

2018 Newsletter

Volume 17- Issue 1



Celebrating

20

Years of L'Aventure Winery

What started out as the dream of a "crazy" french man in 1998 slowly became reality... W can't wait to see what the next 20 years will bring !



Tasting Notes for the 2016 Vintage

I think the 2016 vintage confirms my first impression that I wrote in last year's newsletter. In this vintage, every grape from my estate ended up making some good wine, which is not always the case!!! Now, in terms of style, 2016 reminds me a lot of 2014. I love the balance, the silkiness and the length in this vintage. Most of the wines are big, super intense, rich and flavorful but at the same time super delicate, pure and vibrant. Once again, the terroir spoke, producing some intense ripe wine but also with nuance and nice acidity!!! I am extremely happy with the result.

Also, 2016 was for me an opportunity to create a new cuvée that I call "Inspiración". I took the influence and "inspiration" of the Priorat region in Spain, which for a very long time has been producing blends composed of Cabernet Sauvignon and Grenache. As a lot of you may know, I have a lot of love for Spain, and I wanted to make a wine that was a wink to this beautiful region. For my first try and "prototype", I used some of my high end remaining fruit and I think it worked out not too bad. 😊 But for the 2017 vintage, I pushed this new cuvée even further and created it with specific fruit that I designated especially for this cuvée. You can read more about it in the 2017 report...



Please see below the tasting notes written by Jeb Dunnuck from JebDunnuck.com when he tasted the 2016 Vintage in Barrel.

Optimus 2016

50 % Syrah, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Petit Verdot

It's a pretty, elegant version of this cuvee that reveals a deep ruby color, notes of black raspberries, blackberries, violets and leafy herbs, medium to full-bodied richness and a seamless, silky texture. Drink it over the coming 5-7 years.

Estate Cuvée 2016

52% Syrah, 32% Cabernet Sauvignon, 16% Petit Verdot

Its glass staining purple color is followed by a full-bodied, unctuous, seriously concentrated red that has building structure, a huge mid-palate and terrific notes of crème de cassis, pencil lead, tobacco leaf and graphite. The Cabernet really shows and this bruiser (although it stays graceful and lively) is going to require short term cellaring.

Sibling 2016

45% Grenache, 36% Syrah, 19% Graciano

Plums, blueberries, incense and ample peppery spice all give way to a full-bodied, nicely concentrated 2016 that has a terrific sense of elegance.

For Her 2016

46% Syrah Block Hill Top, 39% Graciano, 15% Viognier
Co-Fermented

The 2016 For Her is the same blend as the otherworldly 2014 ... It offers a heavenly bouquet of violets, black and blue fruits, chalk, wood smoke and peppery herbs. Complex, layered and even nuanced at this young stage, it has full-bodied richness, the power and richness that's common in the vintage and a terrific finish.

Côte à Côte 2016

55% Grenache, 25% Mourvedre, 20% Syrah

Chalky minerality, violets, plums and hints of blueberries all emerge from this full-bodied, ripe, sexy red that shines for its polished tannin and terrific purity. It should drink nicely right out of the gate and keep for a decade.

Les Demoiselles 2016

60% Mourvedre, 40% Syrah

This inky colored beauty knocks it out of the park with its chalky, mineral-driven bouquet of blackberries, liquid violets and licorice. With building structure, full-bodied richness and a great finish, it's another big wine from Stephan that stays impeccably balanced and pure. It's going to need short term cellaring.

Inspiración 2016

40% Grenache, 33% Cabernet Sauvignon, 27% Syrah

It has a terrific, Grenache driven bouquet of blackberries, blueberries, violets and white chocolate to go with a full-bodied, sexy, seamless style on the palate. It's a big wine, no doubt, but it stays impeccably balanced and has terrific purity of fruit.

Chloé 2016

69% Syrah McVey Block, 31% Grenache Old Block Co-Fermented

The 2016 Cuvee Chloe is another first-rate 2016 that's going to deliver the goods. A co-fermented blend of Grenache and Syrah that's not racked until bottling, it sports an inky purple color as well as sensational notes of black fruits, wood smoke, chalky minerality and smoke meats. Big, rich, concentrated and tannic, yet with a wealth of material and awesome purity, give it 2-3 years of bottle age and enjoy through 2028.

2017 From Stepan's Perspective

Let's start by explaining the 2017 harvest. As you may have heard or felt, we had an extremely long heatwave (more than 7 days at 100+ degrees with very hot nights) in September. Due to that, some of my Cabernet Sauvignon suffered with some dehydrated berries. More importantly, in some cases, the stress of this extreme heat slowed down the whole maturation process. Therefore, we had to be super, super, selective in the timing of the picking and in the selection of the berries at both sorting tables. With that said, no worries, as these challenges still make "not too bad" wines 😊. My Cabernet Sauvignon came out good and I have my L'Aventure terroir and viticulture to thank for that!! As for my Rhone grapes, and Petit Verdot, they were not impacted by the heatwave and therefore the picking went smoothly. Overall, harvest, as tiring as it can be, went well and I am quite pleased with my fruit! This just comes to show that you can never expect anything during harvest, and that each year we get a new surprise. That is the beauty of being 100% estate and that is what I love about being a farmer... each year is different.



Now in terms of style, my first global impression of the 2017 vintage, with all the lots still unblended, is that there is a nice acidity which brings a great freshness and a lot of spiciness. I have noticed this especially for the Syrah which is not common!!! Honestly right now, I like it very, very much because it has its own beautiful personality (which I love) and cannot be compared to a previous vintage!!! It will be interesting to see the progression 😊.



Lastly, like I mentioned above in the 2016 Vintage Tasting Notes, in 2017 I was able to fine tune my new cuvée "Inspiracion". Like I have been implementing for the past few years for the Chloe and For Her, I decided to create the 2017 Inspiracion co-fermenting this following blend: Grenache 46%, Cabernet Sauvignon 36%, Syrah Hill Top Block (same as For Her) 13%, and Grenache Blanc 5%, and I think it worked super well!!! Be ready to taste it 😊 in 2019...

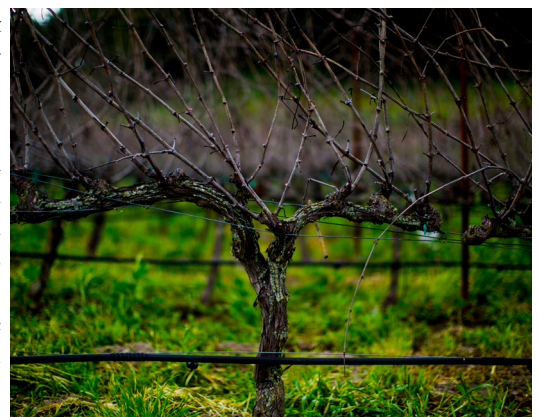


Now, let's talk about the vineyard, as I made a big decision in 2017. After multiple years of waiting, I finally decided to pull out 2.5 acres of my FAVORITE block of Syrah (yes, really, my favorite) called Syrah "Powerline" Block. 😞 I had to make this difficult decision because this block was degenerating slowly, and year after year, more and more vines were dying. Now, with that said, there is some good news! For 6 years now, knowing that I would one day need to make this decision, I took the time to select 16 mother vines from this block. I analyzed them, made sure they were virus free, and year after year multiplied on other blocks to then plan on replanting my Syrah block. In other words, I made what is called my "massale selection"...

What is Massale Selection?

Today, 90% of the vines planted in the world are coming from what we call a "clone". What that means is initially the number of vines that got multiplied were coming from one mother vine to try to keep all the same characteristics of this vine in terms of vigor (more or less), productivity (more or less), size and quality of the berries, etc.

At the opposite, the massal selection is not coming from one unique super mother vine but a cherry picking of 10 to 100 vines that showed very good but had different characteristics from one another. For example, at L'Aventure, in this Syrah "Powerline" Block, I discovered ten years after the plantation that even though it was planted with a clone, 877, slowly some vines reacted, adapted and developed differences to adjust with the L'Aventure terroir. Therefore, from a 7,000 vines block plantation, I did a first selection 6 years ago of 500 vines, then the year after from those 500 vines I reselected about 200 vines. The year after that I reselected maybe 100 and finally ended up two years ago with only 16 mother vines.



I read in different books that vines had this huge faculty to evolve and adjust to their new growing situation. I think this "L'Aventure Syrah Massale Selection" will keep part of the initial DNA characteristics of the clone 877 (which again was always one of my best blocks of Syrah) but because of the evolution of this clone here at L'Aventure it will bring even more complexity because of the "metissage" of this plantation.

Ooops... It is not Monastrell...



One day, Justin Smith from Saxum, calls me to tell me that he had done a DNA test on his Monastrell Block (same Monastrell as me from the same nursery) and that it turns out it wasn't Monastrell but... **Graciano!!!** Still a Spanish grape, but not the one that we were thinking or promoting... so what!!! Graciano is a red grape from the Rioja region in Spain and is known for its low yield, its color, perfume and quality. I am happy with my Graciano now as I think it fits in the Paso Robles "Willow Creek" terroir very well and it is very complementary to my "For Her" blend. So now the question is, would Monastrell be better? Ideally, we would need to find, to plant, to cultivate some real Monastrell and from there, try it, taste it, compare it and see if we like it better.... but we may not 😊.

A Lesson in Wine Terminology with Stephan

Austere: An adjective to describe a grape that is a bit harsh and lacks in roundness and fruit. With that said, it is probably one of my favorite adjectives when describing my "wild card varietal", Petit Verdot. I believe that the Petit Verdot can be austere alone but when you blend it with a Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon like I do, that austerity brings out the elegance, classiness in the other varietals or in the blend.

Grafting: In viticulture, it is the joining of the varietal and the rootstock which, by itself, is not producing berries. Last year, we did some grafting on a Petit Verdot block as the original clone was not producing what I was hoping, and therefore I re-grafted with a brand-new clone that had just arrived to America. What is unbelievable is you can get some fruit the same year you do the grafting. The crop usually arrives a little bit later than the rest of the ungrafted vines, but nonetheless you get fruit the same year!!

Yield: a term to describe the measurement of how many grapes were collected during harvest. It is measured by tons per acre. My nickname in Paso Robles is Mr. Low Yield as on average my fruit is anywhere between 1.5 to 2.5 tons per acre!!! My low yield has a lot to do with my terroir and my viticulture behind the planting.

Natural Micro - Oxygenation: First of all I want to be clear that we are speaking about micro oxygenation, where the wine mature in barrels, and not macro - oxidation where, for example, the wine is exposed to the air for a long time. When we speak about micro oxygenation in barrels, that means that the wine will receive through the stave of the barrels an infinitesimal quantity of oxygen during all the maturation process. The beauty of the micro oxygenation is that it will be more if the oak grew very fast, because the oak is less dense, and it will be less important if the oak grew slowly and in a less rich soil, because the oak is denser with a brighter grain. This shows you that we can speak about terroir like we do for the vineyard. So, when winemakers order their barrels, the density of the oak will be one of the criteria of their choice on top of the oaky flavor, the tannins, etc.

Estate: An adjective used to describe fruit coming from your own vineyard. I am very proud to say that as of 2008 all my wine is 100% estate fruit from L'Aventure Vineyard, which means I do not purchase any fruit from other vineyards. Being estate means that I get to control 100% of my vineyard and the fruit that comes from it. It is hard work and can be challenging depending on what mother nature decides for the year but it is very rewarding to only use fruit from my vineyard.

The Winemakers of Paso Robles

Julia Perez, a professional photographer from Argentina, teamed up with Paul Hodgins, legendary California wine writer, to create a beautiful book about some of Paso Robles Winemakers. In this large format, full -color book, readers get a glimpse through behind the scenes photographs and interviews of the lives and passion of the people behind Paso Robles' wine community. This is probably the most beautiful book that has ever been published about the Winemakers of Paso Robles and we recommend (if you haven't done so yet) to get yourself a copy. The pictures, as well as the interviews are beautiful and truly capture the personalities of each individual. Our limited, custom edition of these books are available in the tasting room and for shipping!



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