

Domestic Red Wines



PETER MICHAEL LES PAVOTS 2001

A seductively narcotic Cabernet blend from the mountains of Sonoma.

One is left to wonder whether Lady Margaret Michael, when she dubbed the stark, steep slope beneath Mount St. Helena in Sonoma County's Knights Valley "Les Pavots," had in mind *le pavot des jardins* or *le pavot somnifère*. Sir Peter Michael's staff will tell you, if you visit the winery and Sugarloaf Ranch, that his wife's inspiration for naming the vineyard was the flame orange wild poppy, California's state flower, a stylized rendering of which delicately accents Peter Michael Winery's otherwise austere labels. But at least one enthusiast of this esteemed producer, who phoned the winery to congratulate the staff on the latest release, appreciates the subtle implication: "It's my opium," she said.

Indeed, this Cabernet blend induces in many of its devotees a narcotic state of sensory pleasure and mental ecstasy—this, and its relatively small production of less than 2,000 cases, makes it a prize more valuable and tirelessly sought after than was the extract of the *Papaver somniferum* in 19th-century Shanghai. In fact, a succession of supremely talented winemakers (including Helen Turley, Mark Aubert, and, now, Luc Morlet) has refined the overall quality of all Peter Michael releases—including the mouthwatering l'Après-Midi Sauvignon Blanc and the succulent Le Moulin Rouge Pinot—to a sublime standard that sets the winery apart as

one of the very few to achieve first-growth quality across all of the varieties in its portfolio. But then, Sir Peter is a sort of Renaissance man, whose interests range from technology to the arts. He founded not only United Engineering Industries, which pioneered

became convinced that the conditions on this property—its austere, rocky soil, morning sunlight, and cool Pacific breezes—formed the perfect *terroir* for making California wines with the same elegance and sense of place as those of great châteaux of France.



The Les Pavots Vineyard's 1,200-foot elevation and exposure results in a much longer ripening cycle—often two to three weeks longer than those of vineyards on the valley floor. This gentler ripening yields greater flavor in the finished wine. Although the 2001 vintage began with a spring frost, a sunny September and October coaxed the berries to a near-perfect balance of sugars and flavor. Consisting of 72 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 16 percent Merlot, 10 percent Cabernet Franc, and 2 percent Petit Verdot, this deep indigo elixir exhibits a full-bodied, silky texture that glazes the glass enticingly. Its bouquet exudes a brooding blueberry and lilting lavender, as well

as roasted coffee. The tannins are powerful yet soft, and the extended finish smolders with smoked ham, tobacco, and a note of pencil lead, punctuating this diverse blend with a virtuosity and complexity to match those of Sir Peter himself.

new digital technologies for broadcast television, but also Classic FM, the world's largest commercial FM radio station. Time spent in France with his father during his youth inspired his love of fine wine, and he always had planned to buy a vineyard in either Burgundy or Bordeaux. This plan took a westerly turn when, on a business trip to the San Francisco Bay Area, he discovered Knights Valley. He

—BRETT ANDERSON

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