

L'AVENTURE NEWSLETTER

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Look for Stephan (or one of us) at the following upcoming events:

May 17: Paso Robles Wine Festival, and dinner at L'Aventure with Chef Jeff Scott.

June 5-8: Triple Creek Ranch Wine Weekend, Montana. Go to www.triplecreekranch.com for details.

June 25: Ferry Plaza Wine Shop, San Francisco. A Paso Robles Tasting.



BLENDING VINTAGE 2007: FRANCO-AMERICAN CONCORDE!

As Stephan says, "our blends really start in the vineyard". The complexities of L'Aventure wines are due to the blending of grapes planted in different parts of the vineyard. At L'Aventure we have planted over 30 well defined plots on our 60 acres. Grapes from different blocks of our vineyard tend to show tremendously different exposition and fruit characters. For example, syrah grown on a north facing slope of our vineyard may show more pepper characteristics than syrah grown on one of our south facing slopes.

The second step in developing complexity is done by blending the different varieties of grapes themselves. Our goal is to create a blend of grapes in which the whole is more complex and balanced than the individual parts that make it up. By blending grapes like Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah together, we can intertwine their characteristics to create a blend that presents a face of its own.

The third step is aging the blends in French oak barrels. At L'Aventure, we age our wines in a variety of oak casks with subtly different toast levels. We work with our coopers directly to get exactly the toast levels on barrels that Stephan wants. Different toast levels determine the way the oak reacts with the wine. By using different toasts in different barrels we end up with a wide variety of flavor profiles when it comes time to blend the wines. At every turn, Stephan's goal is to use all of the tools available to him to create the most complex and full expression of the terroir and fruit as is possible in the wines.

Stephan, Dave, and Guil-

laume manage our viticulture and winemaking strategies. As the wines complete their fermentations, they are racked into barrel, and settle through the malolactic fermentation. After malolactic fermentation is completed, they are allowed to rest through the end of the year. In the start of the new year, Stephan will begin to create trial blends for Optimus, Estate Cuvée and Côte à Côte. As he refines his sense for the vintage and culls the best blends down to reasonable quantity, he presents them to the blending panel.

In most years, the blending panel consists of our local crew of Stephan, Dave, Guillaume and Michael. We also look forward to our annual visit with Stephan's partners from Bordeaux, Messieurs Dominique and Philippe Meneret to round out the panel with a French perspective. What follows is a very serious, comical and exhausting two days of tasting, sniffing, spitting and ranking the initial blends. The winner will go into bottle as the wine of the vintage.

On March 14 and 15 of 2008, the whole panel sat down in Stephan's lab to address the task of selecting the blends for the 2007 vintage. Pen and paper set out, bottles bagged and lettered A through E, we commenced. Estate Cuvée and Côte à Côte are blended first in order to assign our best estate fruits to these cuvées; Optimus follows, contain-

ing some of the estate fruit not included in the estate blends. Currently, Optimus is a blend of estate fruit and fruit sourced from other west side vineyards, though 2007 looks to be the last non-estate vintage of this wine.

It is curious to be in the room as the blends are being discussed. There are definitely two distinct palates at work, French on one side and California on the other. Young Guillaume tends to gravitate



Stephan and Michael debate the merits of a potential blend

more in the direction of Dominique and Philippe with the leaner, more acid driven style, while Stephan, Dave and Michael tend to recognize the bigger Paso style as more appropriate to our purposes. While the blends are conceived and evaluated with nothing but quality in mind, there is some range of accord that needs to be reached, given six differing opinions and palates. Lively exchanges in both languages underscore the convivial spirit that drives the L'Aventure culture. Suffice to say that, while French is the international language of diplomacy, it is fortunate, I think, that we do not understand everything that is said at blending!

A CHEF FOR ALL SEASONS

Chef Jeff Scott arrived on the Paso Robles scene only a couple of years ago, but is fast gaining a reputation as one of the area's premier "private dinner" chefs. A graduate of California School of Culinary Arts, Jeff made his name at the Playboy Mansion in LA, after stints at Le Bernardin in New York and The French Laundry in Napa, California. A Maitre Fromager, Chef Scott also started the company "Perfect Pairings" in 2002 which brings him to your home with specially tailored food and wine pairings.

Chef Scott will be working with Stephan throughout 2008

to craft special menus for our April 5 Wine Club Members Appreciation Party, our May 17 Wine Festival Dinner at L'Aventure and our October 18 Harvest Tour Dinner at Willow Creek Farms, home of Pasolivo Olive Oil. Chef will create a menu with fresh, seasonal ingredients to compliment Stephan's new and older vintage wines.

These dinners are sold out but you may want to get on the wait list if you are feeling lucky. For those of you that have booked a table early, one word...no, two: Bon Appétit!



STEAKING OUT PASO ROBLES

Paso finally got a Steak House to go with our big, rich, red wines! Bernick's Steak House is the brain child of owner Todd Bernick and managing partner Kurt Kennedy. The ambiance reflects the outgoing, friendly character of Paso Robles. "Bernick's is a nice, top-end bar, with steaks" as Kurt puts it. Diners can nestle on banquettes along the right side of the room, or sit at the bar that assumes the central feature at Bernick's. At the bar, Ryan Abbot will mix you an excellent Martini if you choose not to select from an international wine list (which features L'Aventure wines, of course!).

Steaks are, of course, the stars at Bernick's; all USDA Prime, and cooked to order and perfection. There is a great selection to choose from with Hanger Steak, Baseball cut top



Sirloin and Filet Mignon to start out with. The New York strip is impeccable, as are the bone-in Rib Eye and Porterhouse. For those not in the mood for steak, you can choose from a delicious Rotisserie Chicken, daily Seafood Specials and a very generous Prime Burger.

Produce is locally sourced, and organically grown. The spinach side is the classic compliment to any of these excellent

steaks! Bernick's Wedge Salad offers a delicious departure from the classic version and the grilled asparagus can't be beat.

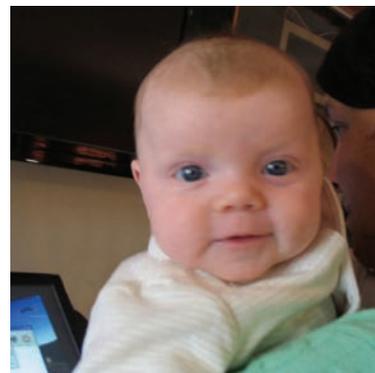
The key to Bernick's is to relax and enjoy the crowd as much as your meal. Chelsey Clegg is the capable GM that will receive you, and do whatever she can to make your meal at Bernicks "the best steak in town!"

For reservations, call 805- 226-9400, or go to www.bernicks.net.

ENCORE DAGNY & JOEL!

Dagny, the administrative glue that holds the House of L'Aventure together, and her husband Joel welcomed baby Amelia Virginia into the world at 1:20 pm on February 1st, 2008. Amelia joins sister Kalista in a sister act sure to cut a future swath through

Paso Robles! At eight pounds and ten ounces, she's close to being ready to hold down a job at the winery! And, while I wasn't able to speak with Amelia directly (she was napping), her mother assured me that she "wines" right along with the best of 'em!



INSIDE THE WINERY

At L'Aventure, Stephan is always looking for a better way to do things and he has found that sometimes, less is better. Increasingly, he finds himself doing things in a more "old world", non interventionist way. Recently, he, Dave and Guillaume have been experimenting with various elements of the barrel program that they shared with me over a steamy barrel cleaning.

One new change is that we have added two puncheons to the barrel cellar. Puncheons have capacity to house 500 liters vs. 225 liters in our conventional barrels. Aging in Puncheon decreases the surface to volume ratio, resulting in wines that are less influenced by new oak and experience greater retention of fruit integrity.

Another experiment in the



Dave & Guillaume removing barrel lids

cellar this year is fermentation in cask. Typically, we execute the primary fermentation of

our red wines in stainless steel and reserve the use of barrels for malolactic fermentation only. During the 2007 vintage, however, Guillaume Fabre, our experimental "mad scientist" reserved four barrels for primary fermentations. His objective was to gauge how post-fermentation maceration might benefit in wood. He wanted to use this process to see if the wine could possibly become more extracted and integrated than it is using our current methods. His findings showed that at one week following the arrest of fermentation, color, flavors and aromas were at their peak.

Stephan will be taking these new approaches into consideration as he moves L'Aventure forward, into a 100% estate fruit based program in 2008.

2006 VINTAGE TASTING NOTES

L'Aventure Estate Cuvée 2006 - 49% Syrah estate, 37% Cabernet Sauvignon estate, 14% Petit Verdot estate. A dark, dense color reflects similarly dense, tight aromas of black fruit, "pain grille" and light barrel toast. A firm, consistent attack on the palate provides a vibrant beginning. Blueberries and wild blackberry mingle with some higher-tone notes of macerated strawberries and raspberry puree. Licorice and leather underpin these and all wash across the mouth to a long, rich, silky and seamless finish. A hint of calcaire runs throughout the nose, and the finish. Stephan loves this wine, as it is at once dense and elegant from the soft tannins, as well as bright.

L'Aventure Estate Côte à Côte 2006 - 40% Mourvèdre estate, 30% Grenache estate, 30% Syrah estate. Deep ruby and garnet circles describe the color, while explosive red fruit aromas and spice dominate the nose. Hints of ripe blueberries and black cherries, along with acacia and graphite add complexity to this polished wine. Full bodied with a very long finish.

L'Aventure Estate Cabernet Sauvignon 2006 - 100% Cabernet Sauvignon estate. Deep, dark, brooding ruby cast. Cola, blueberry and blackberry mingle in the nose, which is very deep and mineral laced. A soft attack, followed by tight, well wrought tannins, opening up into a bouquet of dark fruit, tea leaf, bramble, and tar. An immense middle palate leads to a long, integrated finish that shows the polish of new French oak.

L'Aventure Optimus 2006 - 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 45% Syrah, 5% Petit Verdot. Dark ruby in color, with wax and licorice surrounding aromas of crushed red and black fruit. A good attack is followed by a flow of fruit and acacia, finishing with a spicy, "pain grille" flavor. Cellar for 7-10 years.



DANS LE VIGNOBLE 2007 IN THE VINEYARDS

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"Two vintages in the same vintage", is how Stephan sums up the 2007 harvest. "We began picking on September 6. The first wave was warm and we had around 40% of the fruit picked in a compressed, 10 day period. We brought in the Roussanne, much of the Syrah and some Cabernet. This start was reminiscent of 2004, when the entire vintage was picked in a very busy 26 day period."

We then saw a radical cooling trend, with temperatures hovering in the mid 80's. This cooler weather resulted in a hiatus from picking for a week followed by a gradual return to the Syrah and then Cabernet. Petit Verdot was the next to come in followed by Grenache and Mourvèdre in the second week of October. This cooler, second wave was more reminiscent of 2006 (which we finished picking on November 2 or 3) producing fruit in the same spirit. Stephan thinks that this "second harvest" will provide the backbone for a very good vintage".

While it is too early to make a definitive statement as to the style and quality of the 2007 vintage, it currently is showing more elegance than our past "California style" vintages such as 1999, 2001 and 2004. It falls more into the category of a "classic" year, such as 2000, 2002, and 2006. These vintages display a tighter, more elegant and dense character. Vintages 2003 and 2005 seem to have about them something of both.

"The 2007 is more than ever a blending vintage", Stephan continues. "It is a textbook example of the Paso blending advantage. It is maybe the vintage with the most unique character for me so far". The split vintage saw us harvesting the same variety, on the same hillside maybe 3 weeks apart from each other, depending on whether the fruit was situated at the top, middle or bottom of the hill. This made for a labor intensive, round after round approach of selective picking. It also makes for a complex and flavorful blend, with some "juicy" black fruit character, as well as a tight core of acid, tannin and brighter fruit.

It looks like 2007 is the last year that Stephan will purchase fruit from sources outside of our vineyard. That means that the 2008 Optimus will be 100% estate grown! This event will mark the fulfillment of Stephan's original intent to make one wine (Estate Cuvée), and a second (Optimus) to insure the top



Stephan bringing in the 2007 harvest

quality of the first. Along the way, Côte à Côte snuck in, as it is impossible to ignore the superb potential of Rhône varieties in Paso Robles' west side *terroir*.

Not only will 2008 be the beginning of L'Aventure's 100% estate wine program but Dave and Guillaume are just now in the process of ripping, grading, and staking out a half acre just behind the winery for a new block of Grenache Blanc. We are excited to have Grenache Blanc planted on our estate as Stephan is planning to blend it with the Estate Roussanne, making an even better white wine here at L'Aventure. Though a half acre may sound like a lot, it will result in an increase of only 30 cases (or 360 bottles) to the new blend! As we say, it's all about the quality, not the quantity.



Dave monitors the ripping of the new Grenache Blanc hillside