineyard, we have spent the last 5 years introducing organic viticultural practices in order to fully embrace this growing philosophy. As part of the *biodynamic* scheme, vineyards need necessarily to be part of an integrated environment in order to flourish under its rigorous regimentation. A key factor in sustaining an organic and/or biodynamic vineyard is making it a controlled environment, in which polyculture enables the presence of beneficial bugs that can act to control or mitigate the malevolent pest population (mainly dust mites and leaf hoppers). After years of soil management that included some cover crop applications, and an enormous amount of tilling, we found the vineyards lacking in a vegetation base for cultivating such



beneficial populations. This led Stephan, Dave, and Guillaume to a strategy to redevelop some green lands here on the property. Starting in March, Dave will be in charge of planting 20 locations throughout the vineyards to habitats that will serve as beneficial insectaries. Right, insectaries!

At key intersections of blocks, along the roads, and wherever open fieldscapes can be reduced, Dave will plant

bushes and flowers that have been chosen for their known ability to attract and retain beneficial bugs including the mite Californicus, lady bugs, pirate bugs, and parasitic wasps. Fennel, lemon balm, coriander and buckwheat will join lilac, mums, poppies, marigolds and four o' clocks to anchor these insectaries. Native weeds will be welcomed to grow into and fill out these thickets.

In the end, the objective is a sustainable, controlled environment that will enable us to continue to farm utilizing biodynamic practices. With seven pounds of heirloom seeds coming in, Dave will have his work cut out for himself. Next time you visit, look for him among the yarrow, butterfly bush, California wild rose, and lavender!

CAVE DWELLERS

What was initially a small cave project has become a big cave project! Stephan has been planning for a few years now to create a cave in order to have a barrel aging cellar and library with perfect natural humidity and constant temperature. In 2011, Stephan took the initial steps to develop the cave. His dream has finally arrived and the dig is scheduled to begin at the end of this year. The 7,500 square foot subterranean "cathedral" should hopefully be completed and ready for use by the end of 2014.

The cave will not only serve the primary purpose of housing barrels and our library, but will also be home to the new L'Aventure tasting room. This new tasting room is a vision of glass and light, framed in the calcareous earth that is our *terroir*. In the spirit of our current tasting room experience, we will continue to focus on the docent aspects as concerns Stephan's wines, our vineyard regimen, and the Paso Robles AVA. Our members and visitors will have a larger space in which to taste our wines, and a small front landing will extend the degustation

experience outdoors when weather permits. Those of you who know us will understand that this new cave will never be a "tourist trap" and will be dedicated to barrel aging and production first and foremost. Inviting our visitors to sample our wines in this new space is an irresistible opportunity to afford tasters a much enhanced experience. A small, intimate "members only" VIP lounge will be the highlight of this new era at L'Aventure. In Stephan's words, "The cave is a final big touch on this adventure that started 15 years ago".



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L'Aventure Winery**

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DANS LE VIGNOBLE 2012 IN THE VINEYARD

The 2012 growing season was a welcome return to the more typical, "classic" style growing season at L'Aventure. After two consecutive vintages (2010, 2011) that were characterized by cool weather, 2012 saw a return to what most of us think of as a Paso Robles summer, with 20 plus days seeing 100+ degree temperatures. In the image of the 2009 and, somewhat like 2004, the growing season was free of natural misfortunes, such as shatter or frost, and benefited from enough degree days of sunshine to easily produce fully mature fruit. The crop was average at 700 HL, and of excellent quality.

Harvest began in early

September with the white grapes. While only 166 cases were produced, this Roussanne, Grenache Blanc, Viognier blend is again at the top of the list of Paso Robles white Rhône variety wines. Our red fruit began coming in around the middle of September harvest continued into mid October. Fermentations were efficient, and the secondary malolactic fermentation was done before the holidays. All in all it was a very manageable vintage.

"Syrah was the star", Dave says. "Grenache was awesome", according to Guillaume. Stephan was impressed by the new Mourvèdre plantation, which "met expectations".

Looks like a fine year for Côte à Côte, Sibling, Chloé, and anything else Rhône driven that Stephan might have up his sleeve as he begins to blend the wines this March.

Cabernet, the lynchpin for Estate Cuvée and Optimus, varied depending on block. The consensus was that our Arena Cabernet block was as good as it has ever been, and that most blocks were above average. With a good Cabernet vintage, and a reduced quantity of Petit Verdot in the blends due to the grafting over of 2 acres to Mourvèdre, look for rich, bright Cabernet fruit, with plenty of grip in the wines from 2012.



MORE MOURVÈDRE

Mourvèdre is planted on only 5 of our 60 acre plantation, but plays an important role in our Rhône blend Côte à Côte. This vine takes years to come into maturity, being awkward and gangly in its youth. It wasn't until the 2004 vintage that Stephan was able to confirm to himself that Mourvèdre was going to be able to play a starring role alongside Grenache and Syrah in our homage to the southern Rhône, Côte à

Côte. Confident that Mourvèdre might actually emerge as the darling of the "holy trinity", in 2011 he re-grafted 2 acres of our Petit Verdot on our highest plateau to a Spanish Mourvèdre clone, #571, known popularly in Spain as Monastrell. This 2012 vintage was the first harvest for these grapes, and Stephan declares that the fruit met expectations.

With a smaller cluster and berry size, this clone of

Mourvèdre gives more color and more fruit intensity than our other clones. Planted on our highest, rockiest slopes, these characteristics will be amplified. The addition of this clone can only contribute more complexity to the blend. This is good news for Côte à Côte fans, who will probably also find the increased Mourvèdre anchoring a "members only" cuvée.

