

L'AVENTURE NEWSLETTER

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Special points of interest:

- PRWCA "Paso Robles Grand Tour schedule for 2006—see pasowine.com for details.
- *L'Aventure* was at the **Wine Experience**, organized by the Wine Spectator, in New York on October 20-21



Serge Dore, our NY distributor with Stephan at the Wine Experience

2005 VINTAGE....THE WINES

With the exception of the Estate Syrah, and Roussanne, all of the other wines are still fermenting, except for Mourvedre, which is still on the vine! Safe to say, it's early to say too much about the wines, but following are some cellar notes as to what's going on inside the winery.

Fermentation for all varieties has gone very smoothly. Following a pre fermentation "cold soak" maceration period of a couple of days, roughly, Stephan and Dave ferment at 85 degrees, to insure a balanced fermentation and optimum extract. As the yeast are introduced to the must, Dave and Stephan are experimenting this year with a different way of nurturing them. Instead of adding 100% of their nutrients on day two of their being present in tank, they are adding 50%, then another 50% a couple of days later. Yeast on a diet, you might say. The object is to lengthen fermentation time, and therefore extraction and concentration in the wines. Stephan will stop at nothing, it seems, on his quest for optimum character in his wines! As the wines move through this primary fermentation, they are "macro - oxygenated" twice a day during pump over, to keep the yeast healthy and productive, fix pigments, soften tannins.

Following this primary fermentation, the wines will go into our cellar to undergo malolactic fermentation, thereby finishing the fermentation process. The Estate Syrah, for example, is currently undergoing this phase



Petit Verdot undergoing macro -oxygenation

of fermentation, and is rounding out, softening up, and beginning already to show some rich, smooth, and complex characteristics.

Another point of interest for this 2005 vintage, is that Stephan has resorted to the technique of "*saigner*" to bleed off some juice during fermentation on a couple of varieties. This process leaves the must with 100% of the skins, but roughly 10% to 25% less of the original volume of juice, therefore acting to again concentrate the wine even more. The happy consequence of this is that we now possess a "*rosé saignée*" from our Côte à Côte varieties, to the tune of approximately 90 cases. Imagine, a Rosé de Côte à Côte!...for members only!

Roussanne is another bright note, as, we will produce over 400 cases this year, up from 280 last vintage. There may also emerge a secret or two as

concerns special *cuvées* from the vintage. These lay in Stephan's hands, and he's not talking!

You have all heard the axiom "It all starts in the vineyards". At L'Aventure, Stephan says that "It's 80% vineyards. After that, you can put the grapes in the tank, walk away, and you get good wine in two weeks...if you start with great fruit". I can't help but think that he's short changing the winemaker in this scenario. I'm going to say that, regardless of how great the fruit is, it takes an artesian approach to winemaking to fulfill nature's creative potential and to make great wine.



Balance may be the best guess as to what makes a wine last.

AGING L'AVENTURE WINES

It seems that nearly every day, whether in the Salon at the winery, or on the road with customers and trade, the question invariably pops up as to how long our L'Aventure wines will age. The question is easier asked, than the answer given. We can start by looking at some of the things that endow a wine with the potential to reach a healthy maturity.

Stephan's axiom that "it all starts in the vineyards" is clearly applicable to this question. The fully mature fruit from which he crafts L'Aventure wines endows the wines with fully integrated polyphenol chains. (The notion that excessive tannins aid in aging is not

strictly true. Rather, an abundance of mature polyphenols—of which family tannin is a member—is certainly critical to extended aging.) The balance inherent in fully developed fruit may be the most fundamental contributor to a wine's longevity. As acidity/Ph balance, tannic maturity, natural alcohol levels, and a judicious underpinning of wood interplay, a well made wine becomes integrated over time. It seems that the relationship between concentration and extraction, on the one hand, and the role these play in the overall balance of the wine might be the key.

Cellaring a wine properly is the responsibility of those that desire to protect and enhance the winemaker's hard wrought creation. Maintaining a consistently cool (50-55 degrees) cellar environment is a starting point. Having enough wine on hand to cellar and watch develop is also part of the game. One intent on collecting a favorite producer's best bottling will want to follow its development by sampling a bottle now and again, perhaps at six-month intervals. This requires the investment of a case, at least, if not 2-3, in order to

enjoy a wine as it unfolds across the full span of its lifetime.

It is ironic that, while we do all we can to stall the aging process while a wine is in the cellar, we do just the opposite as our prize bottle finally finds its way to table. We decant, aerate, and allow it to awaken in the glass, as we hasten its ascent to perfection!

So, the answer to the question? Don't listen to us, because we don't know! We can say "12 to 15 years, maybe more", but, really, the best course is for each to manage her/his cellar, and to find out for themselves. This is truly a case of enjoying the journey, the destination being uncertain.



50-55°

EVENTS 2006



The *L'Aventure* social calendar is filling up fast for **2006!** Please see our website at www.laventurewinery.com for complete details.

January 28 & 29; Boston Wine Expo.

February 1; Paso Robles GT, Atlanta, Georgia.

February 9; Wine Dinner, Triple Creek Ranch, Darby, Montana.

February 17-19; Savor Dallas.

February 26; Tour de Paso, Scottsdale, AZ.

March 6; Paso Robles GT, Dallas, Texas.

March 8; Paso Robles GT, Austin, Texas.

March 9 & 10; Boca Bacchanal, Boca Raton, Florida.

March 20; Wine Dinner, Boston Harbor Hotel.

March 21; Family Winemakers Tasting, Pasadena, California.

April 25; Paso Robles GT, New York City.

April 26; Paso Robles Grand Tour, Boston, Mass.

April 28 & 29; Sarasota Wine & Food Festival, Sarasota, Florida.

May 2; Paso Robles Grand Tour, San Francisco, Ca.

May 5-7; Biltmore International Food & Wine Weekend, Biltmore Hotel, Miami, Florida.



THE JOKER



When we say : "L'Aventure...where Bordeaux meets the Rhône!", we refer chiefly to Stephan's innovative Cabernet Sauvignon/ Syrah, signature, "Paso blend." There is, however, another variety from Bordeaux that is making itself less and less obscure in our blends. It is Petit Verdot, "my joker", as Stephan refers to it.

In Bordeaux, where Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot are ubiquitous, and Cabernet Franc is central to "right bank" blends, a scant 2-3 per cent of the wine field is planted to this variety. Unlike the "other" unknown Bordeaux variety, Petit Verdot has not been adopted as a "national grape", as has been Malbec in Argentina. For, as there exist a handful of 100% Petit Verdot "experiments" in the market, most producers that have worked with the grape- from France to Lebanon, and Spain to California- agree that it's greatest value is as a blending component. Why?

A small cluster, with tiny berries having very thin skins, Petit Verdot is well suited and valued as a source for rich color. In Bordeaux, this color rich grape can play an important role in blending. In warmer climates, such as northern Spain, Lebanon, and Paso Robles, Petit Verdot develops a broader flavor and aroma band, making it more than a source of color. It's

flavors, however, tend more towards earthy, graphite tastes. The fruit components are very dark, reminiscent of anise and pomegranate essence. More than for the fruit flavors, it is for the varieties' excellent acid /ph balance and "grip", that it is said to have an integrative effect in a blend. In combination with our exuberant west side Syrah, and our ripe and rich style Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot has served to bring a tight, taut, long line to the palate curve. Along with Cabernet, Petit Verdot brings great "nerve" to both our L'Aventure Optimus, and Estate Cuvée.

Stephan feels so strongly about the role that this "wild card" can play in our blends, that he has 10 acres of 60 total acres planted dedicated to Petit Verdot. As the new 30 acre plantation comes into bearing in time for the 2007 vintage, and L'Aventure wines are 100% estate produced (give or take a ton of Rousanne!), Petit Verdot may comprise up to 30% of the blend for Estate Cuvée, and could approximate up to 10% of the Optimus blend.

In the Zen spirit, in the end,

Petit Verdot's gift may be more a case of what it is not, than what it is.



The dense and dark flavor of Petit Verdot, in combination with our spicy, peppery Syrah and rich, dark berry Cabernet make these blends complex accompaniments to grilled meats, game, and exotic fowl. Stews and slow roasted meats match up well with the earthy and powerful flavors in these wines, and don't rule out grilled veggies. Mushroom risotto can't miss!

"Petit Verdot is my Joker, my wild card."

-Stephan Asséo

MONSIEUR DUBES

When Michel Dubès, Stephan's father in law, retired to his home in Brittany in 1992, it wasn't long before this energetic Septuagenarian became antsy. Visiting Domaine de Courteillac, Stephan's first property in Entre Deux Mers during that year's vintage, he gladly pitched in, and has never looked back. After working side by side with Stephan in Bordeaux area, Michel and

his wife Eliane have made the annual harvest pilgrimage to Paso Robles since 1998, L'Aventure's maiden vintage. Eliane is part of the friends' team on the sorting table and Michel, experienced in every aspect of winemaking is Stephan's most trusted aide in the cellar, his "secret weapon" for six weeks each year.

Beatrice has a more direct and Gallic spin on the story.



Stephan and Michel

"My father likes wine, that's why he loves doing it!"



Brittany

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Harvest 2005



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DANS LE VIGNOBLE THE 2005 GRAPES ARE IN!



The winter of 2004/2005 was a wet one, as anyone living locally knows. In fact, according to Dave, it was the fourth wettest winter in 75 years. One of the results of the copious rainfall was an early and vigorous bud break and berry set, requiring lots of man hours in the vineyard, tilling the soil, thinning shoots, pulling leaves, and dropping clusters, in order to maintain quality control, L'Aventure style. As you know from previous reports, all of this vineyard labor is in the aid of producing a scant 6-8 clusters per vine, which equates to just about one (1) bottle per vine! Stephan has always believed that such severe yields were necessary in order to craft the rich, intense wines that the west side Paso Robles *terroir* is capable of producing. To test his thinking, this year he and Dave allowed one acre of the Cabernet block that we call "Arena" (it's the largest knoll on the property, just across from the winery) to self-regulate. This sort of experiment is an important exercise in checks and balances, to make sure that our quality control assumptions are correct. Without the diligent care of Dave and his crew, these vines got a little wild, sending out 3 or more shoots per spur position, and setting 20+ clusters per vine, vs. 6-8, resulting in yields of four+ tons per acre, vs. two. The question was, essentially, are the labor-intensive practices that we engage in worth it, as concerns quality. The answer was a resounding yes! This means two things, right up front; the "wild wine" will be going into Stephan Ridge, and Dave will not be seeing a reduction in tractor time!

In 2005, a long, typical west side growing season, with warm to moderate days, and Templeton - Gap cooled afternoons, prevailed into August. Then, following a couple of weeks of 100 degree plus days, we entered September on a cooling trend, which continues through harvest. This has resulted in Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah fruit that is among the best Stephan has had here in Paso, and suggests a year in which we may get somewhat lower alcohol levels, while still rendering wines of concentration and intensity. As Stephan likes to say, "This is not marketing bullshit, it is the truth!"

Grenache was a surprise star this year, finally living up to expectations, by delivering perfectly mature clusters, at exactly two tons per acre. In combination with the superb estate Syrah, and what looks to be a top Mourvedre crop (it's still on the vine at this writing), the 2005 Côte à Côte promises to continue its tradition of excellence. As



Our Vineyard, before picking

regards Mourvedre, Stephan is taking a slightly different tack this year as to harvesting it. The numbers were in on Monday-numbers meaning pretty much TA (total acidity) and Ph level readings. Everything said "go", so Stephan said "let's wait a week". Why? Over the last two vintages, while the numbers read well, he found the Mourvedre to

be somehow lacking, or incomplete, as compared to his expectations. So, having thrown the Almanac out the window, let's see how these bunches turn out! Dave's turning a blind eye to them until Monday the twenty fourth, so we'll know then. My money is on our enjoying the best Côte à Côte to date from the vintage.

Petit Verdot is another good news story. After a couple of non-productive years, this important variety is back in full swing. Cover cropping and time have brought us our targeted two ton per acre yields, and both Estate Cuvée and Optimus will benefit from the return of the "Joker"! Also, don't rule out the possibility of this "wild card" showing up in the Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, such is its growing importance here at L'Aventure.

Remember that, as these varieties approach maturity, some blocks and rows ripen ahead of others. That makes the harvest a block by block, "pick by numbers" exercise, that may take the crews through a given Cabernet or Syrah block 2-3 times, looking to take only those clusters that have the appropriate acid/Ph readings. In 2005, this approach was necessary throughout the estate, given the long, slow, nearly ideal maturation of the grapes this vintage. We will look forward to reporting back to you on the progress of these potentially excellent wines as they mature a bit in barrel.