

Robb Report

FOOD & DRINK / WINE

MARCH 23, 2023

9 Outstanding Red Wines From Napa Valley's Storied Stags Leap Region

This region is known for its big fruit flavors merged with polished tannins, bold acidity, and gorgeous touches of spice.

By MIKE DESIMONE AND JEFF JENSSEN

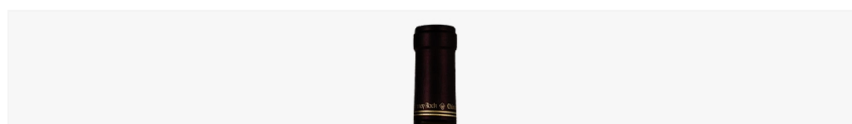


Shafer, Clos du Val, Cliff Lede

Wine grapes were first planted in what is now the Stags Leap District AVA in the 1870s, when Silverado Trail was still plied by farmers on horseback rather than revelers in party limos off to visit their favorite Napa Valley wineries. The first Cabernet Sauvignon was planted here in 1961, and since that time the “valley within a valley,” as it has been called, has become renowned for Cabernet Sauvignon and red blends known for their power and grace.

Bordered to the east by the soaring Stags Leap Palisades and to the west by undulating hills and the Napa River, Stags Leap District is said to be the first to be granted American Viticultural Association status based on the distinctiveness of its soils. A combination of volcanic rock on the hillsides and sedimentary loam and gravel towards the river add a striking level of minerality to many of the wines made here. Sixteen wineries and a handful of growers farm on 1,250 acres here, 90 percent of which are planted with Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and the other red “Bordeaux” varieties. Although this is one of the smallest sub-appellations within Napa Valley, wines made here are famed for their big fruit flavors merged with polished tannins, bold acidity, and gorgeous touches of spice.

Chimney Rock 2019 Tomahawk Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District Napa Valley





Tomahawk Vineyard was planted in 2002 and represents a small grouping of vines at the southern end of Chimney Rock's property that consistently amazes winemakers with the quality of its fruit. The 2019 has aromas of dried Mediterranean herbs, black cherry, creosote, and cassis with a whiff of eucalyptus. The first sip reveals flavors of dark fruits and red cherries with notes of cigar box, tobacco leaf, and mint in the finish. Drink now or through 2029.

Photo : Chimney Rock

Cliff Lede 2018 Poetry Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District Napa Valley



Cliff Lede took ownership of sixty acres of prime Stags Leap vineyards in 2002. His Poetry Vineyard is composed of volcanic soils and fractured shale which impart a strong vein of minerality to this wine. It is inky garnet colored with aromas of purple flowers, rose hips, cassis, pencil shavings, and black raspberry. It is voluptuous on the mid palate with pronounced flavors of dark fruits, graphite, lilac, and balsa wood. It is drinking perfectly right now, but don't be afraid to lay another bottle down and enjoy it again in 10 years.

Photo : Cliff Lede

Clos du Val 2019 Yettalil Stags Leap District Napa Valley



This Stags Leap red blend is made from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, and Malbec. It introduces itself with aromas of black raspberry, black currant, and black plum with lifted scents of pine forest immediately after a rainfall. It is soft on entry, with flavors of ripe black fruits, pencil lead, tobacco, and vanilla. The tannins are pleasantly grippy and there's a nice splash of acidity in the back of the throat.

Photo : Clos du Val

Shafer 2017 Hillside Select Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District Napa Valley



This bottling of the Shafer 2017 Hillside Select represents the winery's 35th vintage of this elegant wine. It has aromas of freshly picked black cherry, rose petals, and mocha and there are flavors of black raspberry, black plum, anise, and freshly ground black pepper with a sturdy tannic structure. It's drinking beautifully right now, but don't hesitate to lay some down or for up to 10 years.

Photo : Shafer

Stag's Leap Wine Cellars 2019 CASK 23 Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District Napa

Valley



Named for the large wooden cask that housed the winery's first single barrel bottling, this 100 percent Cabernet Sauvignon stunner is blended from the estate's S.L.V. and FAY vineyards. It spent 21 months in 100 percent new French oak and has aromas of Earl Grey tea, black licorice, and cassis. In the palate there are flavors of black raspberry, black plum, brown baking spices, and dried sage. It is nicely balanced, the tannins are silky smooth, and there are well-integrated oak flavors in the long-lasting finish.

Photo : Stag's Leap Wine Cellars

Pine Ridge Vineyards 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District



Founded in 1978, Pine Ridge started simply as a small farmhouse winery and today the property boasts four vineyards encompassing 47 acres. All the grapes for this delightful wine come from the estate and were harvested at night to preserve acidity. The wine is deep purple to the eye with aromas of blueberry, black raspberry, and red plum. It has ripe fruit flavors with notes of finely ground black pepper, laurel, and cinnamon in the post palate. The tannins are silky smooth making it suitable to drink now or hold for 15 years.

Photo : Pine Ridge Vineyards

Stags' Leap Winery 2018 The Leap Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District Napa Valley



Stag's Leap Winery was established in 1893 and is one of the oldest estates in the Stags Leap District. The grapes used in the production of this delicious wine are grown on estate vines that average 25 to 30 years of age. The blend is predominantly Cabernet Sauvignon with touches of Petit Verdot and Malbec and the wine is aged in 100 percent French oak (60 percent new) for 20 months. Aromas of black raspberry, cassis, cedar, and pencil lead draw you in to find flavors of black plum, tobacco, and ripe black cherries. Drink now or hold for 15 years or so.

Photo : Stags' Leap Winery

Malk Family Vineyards 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District Napa Valley



Malk Family Vineyards makes small production hand crafted wines on their 11-acre property in the Stags Leap District. In addition, they work hard to maintain balance between flora and fauna on the land and have installed dedicated owl and bat houses to help with pest control. Their 2019 Cab was

aged for 22 months in French oak, 70 percent of which was new. It has aromas of currant, black plum, and cigar box and flavors of rich, ripe black fruits, and dark cocoa powder with pleasantly grippy tannins and a long, long finish. Only 220 cases were made; drink now or over the next 15 years.

Photo : Malk Family Vineyards
