

# L'Aventure 2020 Newsletter



## 2018 Vintage



Now that we are at the end of the maturation cycle in barrels and right before bottling, I have a better “final” idea of the style of the vintage. I have to say there are a lot of the same characteristics as the 2017 in terms of pleasure, fruit and texture. However, I feel the 2018s are a touch more dense with more intense and firm tannins. I think that overall they are a bit less approachable young than the 2017s (which was an amazing point of that vintage) so no rush to drink them... like 99% of my wines 😊.

I would categorize the 2018s as another classic vintage, with great balance and a super texture. Perhaps (even if I should not say that) a step above from our 2017s especially for the Cabernet Sauvignon! All my blocks of Cabernet Sauvignon were extraordinary, and the proof lies in the Estate Cuvée where 40% of the blend is Cabernet Sauvignon instead of 30% like last year. Again, there is no bad vintage in Paso Robles, and the 2018s are proof of that!

## 20th Anniversary of Optimus

Yes, you are reading it correctly, the 2018 Optimus marks the 20th vintage of our signature “crazy” blend. Back in 1998, when we started this journey, Stephan had a vision or in his own words, a “fantasy” of the blend he wanted to make when he arrived in Paso Robles. That blend had been inspired in part from drinking a bottle of Domaine de Trevallon (which was a blend of Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon) and in other part from speaking to his good friend, Michel Rolland, a well known oenology consultant from France who saw and told Stephan how Petit Verdot was unbelievable and always ripe when grown in California due to the optimal weather conditions. These moments and discussions stayed with Stephan until it was time for him to make his first wine in Paso Robles. With a half built winery, purchased fruit from Paso Robles, and an idea in mind, Stephan made the first vintage of his “fantasy blend” in 1998. Through the years the blend has changed and evolved (there was zinfandel at the beginning!!!), but the philosophy stays the same. This special blend is the reason why Stephan wanted to leave France. Today, the Optimus serves as our introduction to what we do. Approachable and pleasurable, the Optimus makes you want to know more... To commemorate the 20th anniversary of this spectacular wine we have created a special anniversary label. The 2018 Optimus will feature a reverse label with the L'Aventure logo in silver and the background in navy.



**OPTIMUS**  
20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

## 2018 Vintage Tasting Notes - Red Only

Please see below the tasting notes written by Jeb Dunnuck from [www.jebdunnuck.com](http://www.jebdunnuck.com) when he tasted the 2018 Vintage from barrels

### **Optimus 2018** 56% Syrah, 32% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Petit Verdot

All the 2018s were tasted from barrel. The 2018 Optimus shows both the style of the estate as well as the purity of the vintage with its rich, powerful, full-bodied style and loads of black fruits and chocolate aromas and flavors. **Aging 1-10 years**

### **Côte à Côte 2018** 51% Grenache, 26% Mourvèdre, 23% Syrah

Loads of blackberries, chocolate, ground herbs, and graphite nuances give way to a blockbuster style, powerful yet elegant beauty that has silky tannins and a great, great finish. It's going to benefit from 2-4 years of bottle age and cruise over the following decade **Aging 1-20 years**

### **Estate Cuvée 2018** 45% Syrah, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Petit Verdot

What Stephan considers his top cuvée (and I can't argue with him), the 2018 Estate Cuvée is another locked and loaded effort that has powerful notes of blackberries, crème de cassis, chocolate, and graphite as well as a terrific sense of chalky minerality. Full-bodied, concentrated, and mouthfilling, it's unquestionably one of the richest, most opulent wines in the vintage. **Aging 1-20++ years**

### **Sibling 2018** 60% Syrah, 22% Grenache, 18% Graciano

The 2018 Sibling is more finesse-driven and elegant compared to the Optimus and is a more Grenache-dominated blend. Plenty of red and black fruits spice, violets, and floral notes all emerge from this seamless, full-bodied effort that just glides across the palate with an ethereal texture. As with the Optimus, it's going to drink beautifully in its youth yet also age gracefully given its balance **Aging 1-10 years**

### **Les Demoiselles 2018** 62% Mourvèdre, 28% Syrah, 10% Grenache

The 2018 Les Demoiselles is a Mourvèdre-dominated cuvée that includes 28% Syrah and 10% Grenache. It was tight and closed aromatically yet shows brilliant blue fruits, violets, and spicy, meaty notes on the palate. Sensationally pure, full-bodied, and balanced, I suspect 2-3 years of bottle age will be warranted. It's a thrilling wine that shows the class and purity of this great vintage. **Aging 1-15+ years**

### **Inspiración 2018** 47% Grenache, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 13% Syrah, 5% Grenache Blanc

Inspired by the wines of Priorat and a Cabernet Sauvignon and Grenache-dominated blend, the 2018 Inspiración offers lots of chocolate-laced dark fruits, graphite, crushed violets, and earthy, meaty aromas and flavors. As with all of Stephan's wines, it's powerful and concentrated, yet also perfectly balanced. **Aging 1-15++ years**

### **For Her 2018** 53% Syrah, 35% Graciano, 12% Viognier Co-Fermented

The 2018 For Her is more closed and dense than the Cuvée Chloe and offers lots of blue fruits, crushed rock-like minerality, and chocolaty herb aromas and flavors. Based on 53% Syrah, 35% Graciano, and 12% Viognier, it's rich and full-bodied, with a mouthfilling texture and a big finish. It's going to need 2-3 years of bottle age to show at its best and should evolve gracefully. **Aging 1-20 years**

### **Chloé 2018** 72% Syrah, 21% Grenache, 7% Viognier Co-Fermented

I think a step up over the For Her release, the 2018 Chloe reminds me of the 2012 with its purity and elegance paired with plenty of power. It offers a heavenly bouquet of crème de cassis, liquid violets, charcoal, incense, and graphite. Possessing full-bodied richness, flawless balance, and polished tannins, it's one of those rare wines to blend incredible power with incredible elegance. **Aging 1-20++ years**

## Cabernet Sauvignon Making a Comeback



### **Cabernet Sauvignon 2018**

#### **98% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2% Petit Verdot**

Last made in 2013, the 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon is a brilliant wine and, with regards to Bordeaux varieties, possibly the wine of the vintage. Incredibly pure crème de cassis, tobacco leaf, crushed rocks, and lead pencil notes all flow to a full-bodied, seamless, silky Cabernet Sauvignon that has loads of ripe tannins, a stacked mid-palate, and a great finish. This primordial, structured barrel sample will require 4-5 years of bottle age but will have 25 years or more of longevity.

**Aging 1-20++ years**

Since our last vintage in 2013, all the Cabernet Sauvignon has been used for our Estate Cuvée. However, like we had announced on the last newsletter, the 2018 vintage is the return of our straight Cabernet Sauvignon. For this vintage I finally had more of my top Cabernet blend than what I needed for my Estate Cuvée and therefore it allowed me to produce the equivalent of 350 cases. Jeb Dunnuck approves, giving it a 97-100points 🤩! I think it is very representative of the vintage and a nice blend between new and old world cabernet.

## 2019 Vintage in Stephan's Perspective



Well, I will go straight to the point... Already during harvest I had a feeling that this vintage could be one of the best I have ever done and now that the wines are finished, I am ready to say that it is the best vintage I have made since I arrived in Paso Robles (21 years!!!). The final blends are still not finished but, each tank, whatever the grape, is fantastic! Especially the Syrah... Incroyable! I know I told you that I wouldn't be doing another straight Syrah again, but the temptation is BIG! I already tasted for pre blending different versions of my top straight Syrah and it will be a shame to not keep some pure. I always said that I was not crazy about straight Syrah in Paso even mine (too much, too big, hard to finish the bottle) but this year there is so much fruit, finesse and elegance that I cannot help but wonder... why not?

With that said, even though the Syrah is incredible, like I said above, all my fruit is incredible this year. I have never had so much difference and expression of the different parcels of my vineyard. Due to the moderate temperature and the long maturation, I never had so much fruit and PURITY. It's ripe, dense but still "light" and super complex. The sun, because that can happen sometimes, didn't leave its footprint in the wine. Again, I am not responsible for this quality, we had a fantastic after season climate: very soft, no heatwave which allowed the fruit to achieve the perfect maturity without stress. In other words, a dream!!! Each tank has its own personality so I cannot wait to see the result beginning of March when I decide the final blends.

Another very exciting part of the 2019 vintage is the new machine I purchased to not only increase the quality but also efficiency during harvest....After 10 + years of good service, I made the decision this year to update all my sorting equipment and it was definitely the cherry on the cake to an amazing vintage. I purchased a new optical sorting table from Buscher Equipment: the Ferrari of optical sorting table \$170,000!!! That was a big ouchy 😬. However, it is a dream machine!

This machine is sold to sort 8 tons per hour. Before, with a regular second sorting table, in the best case, I could run 1.5 tons per hour with 6 people when this year I used it at 3 tons per hour with nobody and doing some work that human beings cannot do. Also, to give you an idea, before, with two regular sorting tables and a lot of people my percentage of waste was between 10 to 17% depending of the grape to achieve a decent result. This year with this machine and no people, my level of waste went down to 5 to 7% maximum because I was dropping only the bad berries instead of sometimes dropping the whole cluster when this one was at 50% bad. At the same time, I have to be honest with myself even that doesn't minimize the quality of this machine, like I said above, the quality of the fruit was so unbelievable that I didn't have to remove as much fruit as other years where there was big heat waves and more dehydrated fruit. That is another proof that the vintage was exceptional.



## The Production Team - It Only Takes Three Men...



When we talk about production or winemaking, for most people they think of Stephan. Yes, Stephan is a huge part of the wine that you get to enjoy in the bottle. However, Stephan is not alone and wouldn't be able to do what he does without the assistance of Dave (left of Stephan) and Patrick (right of Stephan). These two gentlemen are polyvalent and assist in all aspects of the vineyard and production management with Stephan. One of their biggest strengths is that they work as a team. Even though they have their own titles and their own responsibilities, they work together both in the vineyard and in the production. They not only understand and respect Stephan's philosophy but they also bring their own personal touch to the table. With them by his side, Stephan is able to breathe a bit at times and enjoy some longer vacations 😊.

Dave has been with us the longest... over 18 years to be exact! Prior to working at L'Aventure he was working for Farm Supply in Paso Robles which focuses on all agricultural products and supplies. He has tremendous knowledge in agricultural farming and has worked with Stephan since the beginning to make our vineyard the cornerstone for the quality of our wine. His main duties (to name a few) consists of vineyard maintenance, irrigation, fertility needs, managing our vineyard crews and pest control.

With that said, he is also greatly involved in the production and winemaking part as well. He is present during harvest and the vinification, the decision for the final blends, the maturation in barrel, bottling, and everything in between. Dave has a very good palate and knows what Stephan is looking for when making the wines. We are very fortunate to have him part of the family.

We are also extremely fortunate to have Patrick, who has been with us for about 4 years. He might not have the same longevity at L'Aventure as Dave but he sure has the same dedication. Originally from Texas, he was working for a local, larger winery as assistant winemaker before moving to L'Aventure. His knowledge and passion about oenology and viticulture was the missing piece to this Three Musketeers Team. His main role and focus lies more in the winemaking aspect. Patrick works closely with Stephan and starting in 2020 will have an even bigger role during harvest and the vinification process, as well as, the decisions about our final blends and the overall production management. He too, has a very good palate and is a big asset to the final blends you get to enjoy. When he is not in the winery, which is only about 40% of the time, he is in the vineyard with Dave working the land and the vines. Like it was mentioned above, they work as a team and touch every part of the process together. We are very thankful for the Three Musketeers and it was time to give credit to both Dave and Patrick who may not be as much in the limelight but are a crucial part to L'Aventure.

## Dave and Patrick in France

Dave and Patrick just got back from an amazing trip visiting the different properties in Bordeaux and Champagne owned by our partners, the Thienot Family, to learn and discover how things are done in terms of viticulture and oenology in one of the most traditional countries.

Their trip started out in Bordeaux where they spent three days with Frederic Bonnaffous, Vineyard Director for all of their Bordeaux properties. They visited Chateau Belgrave (Grand Cru Classe, Haut-Medoc), Chateau Le Boscq (Cru Bourgeois, Saint-Estephe), Chateau la Garde (Pessac-Leognan) and Chateau Pey La Tour (Bordeaux Superieur). At each stop, they took time to look at their vineyards, as well as, taste through four vintages: 2009, 2010, 2015 and 2016. From Dave's opinion the 2009s and 2010s were without exception the best. Lastly, when visiting the vineyards they learned that in terms of vineyard inputs they use very little to none. The only nutrient input comes from the nitrogen fixing cover crops and the mowing of shoots to be incorporated into the soil. For years that is all the vines ask for and need. Pretty spectacular...

The second part of the trip took place in Champagne where they met with Stanislas Thienot and visited Champagne Thienot, Joseph Perrier and Canard Duchene. Each place had their own unique traits, their own caves and own personalities. It was truly a new discovery for both Patrick and Dave. Lastly, they were blown away by the AOC rules and the fact that it rules everything from harvest dates, varieties planted, to even the pruning style. Like Stanislas mentioned though, if everyone follows the AOC rules it pushes the quality and the prestige of Champagne to the top which is why the rules were created.



Dave and Patrick in St. Emillion speaking about vineyard management in Bordeaux with Frederic Bonnaffous