

Robb Report

FOOD & DRINK / WINE

Forget Books, the World's Most Exclusive Library Card Lets You Taste Rare Wine

The Stags Leap District Black Card gives access to hard-to-get Napa vintages.

BY SARA L. SCHNEIDER ON OCTOBER 14, 2019



Bob McClenahan

We all know by now that every black card has its privileges. But it's safe to say that none offers as delicious an experience for wine lovers as the one [Napa's Stags Leap District](#) has just issued. Celebrating 30 years as an AVA (American Viticultural Area) this year, the storied [Cabernet-rich](#) region against the Vaca Range on the valley's east side—legendary for that “iron fist in a velvet glove” wine character—is offering an exclusive taste of its history for the first time, with the [Stags Leap](#)

District Library Wine Black Card.

Exactly 130 Black Cards will be available, for \$130 each. And during the month of November, a card will allow its holder (and three friends) to add a pour of an exceptional older-vintage wine to a tasting or tour at more than 10 Stags Leap wineries, including Chimney Rock Winery, Cliff Lede Vineyards, Pine Ridge Vineyards, Stag's Leap Wine Cellars and Steltzner Vineyards.

For collectors, of course, tasting wines with significant bottle age means far more than just pleasure—it's a chance to find out how a winery's vineyards and winemaking perform over time, to make choices about how to stock the cellar wisely, for terrific drinking in years to come. One of the region's most-respected flag bearers, for instance, Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, will pour its 1991 Fay Cabernet Sauvignon for Library Card holders. The historic Fay Vineyard was planted all the way back in 1961 by Nathan Fay, a pioneer in these parts by any definition. "It was the first planting of Cabernet Sauvignon in what is now the Stags Leap District," says winemaker Marcus Notaro. "Conventional wisdom at the time was that the area was too cool for growing Cabernet." In hindsight, it's clear that conventional wisdom got it very wrong, as evidenced by Stag's Leap Wine Cellars world-wide reputation. The 1991 is only the second vintage the winery bottled strictly from that vineyard. And it's a chance to taste "just how gracefully our Fay Cabernet Sauvignon ages," says Notaro simply.



Fay Vineyard

Courtesy Stags Leap Wine Cellars

Digging into their wine libraries is a chance, too, for the winemakers themselves to track how their vineyard sources and winemaking choices are faring over time. "From a winemaker's perspective," says Mike Smith, winemaker for Steltzner Vineyards, "library wines are a snapshot of the past, a

chance to ‘jog the memory banks’ of the vintage, weather and harvest conditions. I can see how the wine progressed with all those components in mind. You get one shot, one pick, one chance at making the wines each year. The depth of a library is a great way to remember the past, and use it as a tool for the future.”

Michael Beaulac, general manager and winemaker at Pine Ridge Vineyards, likes the snapshot he’s seeing from the 2002 Stags Leap District Cabernet Sauvignon they’ll be pouring in November: “It’s holding up beautifully,” he says, “showing grace, elegance, leather and tobacco.” In lesser regions, “leather and tobacco” might not share description space with “grace and elegance.” But in the Stags Leap District, the best wines make contradictory complexities exciting.

Proceeds from the [Library Wine Black Card](#) will go into the Nathan Fay Graduate Fellowship Fund at the University of California at Davis. Established by the Stags Leap District Winegrowers in 2000, the endowment awards one scholarship each year to a graduate student in the School of Enology and Viticulture.

With fermentations mostly wrapped up and crowds thinning out on the roads, November would be the perfect time to take a deeper dive into [Napa Valley](#)’s Stags Leap District than most folks get to take.