



# PETER MICHAEL

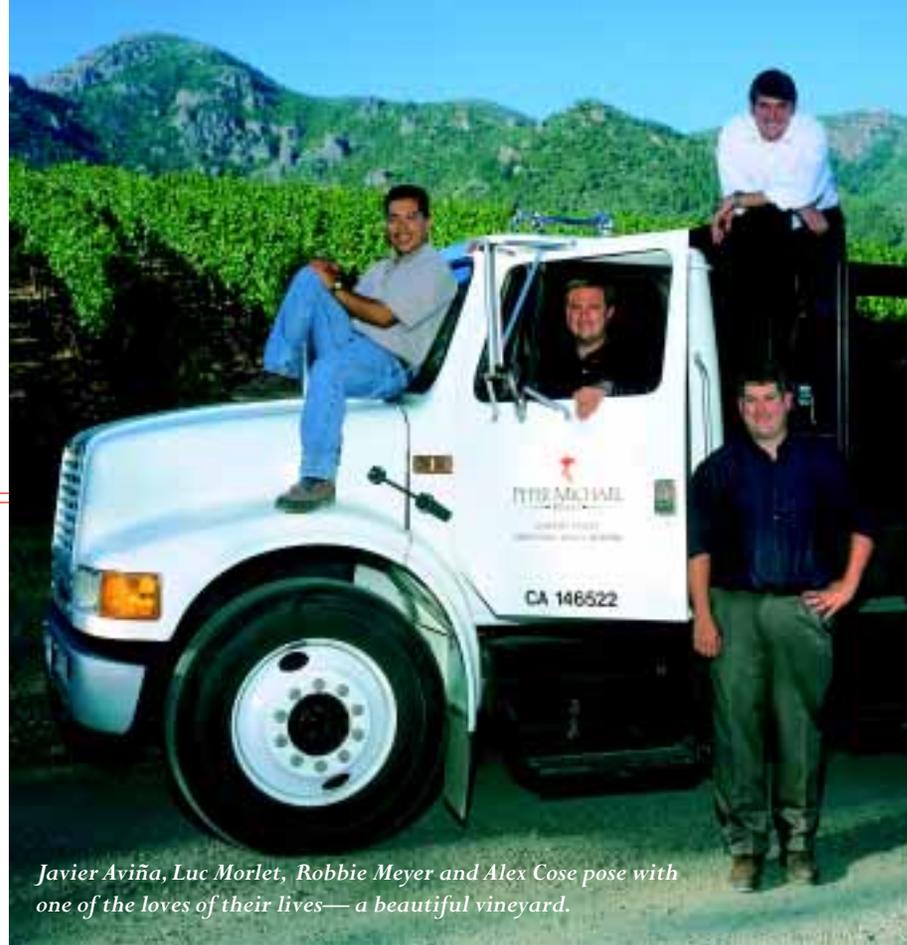
—→ WINERY ←—

## A STORY OF WINE LOVERS

“*P*assion,” says Luc Morlet, the new winemaker at Peter Michael Winery. “Every member of this winemaking team has it. We love the vineyards and the wines.” In the business of wine, love does have a great deal to do with it—and, it seems, in more than one way. Vanessa Wong, our previous winemaker, has left to join her fiancé, Nick Peay, in his new winemaking venture. Luc Morlet comes to us after having left France in 1996 to join his wife Jodie in her native California.

Luc Morlet comes from a winegrowing and wine-making family that originated four generations ago. Luc’s great-great grandfather was an orphan, raised by the local church without education or money. His son, Gaston, though poor, was able to rent a little piece of land in Avenay-Val d’Or, Champagne, and plant grapevines. He cultivated vegetables between the rows to sustain his family during the years before the vines would bear fruit.

The phylloxera crisis at the turn of the century ruined many winemakers, but ironically made Gaston successful. He understood the art of grafting new vines onto resistant rootstock, and the demand for his skills enabled him to



*Javier Aviña, Luc Morlet, Robbie Meyer and Alex Cose pose with one of the loves of their lives—a beautiful vineyard.*

buy land and found the family’s domaine, Pierre Morlet et Fils. He named it not after himself, but after his only son, envisioning a legacy for future generations.

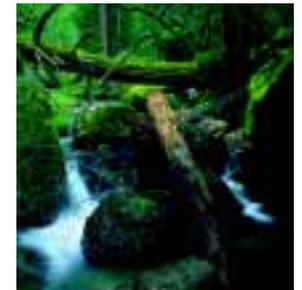
For a child in the little village of Avenay-Val d’Or, there was little difference between work and leisure. All of Luc’s spare time was spent working on the family estate, which at 40 acres was small enough to be managed by the family alone most of the year, but large enough to require the efforts of all its members, including in-laws and cousins. “I had no idea that I was working,” says Luc. “We were having fun. My 4th birthday present was a wooden wheelbarrow. I loved it and carefully painted it white even though its purpose was to spread manure.”

For many of the children of winemaking families,

school was an interlude in the lifelong work of the family estate. The local school had as its motto, “Passe ici avant Mont-Hurlé” exhorting students to tarry awhile before returning to the vineyards. Luc’s parents had always impressed upon him the importance of education, both academic and practical. The Ecole viti-vinicole de Champagne, where not only Luc but also his brothers, father and grandfather had studied following high school, was a working wine estate and produced its own Champagne.

Throughout Luc’s continuing education, which included a degree in viticulture, a Master’s degree in winemaking from Rheims University and a second Master’s degree in wine business from the Dijon Business School, he worked in vineyards and wineries in Burgundy,

# Fall Letter, 2001



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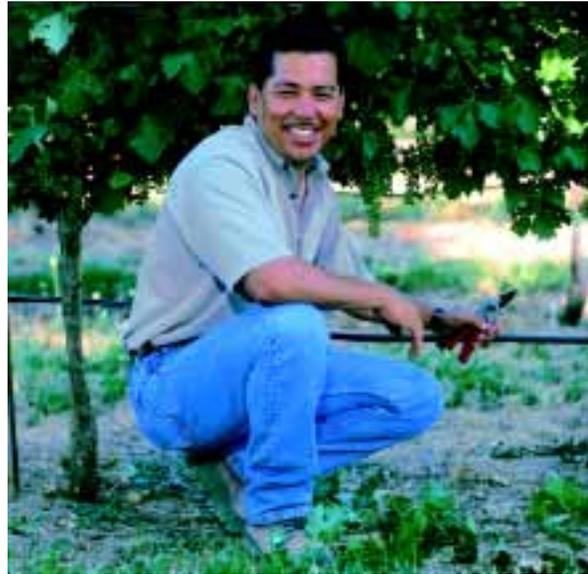


## WINE LOVERS

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Bordeaux, and the Southwest of France. “Before you settle in an area, you must experience winemaking in many different places,” his father had advised. Luc broadened his experience further with technical tours of the viticulture areas of Italy, Spain and Germany, as well as Alsace, Cognac, and the Rhône and Loire Valleys.

His first full-time position was as the Assistant Winemaker for the Le Val d’Or Champagne Cellars. In 1993 he replaced the Winemaker at a French subsidiary in St. Helena which allowed him to discover Napa and California viticulture styles. For the 1994 vintage, he returned to France as the Regisseur of Château Dauzac, a classified Margaux growth. There he furthered his knowledge of the four Bordeaux varietals and how to make “le Grand Vin” with the talented Medoc winemaking consultant Jacques Boissenot: “He taught me how to respect the fruit and the terroir.” In Beaune, Burgundy, at Maison Chanson, Luc’s mentor was Senior Winemaker Marc Cugney who in-



stilled in him the importance of aging Chardonnay wines ‘sur lies’. In Napa Valley, Luc greatly benefited from working closely with renowned Bordeaux Enologist and Consultant Michel Rolland, during his five years as Newton Vineyard’s Director of Enology and Viticulture.

“Michel taught me how to pick fruit at the ‘crescendo of ripeness’ and helped me to perfect my red wine blending techniques,” says Luc. “These three men, after my father, have been the major influences on my winemaking style.”

“There is no great wine without great grapes. I could not be happy on a non-estate winery. For those who love terroir, Peter Michael Winery is the place to be.” Luc’s eclectic viticulture and winemaking style is further supported by working closely with Peter Michael Winery’s former Winemaker and current Consultant Mark Aubert. “I greatly respect Mark’s expertise regarding the style and legacy of Peter Michael wines.”

Luc has no wish to force a French ideal of terroir on Peter Michael wines. “European history has already been made. In California we are making history. I have an aff-

ity for California viticulture,” he adds, pointing out that not only are his wife and children native Californians, he has cousins in the San Francisco Bay Area whose family immigrated in the early 1900s. They always extolled the virtues of California to Luc’s father, whose responsibilities to the family domaine prevented him from satisfying his curiosity. Luc was the first in four generations to have brothers, and thus the first to leave the family estate. “I’ve been through six vintages here. I now consider myself to be half-American.

“I have a science background, and technology is certainly important. But the people who have influenced me, and that I admire the most, are those with an intuitive feeling for the vineyard and the winemaking process. I have found that feeling for the land and grapes here at Peter Michael. When I first walked through the estate with Javier Aviña, Vineyard Manager here for 10 years, his love for what he does was obvious. Not only in the way he maintains the vineyards like his own home, but in the way he understands and reacts to the needs of the vines rather than simply following a schedule. I find that



kind of empathy in each member of the team here, and it enables us to treat the wine gently, with limited intervention, and to recognize and nurture its unique terroir.”

Robbie Meyer graduated from the University of California, Davis with a Master’s degree in Enology and was immediately hired as Enologist at Peter Michael Winery. His recent promotion to Assistant Winemaker continues a story that began in his hometown of Atlanta. He developed an early appreciation for food and wine working as a wine steward before earning his Bachelor’s degree in biology. His academic background initially led him into the pharmaceutical industry, but his passion for wine inevitably brought him to California.

He is happy to have had diverse experiences. “An academic background is irreplaceable, but you can’t make great wines without being able to evaluate them sensorially. Our winemaking decisions are not made by the numbers; they are made by carefully tasting the grapes and wines we work with every day.”

Alex Cose is a Bay Area native, and always felt an attraction to the winemaking regions surrounding him.



When a friend who had become a Winemaker invited him to try winery work, he quickly accepted. After a variety of jobs at Monticello Cellars and Joseph Phelps Winery, he returned to school and got his Enology degree from Fresno State. He has been with Peter Michael Winery as Cellar Master and now Production Manager since his graduation in 1996. “This place gives us everything we need for perfect vinification,” he says. “Every year we make decisions based on the vintage we are presented with; we harvest in small tonnages and make our wine by the barrel in an effort to maintain the highest quality of wine. Our main goal in winemaking is to reflect the character of the vineyard.”

“Terroir consists of climate, soil, exposure and vines; but I always include people as well,” Luc says. “In a small winery like this, we are not each in our own little world—there’s a lot of overlap. I will do my best to lead the team. My job is to bring everybody together, but the fact is, our shared passion for what we do has already accomplished that.”

We’re not quite finished with love stories. Alex was just married here on the estate, and he and his new bride, Monica, are honeymooning in France, where they are being hosted by Luc’s family in Avenay-Val d’Or. ■

*Above, left to right—the Peter Michael Winery winemaking team: Luc Morlet, Winemaker; Javier Aviña, Vineyard Manager; Robbie Meyer, Assistant Winemaker; and Alex Cose, Production Manager.*

*At left: Luc, age 13, receives a lesson in plowing from his father at his family’s Ay vineyard, Avenay-Val d’Or.*



## CONGRATULATIONS!



Sir Peter Michael’s The Vineyard at Stockcross is the smallest hotel in the UK to be awarded a prestigious AA Five Star classification in addition to a Michelin star. Guests that say “Congratulations!” receive a complimentary bottle of champagne until the end of August .

# 2001 FALL RELEASE

The winemaker's tasting notes

The 1999 vintage covered a seven week period starting in the middle of September. We had good weather throughout the harvest—not as hot as 1997 and not as cold and wet as 1998. The excellent growing season provided fruit that arrived in beautiful condition. Healthy fruit gave us agreeable fermentations producing wines we feel reflect the characteristics of the vintage.

## 1999 MON PLAISIR



The 1999 Mon Plaisir Chardonnay reveals inter-

esting fruit complexity with mineral nuances in the nose. Lighter citrus aromas and grilled almond notes highlight the richer essences of orange, pear, and apple. The very smooth palate is enlivened with a zingy vivacity. This wine will evolve another 3-4 years from release.

**Robert Parker, Jr.:** "...Produced from the OldWente clone grown in the Alexander Mountain Estate Vineyard owned by Jess Jackson, and aged totally in French oak (50% new), the 1999 Chardonnay Mon Plaisir reveals abundant tropical fruit characteristics in its ostentatious bouquet. Aromas of oranges, ripe honeyed apples, and buttered citrus jump from the glass of this hedonistically-styled Chardonnay. The integration of wood provides subtle notes of vanilla and toast, which add to the wine's complex personality. Medium to full-bodied, pure, long, and concentrated, with enough acidity to provide freshness and focus, it will drink well for 4-5 years... —94+ points"

## 1999 CUVÉE INDIGÈNE



The 1999 Cuvée Indigène offers a more intense look at

the fruit characteristics typical of this vineyard. The Cuvée presents fresh orange and apricot aromas layered with light mineral, spice, and vanilla characters. The aromas carry through to the delicious palate where the wine shows its weight and persistent length. Should nicely evolve 4-5 years.

**Robert Parker, Jr.:** "Consistently one of California's finest Chardonnays, the 100% indigenous yeast-fermented Chardonnay Cuvée Indigène also emerges from the Alexander Mountain Estate Vineyard. Typically, the 1999 exhibits distinctive aromas of smoky tropical fruit intermixed with peaches, apricots, and pears. Long, full-bodied, and layered, with terrific texture, gorgeous purity, and loads of fruit, this effort can stand up against the finest Burgundy grand crus (as could its siblings). The Cuvée Indigène possesses more leesy, smoky notes in its rich, concentrated style. It is a young, pure, super-concentrated Chardonnay to enjoy over the next 5-6 years (although it may last nearly a decade)... —93 points"

## 1999 POINT ROUGE



1999 Point Rouge Chardonnay features ex-

pressions of ripened pear, apple and citrus peel. A background of orange blossom and tangerine interact with light spicy-smokey complexes. The palate is completed with an elegant finish and excellent length. Should gain even more complexity in the 5 years to come.

**Robert Parker, Jr.:** "The limited production Chardonnay Point Rouge represents a selection of the finest barrels. In most years, this is essentially the best barrels of Cuvée Indigène, picked for their extra intensity and complex style. This is routinely one of the three or four finest Chardonnays being produced in California, as well as one of the greatest in the world... The 1999 Chardonnay Point Rouge is more steely than previous vintages, as well as more closed and unevolved, but there is no doubting its immense potential. It boasts honeyed citrus, orange, tangerine, liquid mineral, and smoky hazelnut aromas... The finish lasts for more than 40 seconds. This wine is more backward than the other Peter Michael Chardonnays, and should have a slow evolution. Anticipated maturity: 2001-2010. Exquisite!... —94+ points"

## 1999 CRÊTE D'OR



A one time only offering, the 1999 Crête d'Or

Chardonnay is our first effort using fruit from the Russian River Valley. The vineyard benefited from typically cool morning and evening fog conditions, as well as excellent sun exposure during the day. The resulting wine produces delicate aromas of green apple, pineapple and dried flowers (acacia, jasmine, wild rose, nicotiana...) which compliment the integrated oak elements of vanilla and toast. Smooth and round entry, nice crisp finish. Will continue to evolve in the bottle at least 5 years.

**Robert Parker, Jr.:** "...the brilliant 1999 Chardonnay Crête d'Or is a creamy-textured, flamboyant, ostentatiously-styled Chardonnay with aromas and flavors of roasted hazelnuts, dried apricots, peaches, and pineapples. A rich, full-bodied effort with good underlying acidity as well as a judicious touch of toasty oak, it should drink well for 5-6 years... —93 points"

## 1999 LE MOULIN ROUGE



The intense fruit of 1999 Le Moulin

Rouge Pinot Noir is expressed in jammy strawberry and cherry notes with spicy aromas of mint and black tea leaves. The fully expansive palate provides an excellent balance of flavors and structure. This Pinot Noir is very enjoyable now and will gain in complexity for 5+ years.

**Robert Parker, Jr.:** "The finest Pinot Noir yet produced by Peter Michael is the 1999 Pinot Noir Le Moulin Rouge. This wine is made from the well-known Pisoni Vineyard in the Santa Lucia Highlands... The dense ruby/purple colored 1999 Le Moulin Rouge offers up a sweet nose of blackberries, pomegranate, vanillin, and Chinese black tea. Gorgeous fruit is found in this full-bodied, concentrated, expansive, potentially profound Pinot Noir. The wood adds nice spice and smoke. Look for this Pinot Noir to drink well in 1-2 years, and last for a decade... —90 - 93 points"

*"Mountain vineyards,  
classical winemaking,  
limited production"*



PETER MICHAEL  
WINERY