

L'AVENTURE NEWSLETTER

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Special points of interest:

- New Wine Club shipment schedule for 2004: February, May, and November
- 2002 Chardonnay...the perfect holiday quaff! Limited supply
- 2002 Report has to wait until February....we're too busy making the 2003s!

ACCOLADES 2003

January's issue of *Forbes* magazine carried an article by Alan Farnham entitled "The Next Napa." Farnham became acquainted with Stephan and his wines at the James Beard House dinner in New York last November 12th. It didn't take long for *Forbes* to get a camera crew out to the winery to document "a day in the life" at L'Aventure. A dramatic photo of Stephan in the vineyards, along with equally flattering comments, sets the tone for press in the year 2003. Farnham ascribes Stephan's choice of Paso Robles over Napa and other California viticultural areas to our unique, Westside *terroir*, and underscores the role of tiny yields in our quest for top quality. *Forbes* mentions L'Aventure in the same breath as Mouton Rothschild and Cheval Blanc, two legendary Bordeaux properties.

Wine Spectator's March 31st issue rated our 2000 Optimus very highly, for this vintage that has critics wrestling about its ranking, given its place between the excellent 1999s and the 2001, which could be our best vintage yet at L'Aventure. This month's November 15th *Wine Spectator* again lists this score in its California Cabernet review. It's interesting to consider how many well known Napa producers did not fare as well, even though their wines trade at two and three times the price.

Saveur magazine's August/September issue featured Paso producers in a story called "Falling in Love with Paso," the title inspired by Stephan's comments that, after visiting Napa,



Stephan Asséo and Ella

Sonoma, and other growing regions, it was with Paso that "I fell in love."

The August *Wine Advocate* review of L'Aventure included the following Robert Parker comments: "...one of the most innovative winemaking operations in Paso Robles. These singular wines are completely different from anything I have tasted from California's Central Coast. This impressive winery is doing everything right."

Then, along came *Food & Wine* in October, listing L'Aventure as reason #98 of "125 Reasons We Love Wine." And this month's *Wine Enthusiast* awarded L'Aventure Optimus and Syrah each 93 points.

L'Aventure is not exactly a well-kept secret anymore —

another important reason to join Club L'Aventure. As our esteemed 2002 Estate Cuvée is released in May 2004, it will be club members who get first crack at this wine and our new releases of Syrah, Estate Syrah, Estate Cabernet, and Rhone Estate, which also typically sell out at release. This, coupled with a 20% discount on all of Stephan's wines and L'Aventure special events — and an inside track on purchasing Estate Cuvée futures — is reason enough to bring a close, wine-collecting friend into the club this holiday season. This way, we can keep L'Aventure in the family a bit longer. As Alan Farnham said: "Haven't heard of Paso Robles yet? Fine. That's the way wine lovers hope to keep it."

TABLAS CREEK NURSERY

In 1985, Laura Wulff was in Costa Rica, trying to “save the world” with the Peace Corps. While working with farmers on sustainable crop management, little did Laura suspect that she would one day be managing



The nursery at Tablas Creek

and developing Tablas Creek’s innovative rootstock and budwood nursery in Paso Robles.

It was in the early 1990s that Robert Haas and the Perrin family of Chateau Beaucastel first brought cuttings from their Chateauneuf du Pape southern Rhône estate to the US. Following a 3-year quarantine of the budwood and rootstock by the FDA, vines were brought to the “far out” Adelaide Road location, where they have flourished ever since. The question is, why?

Bob Haas, legendary importer and partner in the operation,

has the answer. “When we made the decision to come to California, the phylloxera scare was full blown, and, we thought that maybe 20% of available rootstock might be infected. We wanted to start

clean, so we developed the nursery with the idea of providing ourselves with sound rootstock and budwood.” Since its inception, Tablas Creek’s nursery has provided countless wineries and vineyards (including L’Aventure), in and out of the Paso Robles AVA, with top-quality grafts of Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre, and

Counoise, not to mention white Rhône varieties such as Viognier, Marssanne, Roussanne, and Grenache Blanc. Syrah has been the most demanded variety, with Grenache and Mourvèdre on the upswing.

Budwood is derived from canes pruned from the vines following harvest. Canes are cut into 5-bud sections and kept dormant in a cooler for a year until ready for grafting. A complex operation follows, including an omega cut, callusing to seal the cut, and a hot antifungicidal wax to protect the graft. The grafted budwood

is then potted in special soils and ushered to the greenhouse, where it will take root and acclimatize to its new environment. Graft “take” is around 75-80%. Rootstock, similarly, is built from canes and sorted according to diameter. Rootstock harvest takes place in December and January, when pruning takes place.

For a detailed account of the art and science of rootstock and budwood propagation, visit Tablas Creek on Adelaide Road. Call in advance at 237-1231 to schedule a tour.

While the nursery has a 200,000 vine capacity, it has been decided that, for 2004 at least, the nursery will concentrate on propagation exclusively for Tablas vineyards. They will continue to make their budwood and rootstock materials available to outside clients through Novavine Nursery in Sonoma, but prefer to focus their efforts, given market conditions, on developing their own plantation.

The proof is in the pudding! This time- and cost-intensive nursery operation has produced grapes and, ultimately, wines of distinct character and world-class standing.

Name this Rhône! and receive a double magnum of our 2002 “Rhône Estate”

NAME THIS RHÔNE!

We’ve received some excellent suggestions for a name for our Rhône Estate blend to be released in May 2004. As we stated previously, we will award a double magnum of this delicious, 60% Grenache/40% Syrah cuveé to the L’Aventure devotee that comes up with the name that makes Stephan stop and say, “aaaah, yes!” Bijou could be the front-runner....Joker was a good try, but, alas, it’s taken.

Other entries are also under consideration, but we’re going to keep the name game going through the holidays. We know that you Club Adventurers will make it a point to encourage your friends to call upon their creative powers, while around the holiday table and under the gentle influence of a glass of Optimus or Estate Cuvée!

It could be something to do with the wind or with the idea

of a blend itself. Or, one might explore a Latin dictionary or find it hidden in an obscure passage in William Younger’s *God, Men, and Wine*. Who knows where or when this elusive name will pop up. Hopefully, you will recognize it for what it is, as it does. And then....please call me! The winner will receive her or his prize with the May wine club shipment. Bonne Chance!

CHEF OF THE FUTURE

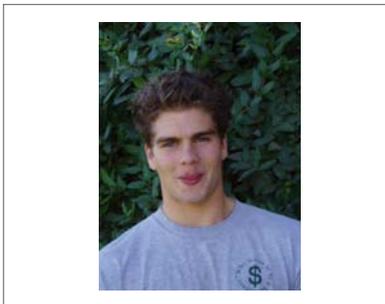
Since moving to Paso Robles in 1998, Julien Asséo has made the round-trip pilgrimage to Bordeaux with his family each summer. This year was different — he stayed behind, electing to trade his Templeton High School diploma for his dream of a culinary baccalaureate from France. With his parents’ blessings, Julien commenced his career in mid-September at the *Lycée Hotelier de Gascogne* in Talence, 15 minutes south of Bordeaux.

It is precisely around this time, 14 to 16 years of age, that students in France begin to decide on their path: a 4-year university education or a professional school. Julien knew what he wanted to do all along.

“I’ve loved cooking since I was little,” he says, “and always wanted to be a chef.” He smiles excitedly as he describes his new routine. Classes convene Monday through Friday, with a comprehensive curriculum that covers all the basics but emphasizes the culinary arts. Monday is his favorite day, as he gets into the kitchen for instruction from 9 AM to 3:00 PM. Tuesday and Wednesday are “regular”

school, with the focus on core subjects. Thursday is dedicated to the administrative and service aspects of the hotel and restaurant trade, while Friday is the toughest schedule...math and French!

The school day at *Lycée Hotelier de Gascogne* — one of the better culinary institutes in France — runs from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Everyone gathers at the end of the day for a meal prepared by students in their third year or beyond. Following the first year’s general studies, students focus increasingly on culinary technique and service protocol. Ultimately, they will experience everything from fresh market shopping to presentation at table, informing themselves on all aspects of the culinary and hospitality arts. At the end of their third year, students have the option of collecting their BAC or continuing for two more years to achieve a BTS, a sort of Master’s in Culinary Arts. Along the way, performance will earn them a recommendation from faculty to work as a *stagier*, or apprentice, in a restaurant or hotel. Students live on



Julien Asséo, age 16

campus during the week and at home on weekends. For Julien, this means weekends in Bordeaux with his *Grandmère* and *Grandpère* on Stephan’s side. Not bad duty to draw! Will Julien stay in France following his tenure at the Lycée? “Maybe,” he says. “My parents know a lot of people there. I know I could get a good job working in a good restaurant. But I might want to come back to the US to work, maybe in LA or New York. France is very competitive, and I’d like to own my own restaurant someday. Plus, I think I can make more money in America.” Chip off the old block!

Watch for a special event at L’Aventure one of these days, with Julien Asséo in the kitchen. Take it from me...if you can get a reservation, you won’t be disappointed!

“Monday’s the best...I get to cook. Friday’s the worst...I have math and French!”

Julien Asséo, Lycée Hotelier de Gascogne

DINNERS AND TASTINGS

Looking back on the October 17th Fall Harvest Dinner with Laurent Grangien, I must say that it was a welcome respite from the orchestrated chaos of the harvest. It gave us time to “breathe,” as Stephan likes to say. Those in attendance will testify to the magic aura that harvest time brings to a winery, and to the splendid evening created by Chef Grangien and Stephan, and the special chemistry among

friends in this once-a-year setting.

Looking ahead, our next dinner at the winery will be with Chef Antonio Varia of Buona Tavola to celebrate Zinfest 2004. Reserve early, as this dinner promises to sell out like all past L’Aventure



Laurent Grangien and Stephan Asséo

Winery dinners. In the interim, Stephan and Fabrizio Ianucci are working on a date for an Etruscan Dinner at Alloro, probably in January. You will not want to miss this hedonistic banquet! Call

Alloro for more details at 805-238-9091.

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*L'Aventure...where
Bordeaux meets the
Rhône!*

DANS LE VIGNOBLE...2003 HARVEST

2003 was a special vintage. A later-than-usual bloom and a hot finish to the summer set a different growing pattern than we had previously seen. The result was very mature fruit and another promising and distinct vintage. While it is too early to talk about the wines, Stephan is articulate about the fruit that will make the wines in 2003.

The growing season itself, once it got going, took off and was poised to set 6-7 tons an acre in our 2100-vine-per-acre estate vineyards. Stephan and Dave DeBusk, our vineyard and production manager, messed with Mother Nature, dropping some 60-70% of clusters to get us down to our benchmark 2-ton-per-acre yield average. This hard work — dropping fruit and pulling leaves, passing meticulously through the vineyard, 3 to 4 times more than most growers — paid off at harvest with rich, pristine, mature fruit gracing the sorting table and on its way to the crusher.

The Roussanne, already finished with fermentation as our Estate Syrah was going into tank, is already showing promise following its first racking into barrel. Rich straw in color and big on the palate, we continue to favor this grape from our vineyards, and expect that — along with Viognier — it will easily replace Chardonnay as the white wine of choice for L'Aventure aficionados. Staying with our Rhône varietals for the moment, 2003 was the first time that Stephan brought in Mourvèdre worthy of going into an estate blend. (You will taste whispers of it in the 2002 Stephan Ridge.) Grenache continues to develop, and 2003 has produced another crop worthy of Estate status. "It's crazy, you know!" exclaims

Stephan. "The cycle this year was shorter than last year, yet, I get very ripe grapes." The vintage will give us potentially 400 to 500 cases of Rhône Estate. We'll see how Stephan ends up blending these with Syrah to finish the cuvée.

Syrah is the workhorse here at L'Aventure, and our estate fruit came in looking great. Small, ripe clusters produced brilliant purple-black juice, all of which is now in barrel undergoing malolactic fermentation. Stephan says it looks very good, "like always," but he will wait until it's been in barrel a while to pass judgment.

The same holds true for Cabernet Sauvignon. Our other workhorse, Cab is the backbone for both Optimus and Estate Cuvée. In 2002, Stephan made a couple hundred cases of 100% Cabernet Sauvignon "because the vintage was so good!" It is now beginning to develop some

Verdot. As we reported previously, the 2002 vintage was not kind to our Petit Verdot or to our Viognier plantings. Unfortunately, we have to report that the same holds true for 2003. While we can see the light at the end of the tunnel for getting these varieties back on track for 2004, the fact remains that the 2002 and 2003 Estate Cuvée will represent a departure from Stephan's intellectual ideal concerning the blend. Nonetheless, the 2002 in barrel demonstrates that — Petit Verdot or no Petit Verdot — the estate fruit from L'Aventure has a very special claim to make, and our Syrah and Cabernet do an excellent job of carrying the blend. (Remember to purchase futures of the 2003 in May and June of 2004. The 2002 futures have closed and commitments have pre-sold the vintage, except a handful of cases for wine club members.)

Syrah, the workhorse, Syrah, the critics' choice, Syrah, the peoples' choice! Easier to identify than an

Optimus, more down to earth than the Estate Cuvée, Syrah is the wine we cannot seem to keep in stock. In 2002, Stephan and I put our heads together and decided that, as Charlie Parker said, "The time is now!" From the 2002 vintage, we will offer some 1000 cases of Syrah, up from 350 in 2001, and we'll add another 1000 in 2003, to take our Syrah to approximately 2000 cases. No more complaining! In all, the 2003 vintage continues a trend of good to

excellent harvests going back to 1999. More difficult to classify than the "big California style" wines of 1999 and 2001, and not as lean as the "classical" 2000 vintage, the 2003 will have time to grow up a bit before being judged against its peers. Let's say, 6 months?



The harvest crew on the last day of the vintage, October 30, 2003

cigar-box aromas over the rich cassis and wild blackberry palate that characterizes Stephan's Paso Cabernets. Will 2003 convince Stephan to again produce a 100% Cab? "We'll see" is all I can get out of him!

L'Aventure Estate Cuvée has been built around Stephan's "wild card" grape variety, Petit