

Morlet Family Vineyards

By Stephen Tanzer

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California wine lovers who missed out on Luc Morlet's superb set of releases under his own label last year will be happy to know that there's a bit more wine this time around, with Morlet's first set of cabernets on the horizon. Most of Morlet's superb chardonnays and pinots come from what he describes as a "true Sonoma Coast vineyard" above the fog line on the second ridge in from the ocean. "I thought this cool site would make leaner-style wines, but they're a bit richer than I would have predicted," said Morlet, who noted that it was necessary to pick around four different rainy spells in October of 2007. Morlet works with natural yeasts and bottles his wines without fining or filtration.

2007 Morlet Family Vineyards Chardonnay Ma Douce Sonoma Coast

(\$70) Full medium yellow. Leesy aromas of lemon oil, honey, smoke and hazelnut. Plump, round and deep, with subtly complex flavors of peach, flowers and butter firmed by iodiney minerality. Rich and seamless, but given definition by harmonious ripe acidity. **93**

2007 Morlet Family Vineyards Chardonnay Ma Princesse Russian River Valley

(\$85) Bright yellow with a golden tinge. Toasty aromas of orange peel, minerals and hazelnut; conveys an impression of stronger acidity than the Ma Douce. Then tighter and drier in the mouth, with a strong sensation of dry extract and a gripping finish that's just this side of phenolic. Intriguing suggestions of lemon, minerals and fresh herbs. I'd give this a year before pulling the cork. From an old Wente clone growing on volcanic Goldridge soil. **92(+?)**

2007 Morlet Family Vineyards Chardonnay Coup de Coeur Sonoma Coast

(\$125; a selection of "the most seamless and structured barrels" from Morlet's Sonoma Coast source) Bright yellow. The most complex of these chardonnays on the nose, combining lemon oil, ripe stone fruits, hazelnut, minerals and coconutty oak. Ripe and firmly built, offering a superb combination of richness and definition. Mineral and saline elements contribute to a strong impression of site specificity. Finishes very long and perfumed. **94**

2007 Morlet Family Vineyards La Proportion Doree Sonoma County

(\$60; a blend of 64% semillon, 34% sauvignon blanc and 2% muscadelle) Bright medium yellow. Knockout nose combines lemon zest and oil, licorice, lichee, honey and lanolin, with a floral honey-suckle quality emerging with air. Lush and sweet but firmly built, with terrific energy to the citrus oil and orange blossom flavors. As dry as this is, its richness gives it an almost sweet impression. Wonderfully seamless and fascinating white blend with a youthful, almost tannic finish. This will take on deeper apricot and quince flavors with bottle aging. The semillon used for this blend comes from 35- and 50-year-old plantings, according to Morlet. **94**

2007 Morlet Family Vineyards Pinot Noir Coteaux Nobles Sonoma Coast

(\$75) Good medium red. Crushed black cherry and spices on the nose, with a violet florality emerging with aeration. Broad, concentrated and deep, with lovely lift to the framboise, black tea and forest floor flavors. This very seamless pinot noir grew even richer with air, without losing its shape. Finishes very long, spicy and aromatic, with suave tannins. Time in bottle should bring even more complexity. From the same vineyard as the Ma Douce chardonnay. **93**

2007 Morlet Family Vineyards Pinot Noir En Famille Sonoma Coast

(\$85) Good red-ruby color. Wilder aromas of black plum, raspberry, sandalwood and steak tartare. Densely packed but uncompromisingly dry, with a round middle currently dominated by firm structure. Flavors of black and red cherry are complicated by nuances of earth and leather. Less open to inspection than the Coteaux Nobles but finishes with even more grip. **93(+?)**

2007 Morlet Family Vineyards Pinot Noir Joli Coeur Sonoma Coast

(\$95) Saturated red-ruby color. Pungently mineral aromas of dark cherry and graphite. Rich, broad and dry, with firm underlying structure giving shape to the plush flavors of dark berries, black tea and graphite. Finishes with firm, dusty tannins, a distinctly silky impression and terrific lift. The tiny clusters and berries produced in the heart of this Sonoma Coast vineyard produced barely two tons per acre of fruit in 2007. Wonderfully deep and soil-inflected California pinot. **95**

2007 Morlet Family Vineyards Syrah Bouquet Garni Bennett Valley

(\$85) Good bright ruby color. Black raspberry and smoked meat aromas lifted by minerals, white pepper and flowers. Intensely flavored and vibrant, with terrific clarity and class to its complex flavors of dark berries, black cherry, flowers, spices and tobacco; there's something almost pinot-like to this syrah's juicy berry character. Winemaker Morlet has really captured the freshness of the syrah fruit. Finishes very long, with firm tannins and excellent grip and spicy lift. Give this time in a decanter or hold it for two or three years. This fruit comes from a warm spot in a cool valley. **94**

2007 Morlet Family Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon Passionnement Oakville

(\$225; a selection of Morlet's best barrels) Good full red-ruby. Aromatic nose combines blackcurrant, loam and black tea. Ripe, rich and dry, with a seamless texture to the flavors of dark berries, licorice, cedar and blond tobacco. There's a juicy, gentle quality to the middle palate. The long, perfumed finish features smooth, sweet, building tannins and an almost candied suggestion of quince paste. This represents a blend of fruit from To-Kalon and another Oakville Bench source, plus Knights Valley. **92-94**

2007 Morlet Family Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon Coeur de Vallee Beckstoffer To-Kalon Vineyard Oakville

(\$175; a 76/24 blend of cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc) Good full ruby-red. Very ripe cassis, violet and tobacco leaf aromas; darker and deeper in character than the Passionnement. Then plush, seamless and deep in the middle palate, with impressively concentrated flavors of black cherry, liqueur de cassis, black olive and minerals. Finishes with firm but fine-grained tannins that are perfectly supported by the wine's fat. Very impressive. This and the Passionnement were in contact with their skins for almost two months, while maceration time for Mon Chevalier was 30 days. **93-95**

2007 Morlet Family Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon Mon Chevalier Knights Valley

(\$155; blended with 6% cabernet franc, 2% merlot, and 1% each petit verdot and malbec) Saturated full ruby. Blackcurrant, black plum syrup, smoke and rocky, flinty minerality on the nose. Sweet on entry, then firmer in the middle, with complex flavors of plum, blueberry, licorice, lavender and cedar. The substantial tannins arrive late, giving this potentially long-aging wine a chance to express itself. Finishes with captivating hints of licorice and lavender. Morlet worked with Knights Valley cabernet during his years as winemaker for Peter Michael, but his own version comes across as a bit less austere than the Peter Michael cabernet. **92-94**
