"None of us knew the story that was going to happen."
—Paul Michael
It's hard to believe, but it has been 35 years since I first set foot on our Knights Valley Estate.

- a teenager's perspective
It was 1982 and my younger brother David, two close friends and I were on a stateside summer holiday with my parents. The excursion opened with a short stay in Napa Valley, followed by white water rafting on the Rogue River in Oregon, learning to scuba dive on the big island of Hawaii and a few days poolside at the Sonoma Mission Inn. While our parents were with us throughout the journey, they were either kind enough or distracted enough to leave us to our own devices.

What we didn’t know was that Dad had an ulterior motive for the trip. Unbeknown to us, and possibly to our Mum, he had been on a six-year search for a ranch to serve as a family retreat and a site for a world-class vineyard. Finally, he thought he had found the right place and it was time to show the family.

At the end of the vacation, without explanation, Dad ushered us into a shiny new hired Cadillac – just like in the movies, this was a very cool car to any British kid – and we started driving. We headed north, and then further north. We arrived in Knights Valley, a bucolic region that bridges Napa and Sonoma Counties. We turned off highway 128 onto a rugged parcel set below Mount St. Helena and Robert Louis Stevenson State Park. It was a dustbowl of weeds and scrub oak called the Sugarloaf Ranch. The name, coined in the 1800s, referred to a round hill on the property. Today, that hill is known as Mylo Mountain in honour of our youngest son.

We forced the Cadillac, wheels spinning, a mile up the rugged eroded ranch roads, alongside a mountain creek, circumventing curious cows that had never seen a car load of Brits. None of us were really ever the same again, and that includes the Cadillac. Through the lens of time, it sounds romantic, but through the eyes of a 17-year-old boy, it was not what I expected from California – no beach, no pool, no Californian girls (enamored with our English accents . . .). My queries of “Why am I here?” were more primal than existential. My concerns about the remoteness and primitiveness of the terrain had little impact on Dad’s thinking or actions, as confirmed by his purchase of the ranch later that afternoon. Even more vexing was his declaration that this was where my brother and I were to spend our summer holidays, at least until we could afford to do otherwise.

So, we were now owners of a 650-acre “retreat” in the middle of nowhere. The next spring my brother and I joined a small vineyard crew to plant the first 20 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc on what would later be christened our Les Pavots vineyard. Tilling the rocky, volcanic soils high up on that mountainside above the valley floor and under the Californian sun was definitely a teenager’s idea of hard work! But it was also an experience worth a million holidays! Our lives were transformed with those first steps on “Sugarloaf Ranch.”

Over the intervening years, this one square mile of California has evolved into 130 acres of mountain vineyards with a winery on the valley floor. We have witnessed the maturation of those first vineyards and helped with the planting of new vineyards across the steep volcanic hillsides. We have tasted three decades worth of wines that capture the hearts of the terroir and the people that work here. We continue to experience the joy of being a part of this special adventure and are amazed to see people that come from all over the world to visit this place. And yet, the creek continues to run, while the mountain continues to watch this place that remains a sanctuary to all who pass through. So here we are all these years later, still spending our summer holidays “on the ranch” along with our own teenage children, the next generation.

Next newsletter, we will write about how this dusty remote cattle ranch evolved into a winery and some of the colourful characters encountered along the way. Until then...
Late summer afternoon light in Les Pavots Vineyard.
GROWING SEASONS AND HARVESTS
from Nick Morlet

2014 Vintage of Cabernet at Oakville
The winter rainfall was 70% of normal, continuing three years of drought. Unseasonably warm temperatures in early spring accelerated bud break by four weeks, then bloom through veraison benefited from moderate temperatures. Early use of drip irrigation was critical for the health of the vines. Meticulous canopy management and substantial crop thinning brought the vines into balance. Ideal Indian summer conditions allowed us to calmly harvest each block as it achieved optimal ripeness. Yields were higher than average, but due to dehydration the skins and pulp of the berries were thicker than normal, resulting in low juice yields at the press, and exceptional concentration in the wines.

2016 Vintage of Sauvignon Blanc in Knights Valley
The near perfect 2016 growing season started early with a warm, dry spring. While California’s drought continued, rains were sufficient to meet the vineyard’s needs. Ideal conditions in May produced even blooming and an excellent fruit set. A green harvest brought the crop load to optimal balance. Overall, the vintage was slightly cooler than average, with consistently warm and sunny conditions and only one heat spike. A long Indian summer gave us excellent ripening and flavor development in all varietals.

“A long Indian summer gave us excellent ripening and flavor development in all varietals.”

PETER MICHAEL FOUNDATION EVENTS
Please join us at one of our fundraising dinners celebrating Food, Wine & Philanthropy while supporting visionary prostate cancer research.

July 29
Chefs Rupert & Carrie Blease
Stars Knights Valley
Peter Michael Estate | Calistoga

September 9
Chef Douglas Keane
Stars Napa
Napa Valley Reserve | St. Helena

October 1
Chef Thomas McNaughton
Stars San Francisco
Central Kitchen | San Francisco

October 22
Chef Suzanne Goin
Stars Los Angeles
Tavern | Los Angeles

Seating is limited. For reservations and to learn more:
415.339.0400
jenny@petermichaelfoundation.org

PETERMICHAELWINERY.COM | 800 354 4459
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2014 Au Paradis Estate Cabernet Sauvignon
To the eye, Au Paradis presents a deep red ruby color. The nose offers elegant notes of cassis, black cherry, chocolate, licorice, clove, cinnamon and an exotic touch of orange. In the mouth, the texture is velvety and loaded with black currant, liqueur of cassis, game, black berry liqueur, black olives, coconut, plum eau-de-vie, and an iron-like minerality. The mouth feel is round, refined, complex and meaty with an incredible length of finish. The 2014 Au Paradis will continue to age gracefully for three decades or more.

2014 L’Esprit des Pavots Estate Cabernet Blend
Generously rich and intense, the 2014 L’Esprit des Pavots displays all the features which characterize the Les Pavots terroir: blueberry, vanilla bean, licorice, chocolate, cedar and coffee. The fruit of younger vines brings additional aromas of black cherry, black currant, plum, leather, tobacco and gray and white pepper to the complex bouquet. The palate is full-bodied and concentrated, exhibiting savory elements and abundant, supple tannins with a lingering finish. Fruit forward and enjoyable at release, this wine should age for a decade or more.

2016 L’Après-Midi Estate Sauvignon Blanc
Intense and multi-layered, the bouquet is dominated by mineral, vine blossom, yellow nettle blossom, honeysuckle, white vine rose, hawthorn, lemon, lime, white peach, completed by acacia honey and candied anise. Rich, balanced, and elegant, the zesty flavors are reminiscent of the aromas with additional, guava, Williams pear, Mirabelle plum and fresh almond notes. The strong mineral background, a stamp from our terroir, balances the overall richness and gives superb refinement. The finish is layered, very long and elegant. The 2016 L’Après-Midi will benefit from three years of cellaring, and it will age gracefully for a decade or more.

2015 Le Moulin Rouge Pinot Noir
Leading with intense aromas of wild strawberry, violet and red cherry, the 2015 Le Moulin Rouge follows with hints of Earl Grey tea and pomegranate. Opening further, the nose reveals additional layers of plum and graphite with clove and cinnamon in the background. Intense in the mouth, the wine blends richness and delicacy as the flavors stretch to a long earthy and fruit-filled finish. This beautiful wine drinks well young yet will age for a decade.

2015 Ma Danseuse Estate Pinot Noir
The winery has elected to not bottle this vintage. Please see our spring newsletter for details.

2015 Clos du Ciel Estate Pinot Noir
The winery has elected to not bottle this vintage. Please see our spring newsletter for details.

2015 Mon Plaisir Estate Chardonnay
True to its name, the wine is indeed a pleasure: intense and perfumed. 2015 Mon Plaisir displays an exquisite bouquet of lemon cream, fresh butter, grapefruit and a flint-like minerality, with subtle notes of honeysuckle. The palate is rich, full-bodied and creamy with beautiful hints of fresh lemon, pear, greengage, apple and brioche. A mineral character with hints of pain grillé and almond complete the mouth feel of this wine and its long finish. Enjoyable now, this wine will age for a decade or more.

2015 Ma Belle-Fille Estate Chardonnay
The 2015 Ma Belle-Fille is spectacularly intense, boasting aromas of ripe peach, tangerine blossom, brioche-like pastry elements, golden apple and nectarine, accented with oyster shell minerality. Generous in the mouth, rich and concentrated, the wine displays flavors of Williams pear, honey, greengage, dried almond, chamomile, orange rind and notes of baked Reinette apple. In the mouth, the wine is tactile and gourmand with extreme purity. Layered and seductive, the finish is very long. The wine will age gracefully for more than a decade.

2015 Point Rouge Estate Chardonnay
Offering elegance, complexity and richness, the 2015 Point Rouge is an exceptional wine. The nose is filled with aromas of apricot, ripe apple, citrus oils, orange rind, Williams pear, almond and acacia honey. Seamless and rich in the mouth, notes of nougat, greengage, orange marmalade, honeysuckle, spice cake, vanilla and white truffle are framed with an oyster shell minerality. The wine offers a rare harmony, as well as extraordinary tactile persistence. While already refined, the wine will gain even more complexity in 4-5 years and should continue to age gracefully for three decades.