



PETER MICHAEL WINERY

Spring Letter, 2003



ISSUE XXII

HAND-CRAFTED WINES

by Luc Morlet, Winemaker

Since our first vintage in 1987, the Peter Michael Winery vision has been to produce, in small quantity, unique world-class wines from properly sited and meticulously maintained vineyards.

Our winemaking philosophy, modeled after that of the best French producers, has been defined as “classical” and is one of minimal intervention. For example, hand sorting our grapes, fermenting with indigenous yeast, and not filtering or fining our wines are non-manipulative, uncompromising methods that guarantee our wines to be the most natural and authentic vineyard expression possible. Ironically, this “laissez-faire” approach requires a great deal of passionate and knowledgeable attention from the winemaking team, along with a sense of artistry and invention. Otherwise, not even the greatest fruit will necessarily result in great wines.



The Peter Michael winemaking team, (left to right) Epifanio Esquivel, Luc Morlet, Robbie Meyer and Rafael Aviña, taste and evaluate the wine as it develops.

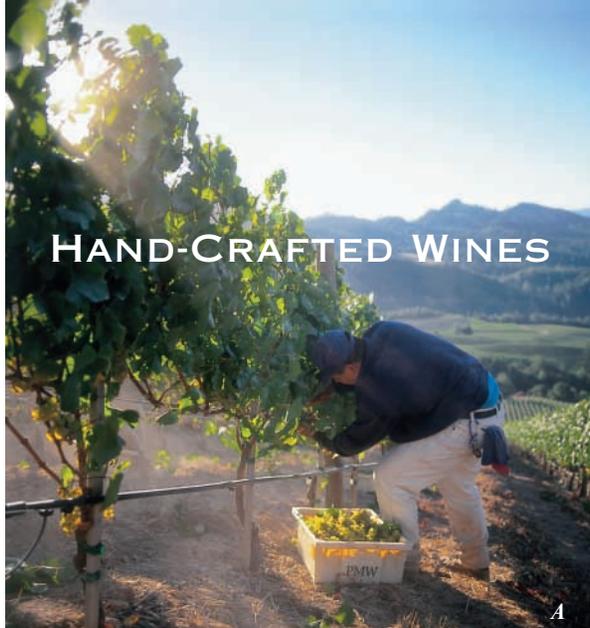
In the late 1980s, Peter Michael Winery was a Californian pioneer in the use of the natural yeast present on the grapes to carry out fermentation. The resulting wine displayed a heightened aromatic complexity and an amazing texture, roundness, and length. Back then we coined the name “Cuvée Indigène” to honor this natural technique, which is now applied to the entire production of the winery. In the same spirit, we have always given special

attention to the gentle handling and sorting of the fruit: allowing the grape clusters to remain intact preserves their integrity and quality. My team and I have just designed three original pieces of equipment which have helped perfect the process.

The first new concept gives the fruit the softest ride possible from the vineyards to the winery. As soon as the grape clusters are hand-picked, they are gently placed in-

—Continued on Page 2

HAND-CRAFTED WINES



A



B

A: As harvest nears, our winemaker monitors the ripeness of the individual blocks three times a week. When he is sure they are ready, the grapes are picked by hand during cool mornings. The grapes are carefully put into 28-pound lugs. They will remain in these small containers until they reach the crush pad.

B: Fruit is gently transported in exclusively designed trailers which give the stacked lugs a very smooth ride.

—Continued from Page 1

to 28 pound capacity lugs, and will remain in them until their arrival at the crush pad. These small containers are stacked to avoid any compaction, and are constantly protected from the sun by an overhead cover. They're loaded into trailers (made exclusively for our winery) that have a special suspension system and additional safety features which allow the piles of full lugs to be towed in our steepest vineyards (some are over 40%!). While dumping the lugs onto the belt of the cluster sorting table, not one drop of juice is noticeable! The berries look untouched.

The second new design is of the grape cluster sorting table. Its pitch has been calibrated to aid in the placement of the clusters on the belt, resulting in less trituration (damage), and to deliver the fruit directly to the press for white wines or to the destemmer for red wines. At this stage, the berries still remain intact!

Our former Winemaker, Mark Aubert, was instrumental in the third new design, which involves the berry sorting table. As they exit the destemmer, the grapes are spread out on a belt and are selected by twenty hands. This extremely meticulous berry-by-berry sorting processes only one ton of fruit per hour, but it is well rewarded. The small pieces of stems (which impart bitterness to the wines) are eliminated, and only the perfect berries are saved. The result is amazing. A look inside the fermenters reveals a flawless carpet of whole berries.

Continuing our careful handling, the pumping over regime is very smooth, increasing skin contact during fermentation and aerating the wine. This benefits the yeast and aides in the multiple reactions between polyphenols (tannins and color). Devatting, the removal of pomace from the tank, is also carried out with care. The pomace is shoveled by hand directly into a basket which is lifted and brought to the new vertical press for a slow autofiltering squeeze. The clean extracted press wine flows directly into the barrels by gravity. During a selective tasting carried out later in the year, the press wine is evaluated for its contribution to the overall blend.

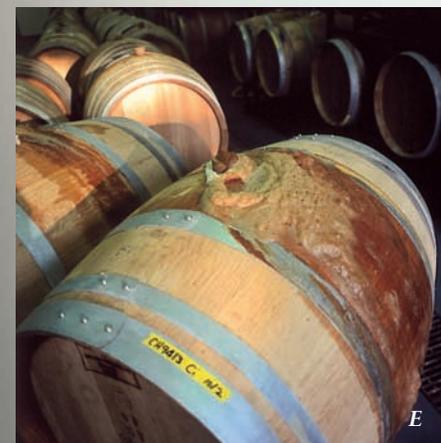
At Peter Michael Winery there is no pre-written recipe for making the wines. Each year, I base decisions on the characteristics of that vintage. If I'm able to eliminate



C



D



E



*At every step,
gentle care
preserves
the unique
terroir of the
vineyard.*



C: We systematically hand sort our production and only the best fruit is selected.

D: Very particular attention is given to the pressing operations. The slow and gentle squeezing allows selective extraction of the juice from the whole clusters.

E: The fermentations of our entire production are carried out by the indigenous flora. Slower and temperamental, they enhance the expression of our terroirs and increase both the roundness of the mouth feel and the aromatic complexity of our wines.

F: After draining the wine out, the pomace is selectively removed from the tank by the use of a soft shovel and goes directly into the press basket.

G: Gentle Pomace Pressing: the small capacity basket press extracts the remaining wine slowly and selectively.

H: Matured in barrels 'sur lies', our white wines benefit from a weekly stirring, or 'batonnage'. Put back in suspension, the lees increase the flesh of the mid-palate and the aromatic complexity.

I: The racking of our red wines is carried out by simple gravity, from one barrel to another, and through the 'esquive' side hole. This gentle technique, without the use of any specific pump or cane equipment guarantees that the wine will keep its integral quality.

J: We constantly taste our wines at each step of their lives in order to determine the care they need. The judicious blend of individual barrels is the result of four months of work and represents the best synergy possible to express the terroir of each wine.

a winemaking manipulation, I don't hesitate to do so. Jacques Puisais stated, "Oenology is a science by definition, and an art because its goal is to deeply move our senses." One of my favorite wine anthems is, "The art of winemaking only starts when one has overcome the techniques."

Every detail counts, each step has its own importance, and each winemaking team member brings a special talent to the process. We consider it an art to properly rack a barrel so neatly, so free of lees, that the wine needs no filtration or fining. Selecting the perfect assortment of French oak barrels from different artisan coopers, forests, and with different toast levels is an art in itself. Finally, there is the art of blending. Within one single estate vineyard such as Belle Côte or La Carrière we obtain, by very selective picking, about 20 different lots. Within these 6-8 barrel lots, each barrel of wine has its own characteristics. This diversity provides a great palette of flavors, aromas, texture and concentration with which we compose each wine. After months of assiduous tasting, only those barrels which best capture the essence of the vineyard and the particularity of the vintage are selected to craft the wine.

We strive to make sure that each glass of Peter Michael wine links the wine lover to nature and the land, and delivers a source of wonderful conviviality and 'Art de Vivre'.



H

2003 SPRING RELEASE— *The winemaker's Tasting Notes*



2001 L'APRÈS-MIDI

Sauvignon Blanc Estate Vineyard

The minerality and delicacy of this Sauvignon Blanc reflects this vineyard's terroir, particularly its white, rocky, volcanic soils. This wine also shows the power and richness of the 2001 vintage. A deliciously ripe and full wine, yet delicate and elegant. Aromas of lime peel and citrus oil with a trace of dry apricot, peony, gooseberry and perhaps white truffle. Good body and minerality with a high natural acidity and a long finish.

Ready to drink now. Can be cellared 2-3 years.



2001 BELLE CÔTE

Chardonnay Estate Vineyard

The 2001 Belle Côte is a distinctly intense, hedonistic wine entirely different than the La Carrière. A muscular and exotic wine, it offers perfumed aromas of rose, lychee and orange, with a background of spice. All of these characteristics follow through to a palate that is deep and concentrated from the start to its long finish. The Belle Côte shows its opulence now, but will continue to develop for at least the next 10 years.

Robert Parker, Jr.: "The 2001 Chardonnay Belle Côte exhibits more exotic tropical fruit notes, a layered, opulent texture, medium to full body, less minerality than La Carrière, beautiful layers of fruit, and a stunning finish. This brilliant effort should drink well for 5-7 years.—91-93."



2001 LA CARRIÈRE

Chardonnay Estate Vineyard

The 2001 La Carrière may be the best vintage so far. The terroir-driven minerality is evident; wet river stone and baking flour come to mind. These elements are highlighted with citrus notes of lemon and lime with a toasty background of pain-grillé.

The exquisite elegance is rewarding on the palate. The wine is rich and smooth without being too powerful. Its mineral core will allow it to age well over the next 7-10 years like its Burgundian cousins.

Robert Parker, Jr.: "The knock-out 2001 Chardonnay La Carrière offers honeyed citrus, liquid mineral, floral, and exotic tropical fruit characteristics as well as admirable definition, texture, body and richness. Although I suspect the acids are high, the wine is more concentrated than the 2000 with more depth as well as fruit. This brilliant effort should age nicely for 5-8 years—91-94."



2000 LES PAVOTS

Proprietary Red Wine Estate Vineyard

The 2000 Les Pavots is quick to show its signature aromas of blueberry, coffee, sweet tobacco, vanilla and red cedar, joined by a ripe currant extract. The tannins offer enough structure for aging while sustaining an enjoyably full body. This wine will mature for the next 5-10 years.

Stephen Tanzer: "Full saturated ruby. Cassis, flowers, spicy oak and a hint of sassafras on the nose; a bit less obviously ripe than the '99. Then sweet and supple on entry... —88-90."

"Mountain vineyards, classical winemaking, limited production"



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