

# L'AVENTURE NEWSLETTER

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## 2007 VINTAGE ESTATE WINES RELEASED

Stephan treads lightly when comparing the 2007 vintage to the 2006 vintage at L'Aventure. The 2007 vintage has the characteristics of a "split vintage" (a vintage that had an early and late harvest split by a turn of cool weather) mixing the forward fruit of an earlier harvest with the structure of fruit that was able to stay on the vine and mature longer. The 2006 vintage tended to be a bit more "classic" in style, (i.e. more tightly knit and less accessible), than the upcoming 2007 vintage.

Throughout August, daily high temperatures maintained readings at 90 degrees plus, and the harvest was off to a harried start, as we commenced picking Syrah in early September. Two more weeks of blistering heat and half way through the Syrah, our good friend the "Templeton Gap" maritime influence kicked in and the tempo slowed from "Macarena" to "waltz". A hiatus of two weeks followed, with the picking of the "second vintage" resuming in early October under cool, clear skies. The balance of the Syrah was in by October 10th and Cabernet, Petit Verdot, Grenache, and Mourvedre followed en suite, completing the harvest by the first week of November. Full maturity was achieved in all varieties and Stephan confers upon the wines the title of "great pleasure wines". Try to beat that! Following are cellar notes on the wines of

the vintage.

### Optimus 2007

45% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Syrah, 15% Petit Verdot.

Our best Optimus ever...(until 2008, which will be 100% estate!) Ruby color, with soft aromas of candied currants, fir, and cardamom. A very sharp attack of

somewhat high-tone red fruit on the palate cedes to blueberries, black currant, and spicy notes which finish long.

1,400 cases produced

### Estate Cuvée 2007

49% Syrah, 37% Cabernet Sauvignon, 14% Petit Verdot.

Opaque ebony center, purple margins. Powerful, complex aromas of graphite, "viande", dark fruit, licorice, tea-leaf...have we forgotten anything? Spicy notes introduced in the aroma linger like cloves and sage in a rich tapestry of flavors that include wild blackberry, tar, gooseberry, and acacia. The length of the finish is memorable. You really need to try this wine for yourself- words do not do it justice!

1,700 cases produced

### Côte à Côte 2007

40% Mourvedre, 40% Grenache, 20% Syrah.

Ruby in color with garnet edges,

the aromas are diverse, with a spice bouquet, mineral notes, and blueberries leading the way. The attack on the palate is vibrant, with rich violet and



wild berry flavors standing over a stream of cherry, pomegranate, and tar. The finish is opulent, with vanilla spice sounding a final note.

1,400 cases produced

### Estate Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

95% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Petit Verdot.

Stephan has made a conscious choice to develop a Cabernet Sauvignon wine as a permanent fixture of the range, that is, if mother nature permits. The 2007 Cabernet is inky-purple, with an opaque center. Spicy currant and cola on the nose, the attack on the palate is immense with spicy cedar and smoke underpinning dark, wild blackberry and blueberry flavors. The luxuriant mouth goes on and on, with tea leaf and more spice in the finish.

800 cases produced.

## STEPHAN IN THE CENTER OF FRANCE

*The oak trees used for wine barrels are 150 – 200 years old, and will have been cared for by 6-7 generations, at their harvest!*

The use of barrels for the ageing of fine wines has been the subject of previous comment in this newsletter. Stephan has always remarked that “the blend starts in the vineyards”, so too the ageing of the wines in wood contributes strongly to the style and complexity of the blend.

With this critical role of wood in mind, Stephan accepted an invitation this last December to spend a week in France with one of our cooperage suppliers, *Seguin Moreau*. The objective of the visit was to educate winemakers on the “life of the barrel”, from forest, to cooperage, to finished product, as well as to the nuances of barrel making and toasting as they relate to finished wines.

Ryan Render, our *Seguin Moreau* representative, accompanied Stephan and 15 winemakers from Napa, Sonoma, the Central Coast and Oregon to Bordeaux, Cognac, and Burgundy to visit some of France’s top producers as well as *Seguin Moreau*’s original Cooperage in Merpins, outside of Cognac. But before the wineries and coopers, there were the forests.

In France, there are 15 million hectares of forested land. That’s 37 million acres. Only 8% of this is state owned (375,000 acres), and of that, only 1% is classified as *Haut Fut*, or forest from which the best barrels can be taken. Barrels taken from these forests are certified by the French Government agency ONF as PESP, or certified, traceable, and sourced from these forests. Most of these forests are located in the greater area referred to as *Centre France*, or Center of France. The oak trees in these designated areas range from 150 to 200 years of age, during the lives of which six to seven generations of forestry workers will care for them! These special trees begin their

lives as a dense forest of small oak saplings. As the forest grows, workers thin the forest removing smaller trees for lumber and other purposes. Eventually, through the thinning process, they are left with 40 trees per acre to be used for wine barrels. Each tree is individually inspected, measured, and evaluated for harvest, taking into account knots, grain density, and



myriad other criteria. In the end, an average of 3 barrels per tree are taken. In this light, it is amazing that such barrels are “only” going for \$1,200.00 each!

And on to the wineries! Chateau Haut Brion in Graves in Bordeaux, Remy-Martin in Cognac, and Domaine Drouhin in Burgundy were the distinguished hosts to our visitors. At each property, winemakers tasted wines from diverse coopers and forests, with different toast levels, etc. Both during the *dégustations* and the dinners that followed, notes were exchanged, ideas discussed, and thinking changed and bettered all around.

In Cognac, the home base for Seguin Moreau, their original cooperage house Merpins served as classroom for analyzing the many different barrels that contribute to the fabled Cognac blend, Louis The Thirteenth. As many as 50 Cognacs from as long ago as 120 years are brought together in a seamless, rich, ephemeral nectar for which some will pay thousands of dollars a bottle. All thanks to the wood!

Of special interest were meetings and seminars by

Seguin Moreau researchers, during which cutting edge developments were introduced. One of these seminars discussed their unique approach to toasting the barrels. As the first hoops go onto the staves, the barrel is submerged in boiling water for roughly 20 minutes for a complete hydration. Then, the barrel is lifted out of the water, let to dry briefly, and set over the fire pot for bending and toasting. The objective is a light, more uniform toast profile.

Upon his return, Stephan called Ryan to the winery, in order to stage a tasting to evaluate the effects of the diverse cooperage that we employ at L’Aventure. The 2007 Estate Cuvee was chosen as the subject of the evaluation. Guillaume and Michael joined in, and the afternoon proved to be a memorable lesson in the radically different results of ageing in such a diverse barrel regime. Low toast, medium long toast, and a few high toast barrels from coopers as diverse as Saury, Tonnellerie d’Aquitaine, Radoux, Boutes, & Treuil, displayed such diverse flavors and structure in the wine, that at times, one did not think that all the wines were from the same blend! Some displayed more wood notes, others higher smoke and caramel influences.

In the end, Stephan’s preferences were for his long time favorite Saury barrique, Ermitage, Tonnellerie d’Aquitaine, the Seguin Moreau French Oak Napa medium toast, and Seguin Moreau French Oak Napa Medium + toast. The group also placed the Seguin Moreau-aged wines in second place overall, making them the highest rated cooper across the boards.

## CHEF KELLY & THE "NEW" PASO ROBLES INN

Those of you that have frequented Paso Robles have undoubtedly stayed once or twice at our esteemed Paso Robles Inn. Established in 1857 when James & Daniel Blackburn purchased the "El Paso de Robles" property which was part of a 25,000 acre Spanish land grant. The Paso Robles Inn became the preeminent place for travelers journeying from San Francisco to Los Angeles to stay. The Hotel was built in 1891, of brick and sandstone arches to insure it as being fire-proof. The addition of

hot springs and a state of the art "plunge" in 1906 attracted the rich and famous from all around, including Paso's own Ignace Paderewski. Alas, in 1940 the Inn burned down..."the best laid plans"!

The Inn was rebuilt, and when the Martin family purchased the Paso Robles Inn in 1999, the modern chapter was begun (See [History of the Paso Robles Inn: A Century of Pride](#) by Ann Martin Bowler). The most recent commitment to excellence at the Inn brings us to this story. It is the return of Kelly Wangard, the "prodigal chef," to her home town!

Most of us think "steak" when we enter the western - style dining room of the Inn. Well, be assured that Chef

Kelly is continuing the tradition of serving 100% Certified USDA Choice, Angus beef. The Kansas City strip, filet mignon, rib eye, and flat iron steak all come in generous cuts, with your choice of potatoes just-about-any-way. Mrs. Wangard, however, has brought back to Paso the rewards of a fast-track career in culinary arts that has transformed the menu

Loews hotels. With a young daughter at home, a few visits to the family here in Paso inspired the Wangards to return home. When Gregg found himself being offered the chef position on the spot at The cliffs in Avila Beach, Kelly knew that something would pop up for her in time. The rest is history!

from being "just about steaks" to as refined and appealing a menu as you will find in the area. Following her graduation from the CCA in San Francisco in 1997, Kelly spent time in the kitchens of Puccini & Pinetti and the Hotel Monaco in San Francisco, before working her way up to *chef tournant* under the venerable hand of Hubert Keller at Fleur de Lys. A stint at the famous Kniel Bay Resort at Turtle Bay on St. Johns, V.I., as *garde-manger* served to introduce her to her husband Gregg (also a chef!). She followed Gregg to the Five Diamond Koehler American Club Resort in Wisconsin, where they both worked, and then on to Southern California, where they worked for the

Diners at the Paso Robles Inn will enjoy such menu additions as Day Boat Scallop Raviolis, Maple Leaf Farms Duck Breast and Confit, Braised Short Ribs, and Grilled Salmon with Avocado, Grilled Corn and Rock shrimp with Butter Sauce. And then, there's the Snake River Farms Kobe Black Truffle Burger.

Kelly's philosophy is to use only the highest quality food products, and a straight forward French technique. "The food should not be complicated, but complex."

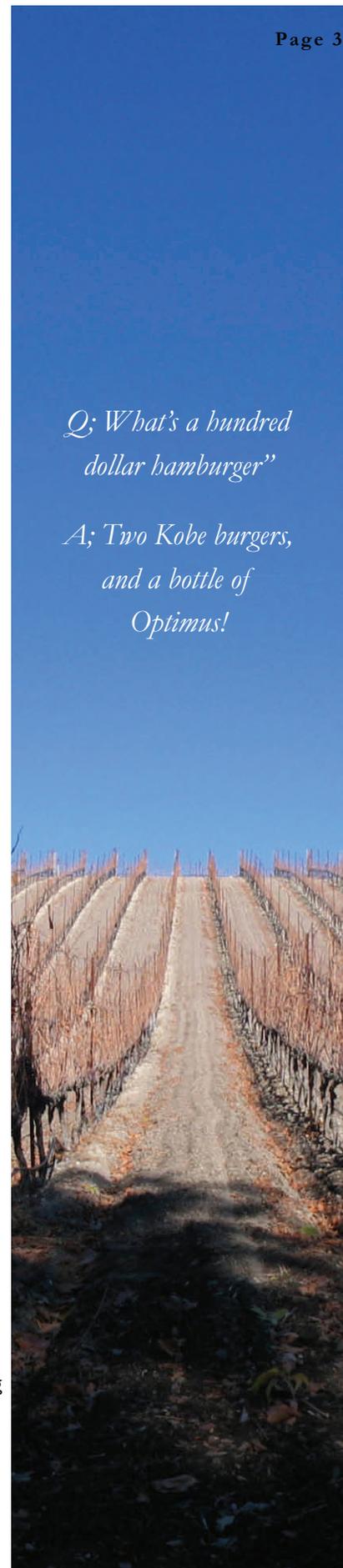
She has come a long way since her first catering job with Jim & Lisa at Cahoots! Call 805-238-2660 for reservations.

Once again, it is a year of family additions at L'Aventure! On December 2, 2008, Wine Club manager Chandler Smiley and his wife Emily welcomed Zoë Wren Smiley into their family. At 8 pounds, 6 ounces, Zoë arrived a healthy and happy

baby girl, and has been growing steadily with her near constant intake of food! Sleep deprivation aside, Chandler & Emily are thoroughly enjoying this new experience, and look forward to sharing their lives with her.



### BABY ZOË



*Q: What's a hundred dollar hamburger"*

*A: Two Kobe burgers, and a bottle of Optimus!*

## DANS LE VIGNOBLE; 2008 ON THE ESTATE

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The 2008 wines are soundly made and resting in the cellar. And while it is too early to make a definitive pronouncement on the vintage, Stephan and Dave have recounted the following about the 2008 growing season.

In 2008, we essentially saw two distinct vintages, the first a product of a compressed, hot start. As the Templeton Gap cooling trend prevailed, a recess of a couple of weeks ensued, and the "second harvest" was underway. In years during which we experience these "double harvests", we enjoy the richness of the warm, summer picking, along with the more austere and tighter fall fruit character. These vintages produce what Stephan calls "pleasure wine".

The 2008 vintage offered a number of challenges to Stephan, Dave, and Guillaume in the vineyards. Being the third year of a dry spell, the vines were in for a fight from the beginning. While we do irrigate vines, it is done sparingly, and typically towards the end of July and early August, so as not to create disequilibrium in the fruit. Our high density plantation of 2,100 vines per acre both requires some irrigation, and exacerbates the vines taking moisture from the soil.

The fact that nearly half of our vines are young, and just now beginning to give yields in their fifth leaf has also led to 2008 being a short crop. These vines were planted in the second plantation phase, and inhabit our most inhospitable slopes, typically in places with no top soil, just chalky rock as a bed. In real terms, we got less than one ton per acre from these babies in 2008!

Shatter was the principal issue that characterized this difficult vintage. A radical temperature swing in mid June, from the low nineties and high eighties, down into the fifties resulted in an interruption of

blends as he, Dave, and Guillaume taste weekly through the separate lots. As this short vintage is offered in 2010, it will definitely be a case of "the early bird gets the worm", and a good time to have the wine club member's first offering.

In other news, Dave's been enjoying his new tractor. The Yanmar is Italian-made, a crawler that features rubber treads vs. metal treads, for easier turning (less earth displacement), and easier navigation of

the rows (less compacting). "Works like a tractor, drives like a car" quips Dave, as he hooks up his new chisel plough to the Yanmar. "What now?", I ask Dave about the new attachment. "This is for in-row ripping, to cut the root systems and thereby increase (possibly double) the root's penetration area. This allows the vine to take in more of what the *terroir* has to offer".

the flowering cycle. Pollination simply did not take place due to these conditions, made worse by high winds, and the result was an approximate drop in Cabernet production of 80%, with Grenache and Mourvedre suffering at around 25% of average yields. These shortfalls mean that in 2008, our case production will hover around 5,000 cases, our lowest volume since 2003.

The blends will also be effected by the Cabernet Sauvignon shortfall, and Petit Verdot will need to step-up in 2008 to round out both Optimus and Estate Cuvee. The good news is that the quality of the 2008 vintage is excellent. A second "pleasure wine" vintage in succession, the wines are currently showing very well in barrel, as Stephan already is beginning to conceive of the

The chisel plow is just one addition to constant updates and changes in our vineyard approach at L'Aventure. Stephan is always looking for ways to improve the quality of the L'Aventure fruit and this year he has decided to make the transition toward biodynamic farming. This is a labor intensive shift in farming practices that he is very excited

about. We will keep you up to date on the progress of this project in newsletters to come!

