

## Stags Leap founders mark 25th anniversary

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- by Adam Lechmere in Napa Valley

The founding fathers of Stags Leap Wine District, one of the world's greatest Cabernet Sauvignon terroirs, have come together to celebrate the appellation's 25th anniversary.



The smallest and one of the first of Napa Valley's sub-AVAs, three miles from north to south and one mile across, encompassing 1200 acres (486ha) of vineyard, Stags Leap was formally recognised as an American Viticultural Area (AVA) in 1989, after an application process that lasted several years.

The Paris Tasting of 1976, in which Warren Winiarski's 1973 Cabernet Sauvignon triumphed over iconic Bordeaux wines, had already put wines from the district on the world stage.

In celebration of the anniversary, the district's annual Vineyard to Vintner 'open house' event included a special seminar at Shafer Vineyards. The panel included John Shafer and Dick Steltzner, who with Winiarski of Stag's Leap Wine Cellars were the key architects of the appellation.

Wines such as 1977 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Cask 23 Cabernet Sauvignon, 1980 Steltzner and Shafer's Hillside Select 1988, as well as more recent vintages from Pine Ridge, Chimney Rock and Odette were presented.

John Shafer, founder of Shafer Vineyards, told **Decanter.com** it was the burgeoning popularity of the area's Cabernet Sauvignon that made them realise Stags Leap should be a separate AVA.

‘When people talked about Cabernets from this area they would refer to the Stags Leap character. Dick had experienced the same thing, and we saw there is a common thread running through them and realised it deserves to be separate AVA.’

Doug Shafer, president of Shafer Vineyards, said there was never any question that the parameters of the AVA would be purely geographical.

‘There was no discussion about that. It never came up. In terms of varietals, this is America and you can plant anything you want. There's plenty of room for everybody.’

Stressing the point, he referenced such relative newcomers to the AVA as Cliff Lede Vineyards, established in 2001, and Odette, a 2012 addition to the Plumpjack group.

‘When they started, people asked me if I was worried, and I said, “No, it's great, bring it on. They're our neighbours, they've got Stags Leap on the label and they're making really good wine”.’

While Cabernet Sauvignon makes up some 90% of the Stags Leap plantings, other varietals such as Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Zinfandel have a foothold.