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SPECIAL ISSUE

Robb Report

JUNE 2010

RobbReport.com

BEST OF THE BEST



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Best of the Best Domestic White Wines



Morlet Family Vineyards 2007 Chardonnay Coup de Coeur

A Chardonnay sans couture.

ONLY A TRULY significant passion could compel one to leave behind an illustrious family legacy to strike out on one's own, as Luc Morlet realized in 1996, when he left his home in Avenay-Val-d'Or, where his paternal great-grandfather, Gaston, had established the prestigious Champagne house Pierre Morlet & Fils. His reasons, however, were the best possible: He relocated to Northern California to be with (and, soon after, marry) his American girlfriend, Jodie. He quickly set about adapting the practices he had learned in France to the conditions he found in the vineyards of Sonoma and Napa counties, where he served as winemaker to such esteemed producers as Newton Vineyard, Peter Michael Winery, and Staglin Family Vineyard. Despite these enviable positions, however, Morlet and his new wife continued to dream of creating their own label together. "I'm somebody who really cherishes freedom and loves it," says Morlet. "When you craft wines for other wineries, there's a sense of style that's in place that you have to respect. But in creating your own brand, you can craft the wines in exactly the way you feel, with no strings attached."

The couple fulfilled their ambition in 2006, when they began producing small quantities of wine under their own name. Morlet describes his style as neoclassic and non-interventionist, similar to that of Peter Michael Winery. "The difference," he says, "is that I get to work with some other vineyards that I love and appellations that I believe are among the best. And I can go a little further in taking risks, because it's my own. So I'm pushing the envelope."

Morlet makes wines from Bordeaux-style varietals, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc, and Sémillon, but his youth in Champagne instilled in him a particular love of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay—an affection deliciously evinced in his 2007 Chardonnay Coup de Coeur Sonoma County (\$125). While Morlet's Ma Princesse Chardonnay from the Russian River Valley and Ma Douce Chardonnay from the Sonoma coast are vineyard-designated wines, Coup de Coeur is a special cuvée blended from the very best individual barrels of the vintage. "One of the things I have in mind when I blend wines is harmony," he says. "It's a symphony of diverse individual flavors. The wine is rich and full of personality, but all of the pieces hold together. We call it *sans couture*—seamless."

Flawlessly integrated yet also complex, the 2007 Coup de Coeur layers aromas and flavors of yellow plum, pear, lemon zest, lime, and fig over a foundation of deep mineral. "A great wine," notes Morlet, "should not be too mineral, too monolithic. Rather, it should be like a Gothic building: It should have strength, but you should still be able to see the details, the tracery." —BRETT ANDERSON

Morlet Family Vineyards, 707.967.8690, www.morletwines.com



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Coup de Coeur Sonoma County*