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## Morlet Family Vineyards

By Stephen Tanzer

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**Luc Morlet's first releases under his own label were a revelation in March. Happily, production will rise to about 2,000 cases in the 2007 vintage (just 1,200 cases were made in '06), and there will also be a five-variety Bordeaux blend from Knights Valley fruit as well as a cabernet from the To-Kalon Vineyard in Oakville. Morlet, who was responsible for making the Peter Michael wines from 2001 through 2005 (his brother Nick is now in charge there, although Luc continues to consult), and vinified at Staglin in 2006, looks for older vines from top sites, buying heavily from a "true Sonoma Coast" vineyard at an altitude of about 1,400 feet on the second ridge in from the ocean. Everything I tasted with Morlet was outstanding, and his top pinot was one of the most exciting examples of this variety I've tasted to date from California.**

### **2006 Morlet Family Vineyards La Proportion Doree Sonoma County**

(\$60; 66% semillon, 32% sauvignon blanc and 2% muscadelle) Pale, bright yellow. Highly complex aromas of lemon, honey, herbs, white flowers and nuts, plus a suggestion of lanolin. Dense and lush but bright; thick yet light on its feet, with complex flavors of grapefruit peel, citrus blossom, spices and herbs. Impressively seamless wine with excellent energy. The sauvignon and semillon come mostly from 26-year-old dry-farmed vines in Dry Creek Valley, while the muscadelle is from Napa Valley vines more than 50 years of age. Morlet told me the blend is roughly "an average of the blends of Haut-Brion Blanc and Laville Haut-Brion." **92**

### **2006 Morlet Family Vineyards Chardonnay Ma Douce Sonoma Coast**

(\$70; from the same Sonoma Coast source as Morlet's pinot noir) Full yellow color. Aromas of lemon drop and orange zest complicated by minerals, hazelnut and a whiff of tropical fruits; some oak showing today. Densely packed and soil-driven, with highly concentrated, lightly saline flavors and a chewy texture. There's a wildness to this chardonnay that I find intriguing. Bottled just ten days prior to my visit, and yet this is seriously sappy from day one, not to mention long on the aftertaste. **93**

**2006 Morlet Family Vineyards Chardonnay Coup de Coeur Sonoma Coast**

(\$125) Full medium yellow. Pungent lemon drop, fresh herbs and strong minerality on the nose. Powerfully mineral on the palate, with a dominant flavor of liquid stone and a suggestion of apricot pit. Extremely young, classically dry chardonnay that's less obviously delineated now than the Ma Douce but richer and thicker. Wonderfully subtle and long on the aftertaste. This represents a selection of the best parcels; Morlet told me he looks for seamlessness, personality and potential longevity. **93(+?)**

**2006 Morlet Family Vineyards Pinot Noir Coteaux Nobles Sonoma Coast**

(\$75) Medium red. Sappy, slightly high-toned aromas of kirsch and framboise Then ripe but uncompromisingly dry, with inviting flavors of raspberry and forest floor lifted by subtle spices. Conveys a strong impression of terroir Seamless in the middle, finishing with firm-edged tannins. **92**

**2006 Morlet Family Vineyards Pinot Noir En Famille Sonoma Coast**

(\$85; includes fruit that was crushed by Morlet's children; aging in 500-liter puncheons) Medium red. Less fruity and high-toned on the nose than the Coteaux Nobles, but with good purity to its reticent flavors of raspberry, cherry and graphite. Rich in the mouth, with the red fruit flavors complicated by a sweet suggestion of blond tobacco. Ultimately rounder, thicker and more concentrated than the Coteaux Nobles, and sweeter on the finish. But this also has more grip and really fills the retronasal passage with perfume. **93**

**2006 Morlet Family Vineyards Pinot Noir Joli Coeur Sonoma Coast**

(\$95) Deep red. Brooding aromas of dark cherry, raspberry, spices, menthol, graphite, minerals and wild underbrush, all lifted by a floral topnote. Wonderfully sweet yet at the same time light on its feet: this saturates the entire palate without giving any impression of weight. There's a captivating wildness to the wine's very intense raspberry and griotte cherry flavors. Finishes with extremely fine tannins and palate-staining perfume. A great example of Sonoma Coast pinot noir that reminded me of a Musigny. This cuvee represents a selection of a few rows at the center of the block, where the berries and clusters are smaller. **95**

**2006 Morlet Family Vineyards Syrah Bouquet Garni Bennett Valley**

(\$85) Good full, deep ruby-red. Explosive nose offers crushed raspberry, bacon fat, mocha, menthol, bay leaf, flowers and spiced meat. Sweet and lush on entry, then wonderfully intense in the middle palate, offering a superb combination of lift and underlying spine. As ripe as this is, there's a distinctly dry, youthful character to the finish, which features substantial dusty tannins. Made from 11-year-old vines cropped at about two tons per acre, according to Morlet. **93**

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