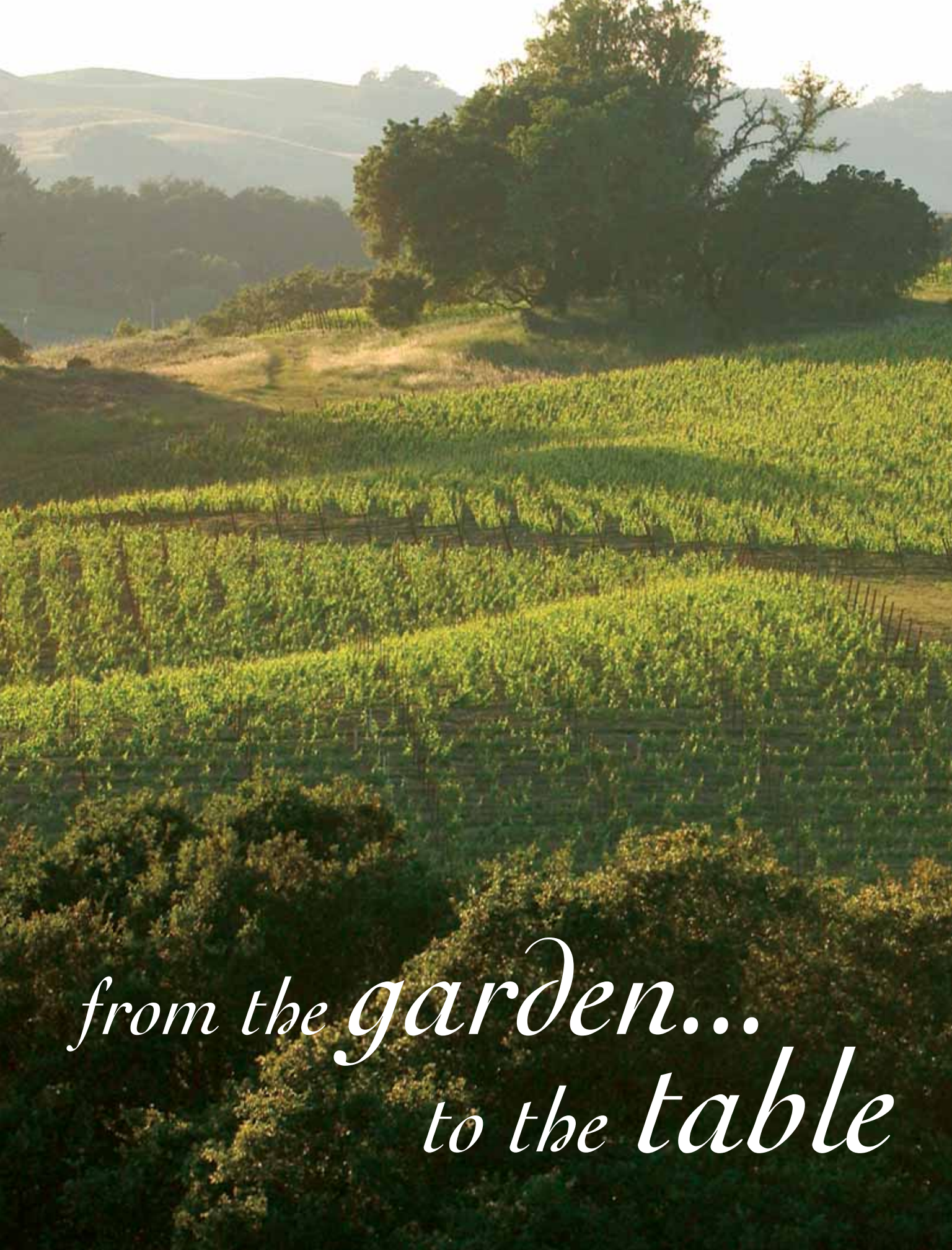




**Chalk Hill Estate's
Culinary Tour Beautifully
Showcases Great Food and Wine**

*Written by Robyn Roehm Cannon
Photography by Chalk Hill*



from the garden...
to the table



NEARLY EVERY AUTUMN FOR THE PAST DOZEN YEARS, I've been drawn like a moth to a flame to Napa and Sonoma Valleys during harvest. What could be better than spending leisurely sunny days tasting excellent wines on pristinely manicured estates while viewing acre upon acre of rolling hillside vineyards?

Hospitality overflows in a genuinely engaging way throughout this diverse region. But the October afternoon my husband and I set foot onto Chalk Hill Estate for their Culinary Tour, the bar was forever raised. We were shown Wine Country hospitality at its finest.

Malbec, Petit Verdot, Carménère, Syrah, and Semillon are also produced on the estate.

Executive Chef Didier Ageorges' two-and-a-half-hour Culinary Tour is by far the best way to fully enjoy all Chalk Hill has to offer. This intimate, elegant, yet very relaxed tasting experience takes place at 2:30 PM on Mondays and Fridays of each week and is offered by appointment only. If you go, don't eat lunch and be prepared to settle in for an afternoon journey that captures the essence of Wine Country horticulture, cuisine, and scenery.

Chef Didier Ageorges was born near Paris and grew up in

“Be prepared to settle in for an afternoon journey that captures

In 1972, San Francisco attorney Fred Furth founded Chalk Hill Estate Vineyards and Winery to replicate great estates he'd admired throughout Europe. He has succeeded beautifully. Today, his 1,200-acre compound outside Healdsburg in Sonoma County has the intimate European character he envisioned 36 years ago, and his wines have gained international stature and respect.

In addition to 350 acres under vineyard cultivation, Furth maintains his private residence and gardens, the winery, a hospitality center, a culinary garden, a world-class equestrian pavilion and stables, sports fields, fishing and swimming ponds, guest houses, and a native park, all in a magnificent setting.

Under the direction of Winemaker Steven Leveque, the winery bottles 70,000 cases annually, consistently winning a coveted place on *Wine Spectator's* “Top 100 List” for its handcrafted and unfiltered Estate Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot,

Burgundy, so from the very earliest age, he was exposed to the relationship between great wine and food. After entering culinary school at the age of 15, he worked in kitchens on three continents before the age of 20. Returning to France in the 1980s, he cooked first in Paris, then for the glamorous film crowd of Cannes, and then for ten years in Biarritz, where he perfected a style he calls “Cooking of the Sun,” a blend of Mediterranean, Basque, and Cote d'Azur cuisines.

Ageorges immigrated to the United States just after the millennium, landing at The Ritz Carlton[®], San Francisco as executive sous chef for two years. But after an introduction to Fred Furth, he was wooed into the kitchen at Chalk Hill, and it is here that he has found his “heaven,” he says. Ageorges has been given free rein by Furth to express a culinary statement that is as lively and diverse as the wines at the Estate—and he is masterfully up to the task.

The Culinary Tour began as Neil, our host for the afternoon,



warmly greeted guests with a glass of Sauvignon Blanc. When all eight had assembled and been introduced, we were given a brief “windshield” tour of the vineyards and an overview of the property. Then, a stop at the 1-acre Culinary Garden, where a bounty of antique specimens and heirloom cultivars is grown under the strictest organic-farming principles.

A brood of free-range hens provides eggs and keeps slugs at bay, while beehives assist with pollination and produce a proprietary honey for the Estate. Utopia, indeed! That afternoon, our group tasted more than 20 varieties of tomatoes off the vine, along with other produce that was

produce, magically transformed by classical French technique. But this was not contrived, overly fancy food. Whatever the season, Ageorges presents complex yet clean and sparkling tastes that showcase the wine to great advantage, creating a perfect, soulful marriage of food and wine. That day, pan-seared day boat scallops, with chioggia beets, chanterelle crisp, and beet and black truffle vinaigrette were paired with a 2005 North Slope Pinot Gris. Phyllo-wrapped “spear” fish, Japanese mushroom fricassee, and vanilla parsnip puree highlighted the Estate Bottled Chardonnay, and a sweet Thai-style

the essence of Wine Country horticulture, cuisine, and scenery.”

harvested just moments before. If you’ve never tasted an organic carrot straight from the earth (washed clean in a bucket, of course!), it’s a life-changing revelation.

Next, we were escorted to the Grand Pavilion, which commands breathtaking panoramic views of Chalk Hill Valley. Inside, a graciously appointed dining room overlooks Furth’s magnificent equestrian arena—the largest in North America, constructed over a three-year period of massive Alaskan Golden Cedar beams. Although Equestrian Director Erika Jansson was not riding one of the Estate’s eight European warm-blood horses that afternoon, she often performs formal dressage presentations for wine club events and other special dinners throughout the year.

Our table was perfectly set with linen, crystal, and flatware that spoke of heirloom quality. As each course was introduced, a different Estate wine was poured to match Chef Ageorges’ exciting interpretation of freshly harvested

rib roast with quince paste was served with an outstanding 2003 Estate Merlot.

After our third course, Chef Ageorges came out of his kitchen—charming in his crisp white chef’s coat. We were instantly enamoured with his contagious enthusiasm for our experience at Chalk Hill. “I love to create unforgettable food memories for people,” he says. “A good chef knows to keep it simple and let the food and wine speak for themselves. Someone once told me that coming here is like eating a wonderful dessert. So, if we can be a delicious dessert, and people want to come back again and again, I’m the happiest guy on earth.”

Speaking of sweets, we finished our afternoon with Estate Cabernet and Chef Ageorges’ luxurious handmade chocolate truffles and found it difficult to leave this beautiful setting. But every day is a new culinary experience at Chalk Hill, and we’ll certainly be returning for more adventures at this talented chef’s table. 