During their first visit to Peter Michael vineyards, our guests are often astonished by the natural beauty of the hillside property and by how well the vineyards are farmed. “Manicured” is the most frequent description that comes to their minds when sharing their appreciation for the care we give to our vines.

Luc Morlet, Winemaker, and Javier Aviña, Vineyard Manager, oversee in tandem the 114 acres of vineyards at Peter Michael Winery. They never forget their motto: “Great wines come from great fruit— which comes from great vines!” To get great vines, they add, it takes a dedicated vineyard crew: people who are skilled, intuitive and tireless.

Luc and Javier strongly believe that the grapes that create world-class wines must come from healthy and balanced vines. The vegetative growth, which occurs from bud break to closing of the cluster, is important for improving the root system of the plant and for allowing efficient photosynthesis by a healthy canopy. On the other hand, the maturation of the wood and the crop is crucial to the perennial viability of the vines and to produce fully ripened fruit. Balanced vines grow moderately in the hot and moist soil conditions during the long sunny days of the first part of the season. Then, in the middle of the summer, as the days start to shorten and the soil conditions get drier, the vines switch to their reserve building mode (Veraison). Balanced vines lignify their shoots and carry only a small crop which ripens slowly and evenly. (An average crop is 2.5 tons with some blocks as low as 1 ton.) The fruit produced from such vines shows concentrated flavor and exemplifies the unique qualities of its location, its Terroir.

From winter dormancy, starting with pruning, to the autumn maturity and harvest, at Peter Michael we count at least 14 different direct on-the-vine interventions. These are necessary to help control the balance of...
the vines and to create the best quality possible. This represents a tremendous amount of hands-on work which requires immense dexterity, precision and diligence. No machine can properly carry out all these tasks.

Precision in grape farming is crucial. Vines are different from one another just as people are, and have to be considered individually. In pruning, for example, the length of the cane and the number of spurs and buds to leave depend on the vigor of the individual vine being pruned. Without dexterity and skill, it’s impossible to work around fragile new shoots and clusters of fruit. Attention to detail is important as well in keeping the canopy healthy and the zone of the fruit clean. The workers position the growing shoots, remove the laterals and thin the crop to get an uncongested fruit zone where plenty of air circulates around the clusters to provide a natural sanitation of the fruit. Viticulturists call these “prophylactic measures,” which result in very little need for pesticides. These practices of “aerated fruit zone” are rare in the wine business today. Our vineyard crew lives by them.

Throughout the growing season the vineyard crew is always in a race with time. Tasks have to be accomplished as the vines move from one critical stage to another. Painstaking work takes a lot of time and yet must be done quickly enough to follow the growth of the plants. Late can be too late, for if one task is missed it makes for twice the amount of work a few weeks later. Of course, timing is also crucial for the last main task of the season: picking. Once full ripeness is reached, the clusters are quickly and gently picked by hand. This last effort from our vineyard crew is usually very tough. Conditions depend entirely upon the weather, which can be very hot and accelerate maturation. Hot weather can dictate that we harvest at night in cooler temperatures to preserve flavor.
At the end of the 6 to 8 weeks of harvest, the entire Peter Michael Winery staff gathers at the crush pad around a dinner to celebrate the end of the season and harvest. The vineyard workers taste the wines recently bottled and appreciate the reward of their year-round hard work. The stories of the new harvest flow and are compared with the ones from years past.

When asked about their job, the vineyard workers respond that “working in the Peter Michael vineyards is never boring.” Each vineyard block is unique; they each have different varietals, soils, ages and history. Also they add, with a smile, that the vine rows have reasonable lengths and they get to enjoy an ever-changing view of Knights Valley.

As Javier says, “Each growing and ripening season is different; full of rewards. It reflects directly in our wines through the vintages!”

Every touch counts in a race for quality and against time.

Once the vineyard is established, each vine gets hands-on treatment at least 14 times every year:

1) Pruning ‘permanent Cordon’ or ‘double Guyot cane’ (C)
2) Tying against the pruning wire (F)
3) First Suckering at the canes or cordons level (H)
4) First Shoot Positioning to the first set of catching wires (H)
5) Second Shoot Positioning to the second set of catching wires (H)
6) First Hedging post bloom (I)
7) Removing Laterals (H)
8) Second Suckering at the trunk level (F)
9) Leafing (H)
10) Second Hedging (I)
11) First Thinning (K)
12) Second Thinning
13) Third Hedging
14) Picking! (N)

These 14 interventions are in addition to general year-round activities such as mowing, plowing (L), and drip irrigation (J), as well as maintaining protection from weather (G), diseases, and animals. They all contribute to the pursuit of the highest quality fruit.
2002 Fall Release—The winemaker’s Tasting Notes

2000 Mon Plaisir
Chardonnay

The classic style of Peter Michael Mon Plaisir is ever present in this Chardonnay. Produced from vineyards with unique hillside exposure, soil type, and grape side selection. This pleasurable wine shows exotic aromas of orange marmalade and smoked persimmon. The subtlety of white flower petals mingled with mineral essence adds to the grace and velvety elegance of this wine.

Ready now. Can be cellared three to four years.

Stephen Tanzer: “Subtle aromas of peach, flowers, grapefruit and soft citrus fruits. Rich, chewy and deep, with lemon and mineral flavors complicated and sweetened by hints of exotic fruits… Firm acids and the wine’s minerality give it a brisk, dry finish. —91”

2000 Cuvée Indigène
Chardonnay

Fermented with native yeasts indigenous to the vineyard, Cuvée Indigène is indicative of its Alexander Mountain terroir. The wine expresses essence of orange blossom with honeyed pineapple. Candied pears and a hint of dry apricot, mingle with the smooth exotic flavor of lemon crème brûlée. Notes of vanilla and oak lead to a rich finish.

Enjoyable now. Can be cellared three to four years.

Stephen Tanzer: “Highly perfumed nose combines grapefruit, flowers, mint, marzipan and hazelnut. The fattest, richest and densest of these 2000’s to this point, with more spice showing from the 55% new oak component. Quite tightly wound on the back end and in need of at least a couple years of bottle aging. —92”

2000 Le Moulin Rouge
Pisoni Vineyard Pinot Noir

This Pinot Noir was grown on the coastal slopes of the Santa Lucia Highlands. The 2000 Le Moulin Rouge is a rich garnet-colored wine with a heady, fruit-filled nose of raspberries and strawberries with the subtle aroma of tea and roses. Flavors of fresh mint, rhubarb and raspberries.

Great now. Will age up to 10 years.

Stephen Tanzer: “Bright saturated ruby-red. Pungently aromatic nose of raspberry, red cherry, rose petal and white pepper. Juicy and dry, but with terrific flavor intensity; wild strawberry and raspberry fruit call to mind a wine from the southern Côte de Nuits. Conveys a strong impression of soil character. Finishes with substantial but fine and nicely integrated tannins and excellent persistence. Impressively dense and fine. —92.”

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 white truffle. Good body and minerality with a high natural acidity and a long finish.

Ready to drink now. Can be cellared two to three years.