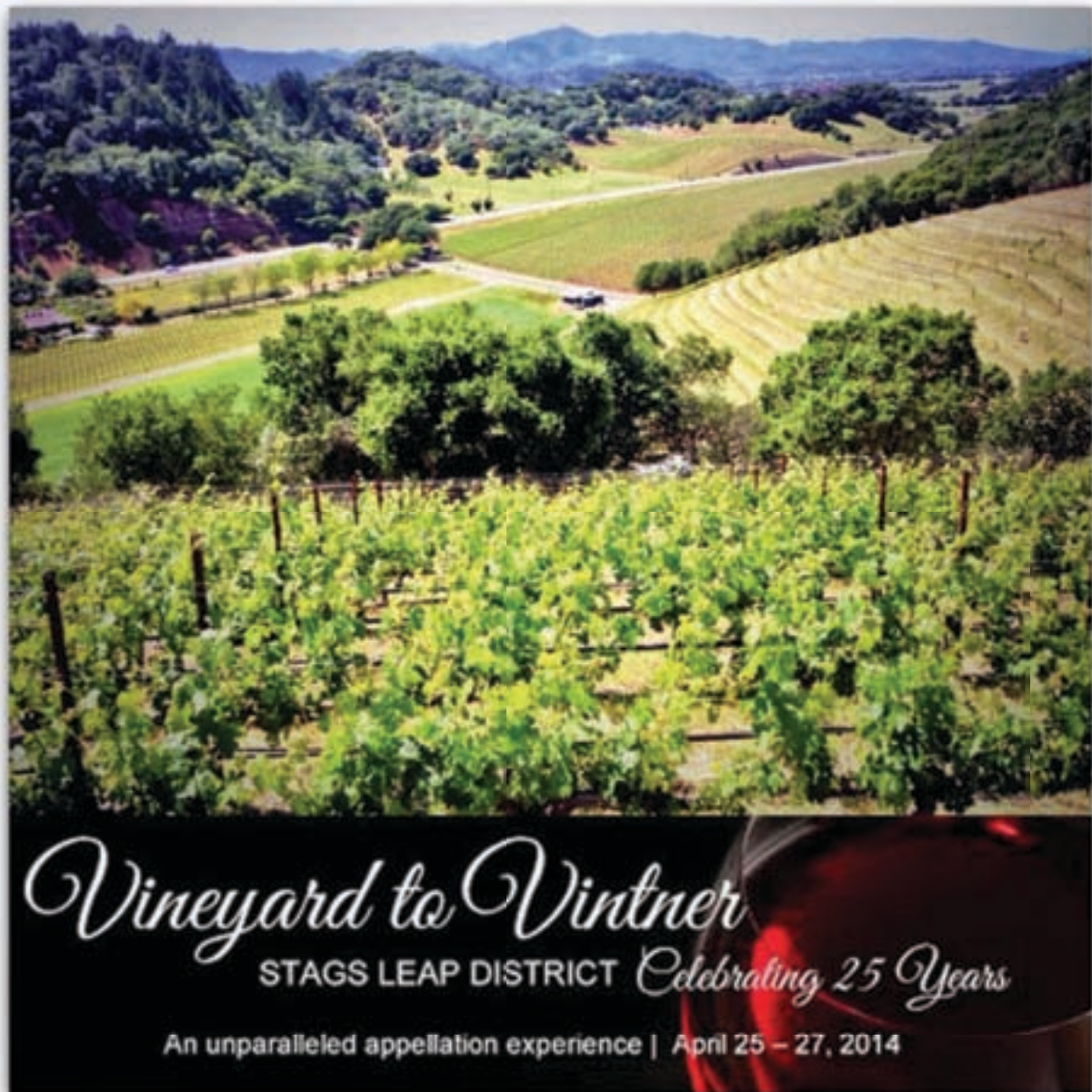


4 weeks ago

V 2 V spells Visitor's Victory



[\[http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-JBdZ1h5BtZk/U2qlxcEprel/AAAAAABUDg/dFbExtBjXXA/s1600/Stags+Leap+District.jpg\]](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-JBdZ1h5BtZk/U2qlxcEprel/AAAAAABUDg/dFbExtBjXXA/s1600/Stags+Leap+District.jpg)

**"You have only so many bottles in your life, never drink a bad one."
---Len Eva**

It's time to uncork another insiders-look, into the world of high-end Food and Wine, an article

written by regular guest contributor; [Ilona Thompson](https://twitter.com/PalateXposure) [https://twitter.com/PalateXposure] She's the Editor in Chief for [Palate Exposure](http://www.palatexposure.com/) [http://www.palatexposure.com/] , a self-described believer in the Sustainability of Critical Thinking and Personal Responsibility. She is also a regular contributor to the [Brenner Brief](http://www.brennerbrief.com/author/ilonathompson/) [http://www.brennerbrief.com/author/ilonathompson/].

[The Stags Leap District \(SLD\)](http://www.stagsleapdistrict.com/) [http://www.stagsleapdistrict.com/] is the smallest appellation in Napa Valley; and, according to [Clos Du Val](http://www.closduval.com/) [http://www.closduval.com/] winemaker, Kristy Melton, the happiest. Happiness is certainly worth celebrating. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why the SLD Winegrowers Association organizes an annual celebration known as Vineyard To Vintner, or "V2V"

Over a three day, food and wine extravaganza, I discovered why this **2700** acre appellation is a such happy place for people and vines alike. Great things clearly come in small packages. To put it in perspective, Bordeaux region has 26000 acres planted and is home to 9000 wineries.

In 1961, one of Napa Valley pioneering grape growers, Nathan Fay, planted 70 acres of Cabernet along the Silverado Trail. Most of the fruit was eventually sold to Joe Heitz, and went into Heitz Fay Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon; which earned the Stags Leap district its sterling reputation for growing high quality fruit. In fact, it was Fay's homemade 1968 Cabernet Sauvignon, served to John Shafer by Joe Heitz, that caused one of the district's most famous vintners to fall in love with Stag's Leap. Someone else also tasted the same wine and made an instant decision to buy the property. His name: Warren Winiarski, founder of Stag's Leap Wine Cellars.

[Stag's Leap Wine Cellars](http://www.cask23.com/) [http://www.cask23.com/] **made history in 1976**, when a blind tasting, that became known as the [Judgment of Paris](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judgment_of_Paris_(wine)), [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judgment_of_Paris_(wine)] catapulted 1973 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Cabernet into international fame by placing first. Another SLD Cab, 1972 Clos Du Val came fourth; well ahead of its French peers.

A confluence of unique soil structure, high daytime temperatures and cool nights (a weather pattern known as diurnal temperature variation) makes this region uniquely optimal in terms for growing fine quality wine grapes. There is something very intimate about SLD, whether it's the folks who populate it and tend to the land (what I refer to as human terroir) or the sheer locale and topography. Once you arrive, you simply don't want to leave.

Stag's Leap District Appellation was formed in 1989. Four years in the making (a lot of credit for which goes to the tireless efforts of John Shafer) it's currently celebrating its **25th** Anniversary. Its nineteen members represent some of the most sought after Napa Valley brands. The vast majority of the area is planted with Bordeaux varietals. The most acreage being Cabernet; and then Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec and Petite Syrah. Some of the district's notable members include Ilsley Family Vineyards, a 60 year grape growing dynasty, Cliff Lede, a relative newcomer whose wines have won over critics and consumers alike, and, of course, the renowned, Shafer Vineyards.



[<http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-BVbidbVArjE/U2qJgB0uEUI/AAAAAABUDY/Mo135I96U3s/s1600/Stags+Leap+Wines.jpg>]

[Viticultrual practices](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viticulture) [\[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viticulture\]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viticulture) in SLD have evolved and changed dramatically over time. Rootstock choices, irrigation regimes and canopy management have undergone drastic changes. These changes result in an extraordinary fruit quality, regardless of vintage. What remains a constant is the heartfelt nature of Stag's Leap that adds the intangible yet ever so powerful element to the wines.

The V2V celebration kicked off the weekend with lavish dinners at iconic wineries. I was privileged to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Stags Leap District at Clos Du Val Winery. Hosted by Hartwell, Ilsley, [Silverado and Terlato Family Vineyards](http://terlatowines.com/brands/california/chimney-rock) [\[http://terlatowines.com/brands/california/chimney-rock\]](http://terlatowines.com/brands/california/chimney-rock), the exquisite, multi-course, wine-paired meal was prepared by Jeffrey Jake, of Silverado Resort. The principals of the host wineries were seated at each of the five tables; a real treat for the attendees. The dinner featured classic cuisine, infused with modern style. Each course was carefully paired with past and present vintages of Stags Leap District Cabernet.

The next day featured a seminar with wine luminaries such as John Shafer (Shafer Vineyards), Richard Stelzner (Stelzner Vineyards), Elizabeth Vianna ([Chimney Rock Winery](http://www.chimneyrock.com/) [\[http://www.chimneyrock.com/\]](http://www.chimneyrock.com/)) and Kirk Grace (Stag's Leap Wine Cellars), who shared their very personal stories of what lead them to produce wines from SLD.

I learned that, in 1972, John Shafer left a successful career in publishing to seek fulfillment in the hills and valleys of Napa Valley. He moved his family west, bought a vineyard and created a brand that became synonymous with stellar, age worthy wines with a deep soul.

An interesting anecdote came from [Dick Steltzner](https://www.steltzner.com/) . He originally bought a property on Diamond Mountain for **\$2K** so he could go duck hunting; only to sell it a few short weeks later for **\$50,000**. The profit became "seed" money for his first SLD acquisition.



[\[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-D7HZjKrEhGg/U2pg30fBQ2I/AAAAAAAAABUDE/MwokYbhY_Ts/s1600/Shافر+Hillside+Select.JPG\]](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-D7HZjKrEhGg/U2pg30fBQ2I/AAAAAAAAABUDE/MwokYbhY_Ts/s1600/Shافر+Hillside+Select.JPG)

[A 1988 Shafer Hillside Cabernet Sauvignon.](#)

[\[http://www.wine-searcher.com/find/shafer+hill+side+select+cab+sauv+stags+leap+district+napa+valley+county+north+coast+california+usa\]](http://www.wine-searcher.com/find/shafer+hill+side+select+cab+sauv+stags+leap+district+napa+valley+county+north+coast+california+usa) one of the wines presented that morning, made my heart race with its exquisite intoxicating perfume. The aromas from this gem made it impossible to concentrate on the seminar. How a 16 year old wine from a really tough year, could have such compelling aromatics is beyond me. All I know is that, for well over an hour, I could not stop smelling it. Given a choice, I would have inhaled those elusive, exotic aromas for five more... or a lifetime.

My other open house adventures included [Cliff Lede Vineyards](http://www.cliffledevineyards.com/) where I was greeted with Mexican chocolate brownies and a food truck which served delicious burgers and scrumptious fried chicken. They offered the opportunity to taste the elegant and compelling 2011 Cliff Lede Poetry, amongst others. Then Lindstrom, where winemaker Celia Welch crafts her beautiful SLD Cabernets, then on to Odette, Hartwell with their stunning Sauvignon Blanc, and fantastic (especially given the challenging vintage) 2011 Estate Cab and finally on to [Malk](http://www.malkfamilyvineyards.com/) and Robinson Family. The atmosphere was casual, relaxed yet very upscale. Unlike a lot of public events it had a sense of casual elegance, heartfelt hospitality and intimacy.

The Vintner to Vintner [\[http://www.stagsleapdistrict.com/v2v.php\]](http://www.stagsleapdistrict.com/v2v.php) **weekend** concluded with an opulent, fiesta buffet-style brunch featuring a live Mariachi band; the delicious meal was prepared and catered by Meadowood Resort. It was held at the outdoor patio of Silverado Vineyards, where vintners and winemakers shared predominantly 2010 reds and a multitude of 2012 and 2013 white wine offerings.

V2V is a small, intimate event that has a very loyal following. It sells out quickly every year. Attendees come from all over the country. In addition to California visitors, I met guests from Arizona, Texas, Florida, who described V2V as their "favorite event of the year." I suggest you plan early and get on [SLD](http://www.stagsleapdistrict.com/) [\[http://www.stagsleapdistrict.com/\]](http://www.stagsleapdistrict.com/) mailing list for the future dates announcements.

Posted by [Bill Eyer](#)