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FOOD & DRINK / WINE

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16 of Napa's Stags Leap Wineries Came Together to Make a Special-Edition Cabernet

Fifty years after the production of the wine that put the small AVA on the map, its members offer a collaborative release.

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Stags Leap district, a small American Viticultural Area (AVA) on the east side of Napa Valley, skyrocketed to fame in 1976 when Stag's Leap Wine Cellars 1973 Cabernet Sauvignon took first place among red wines at the Judgment of Paris, beating out, among others, Château Mouton Rothschild 1970 and Château Haut-Brion from the same vintage. Fifty years after the production of the wine that would bring renown to this small AVA—and put Napa Valley on the map—

the 16 wineries of Stags Leap District Winegrowers Association are releasing a limited-edition 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, the first collaboration among its members.

Originally planted in the area in 1961, Cabernet Sauvignon accounts today for more than 80 percent of the grapes grown on Stags Leap's 1,200 acres. With a winemaking history dating back to the late 19th century, the district is said to be named for a nimble stag who frisked across its rugged peaks, giving local hunters the slip. The animal and the region's wineries are memorialized on the new release's label art. "The 16-point-buck label design features the included 16 wineries and evokes the simultaneous power and grace found in our Cabernets," says Nancy Bialek, executive director of the winegrowers association. Each winery aged Cabernet Sauvignon in new French-oak barrels for one year before they were submitted to a group of five winemakers for selection, blending, and further aging, with only four barrels produced as a final wine.

That master blending team was composed of Michael Baldacci of Baldacci Family Vineyards, Robbie Meyer from Malk Family Vineyards, Robert Smith of Quixote Winery, Elizabeth Vianna from Chimney Rock Winery, and Pine Ridge Vineyards' Josh Widaman, all of whom were chosen by their colleagues. Both Stags' Leap Winery and Stag's Leap Wine Cellars took part in the project, as did familiar names such as Clos du Val, Cliff Lede, Silverado, and Shafer vineyards, among others.



The 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon by Stags Leap District Winegrowers Association
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Of course, that level of participation posed a risk: If too many cooks spoil the broth, just imagine the effect of too many winemakers. But Vianna, from Chimney Rock Winery, says it was “a remarkably smooth and delightful process to put the blend together as a team. Not only are we working neighbors, but we’ve all known each other for many years as friends, so it was a fun opportunity to just hang out, bring each of our different perspectives to the table, and work with some extraordinary juice to craft this one-of-a-kind creation.”

“At this level of wine quality, power and richness are a prerequisite, and these were the types of lots that were provided as samples from our member wineries,” says Pine Ridge’s Widaman. “It became evident very early on in the blending process that the most important thing for us to focus on as a team was the tension that exists between the juicy vibrancy of fruit and the concentrated yet polished tannin profile that are both hallmarks of this district.”

A pre-release sample of Stags Leap District Winegrowers 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon offers a heady bouquet of blueberry jam, blackberry, graphite, and purple flowers. It is soft at first, with polished tannins, moderate acidity, and flavors of black cherry, cassis, dark chocolate, orange zest, and violet; a pleasant floral note persists into the smooth finish.

Priced at \$275 per bottle, with three- and six-packs available, pre-offer takes place at the Stags Leap District Winegrowers annual Vineyard to Vintner event at the end of April. Starting October 15, it can be purchased exclusively on the district’s website, with sales ending December 14.