



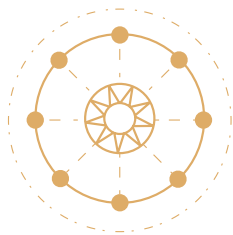
The Occult of the **ROCKY** *Outcropping*



Sommeliers and SLD vintners assemble at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars during The SOMM Journal's SLD SOMM Camp.

**UNCOVERING THE INTIMATE
ALLURE OF THE STAGS LEAP
DISTRICT AT THE REGION'S
FIRST-EVER SOMM CAMP**

*by Tessie Birschbach
photos by Alexander Rubin*



During a rapt moment at *The SOMM Journal's* first-ever Stags Leap District (SLD) SOMM Camp this June, I

found myself glancing down a long table at the pond's edge of **Stag's Leap Wine Cellars** to take in the scene. Plates of barbecued meats and picnic-esque sides emptied as some of the best sommeliers in the country rubbed elbows with the winemakers of the SLD. The winery was a fitting location to debut our multi-day excursion, as any somm worth their salt knows Stag's Leap Wine Cellars is the American winery that won the Cabernet Sauvignon category in the 1976 Judgment of Paris.

After Marcus Notaro, Head Winemaker at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, welcomed the group, he perhaps unwittingly offered a clue as to how this unprecedented upset happened. "I think SLD Cabs are the Goldilocks of Cabernet. Our Fay vineyard has this big perfume note, voluptuous tannins, and a soft, silky personality, but when you open older vintages of Fay, you see that perfume is still there," he said. "That for me as a vintner is very exciting."

The somms sampled this sort of excitement before dinner at a walkaround meet-and-greet tasting, held in the caves



Above, Master Sommelier and SLD SOMM Camp counselor Fred Dame finds "inspo" by the pond at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. At right, Gillian Ballance, MS, and Stag's Leap Winery Winemaker Christophe Paubert pose under the property's famous stag horns.

at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. There they tasted older vintages against the current releases of nearly the entire "valley within a valley," a term used by locals to describe the geographical position of the small SLD AVA—1 mile wide and 3 miles long—nested within Napa Valley. As Notaro promised, the 1995 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Fay Vineyard created a stunning comparison with the 2015 vintage, with its "silky personality" becoming even more luxurious. "As Napa goes, I truly think the best wine is coming out of this region, and this is why I wanted to bring some of the best somms I know to the SLD," said Master Sommelier Fred Dame, who attended as the official *SOMM Journal* camp counselor. "When I started coming to Napa in 1976, it was much different then. The world has changed, but if you listen, you can hear the heartbeat here."

Back at the dinner, the dense and chocolatey yet earthy Quixote 2011 Helmet of Mambrino Petite Sirah unfurled into my glass, creating a striking symmetrical opposition with the barbecue smoke flooding into the sky. The plume revealed a beam of dim sunset light that pointed to the glowing, golden Stags Leap Palisades in the distance.

A few days later on the last night of camp, it would become abundantly clear that those protective, warming rocky outcroppings were a big part of why we were all gathered there in the first place—and perhaps also why the region's eponymous stag might have lived another day. Of

course, the local winemakers and winegrowers had something to do with it all, too: Without these wise shamans, we may have never tasted the alluring alchemy of the SLD.

"THE REST IS HISTORY"

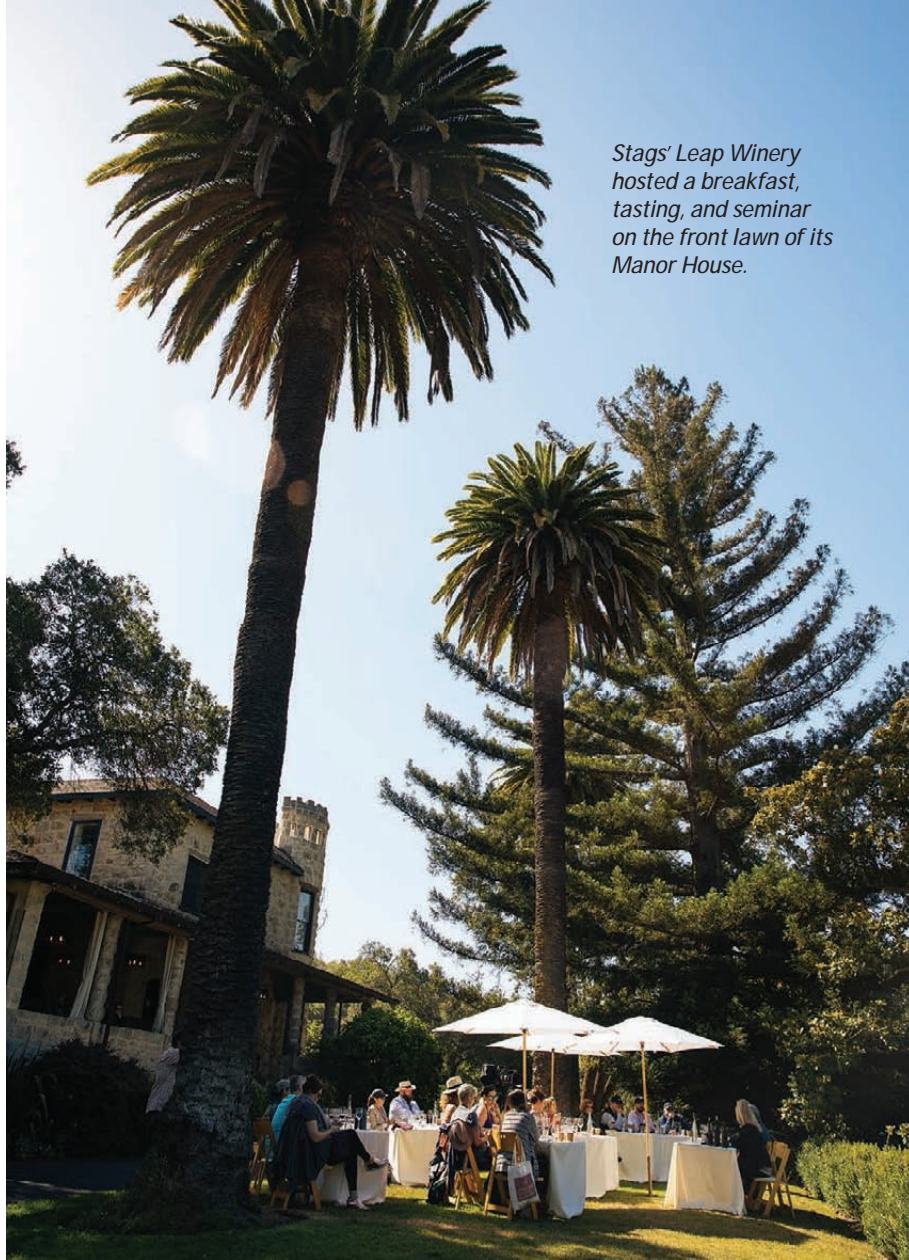
In the mist of the early morning, Master Sommelier Gillian Ballance, who serves as the National Education Manager for Treasury Wine Estates, walked the somms through the great history of **Stags' Leap Winery** while squiring them about its lush grounds. Even without an insightful Master Sommelier acting as a tour guide, relics of the winery's great past can be found everywhere visitors look.

This is particularly true in the castle-esque Manor House, which is filled with sepia-toned pictures of the estate's previous families and their guests dating back to the early 1900s: the Chase family, who built the house and likely the country's first plunge pool; the Grange family and its matriarch, who liked to entertain wealthy San Franciscan elites; and Carl Doumanis's tenure of ownership, which began in the 1970s and ended after the winery was sold to Beringer Vineyards in the late 1990s. "It was then they really started to catapult this winery to the reputation it has today," Ballance said of Beringer. "They built a modern winery, expanded and replanted vineyards, and brought on a fantastic winemaker. The rest is history."



SOMM Journal Publisher Meridith May, Clio Lede Vineyards COO Remi Cohen, and Nancy Bialek, Executive Director for the Stags Leap District Winegrowers Association, at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars.

Stags' Leap Winery hosted a breakfast, tasting, and seminar on the front lawn of its Manor House.



THE MEANING OF OROGRAPHY

Trickling out of the allegedly haunted speakeasy located in the manor's basement, the somms emerged onto a front lawn overlooking Stags' Leap Winery's vineyards. A breakfast and a slew of wines awaited them in advance of a seminar aptly titled "Drawing the Map—The Creation of the SLD AVA," led by a panel which included Ballance, Stags' Leap Winery Winemaker Christophe Paubert, and attorney and author Richard Mendelson.

Before diving into the story behind the appellation's formation, Paubert had something to say about style. "I'm from Bordeaux and I make French-style wine in Napa, but that doesn't mean I'm making French copies—I'm just showing the fruit,

the soil," he explained. "Yes, the approach is more restrained—less oak, less ripe—but my goal is to really show the beauty of the fruit that is growing here." After a review of the stunning Stags' Leap Winery lineup, Paubert passed the baton to Mendelson, the self-appointed "appellation junkie."

The tale of the brave and desperate stag—which, according to Native American legend, chose to leap into uncertainty over the Palisades rather than face a guaranteed demise—presents a familiar and symbolic means to remember the region. "If you look at the maps on which the AVA boundaries are demarcated based on [United States Geological Survey] topographic maps, the term 'Stags Leap' appears on the Palisades behind us," Mendelson says of the name-selection process

in the late 1980s. (As to how the Palisades came to be called Stags Leap beyond the fable of the titular animal, an early settler named William Staggs and the term "leap," which refers to a place name in American and British slang, could have played a role.)

It seems the great effort put into naming the SLD AVA, officially established in 1989, was only rivaled by the significant challenge of creating its boundaries. "I learned a new word in the field of geomorphology that I think perfectly captures what happens in this area and what makes SLD so unique," said Mendelson. "The word is 'orography,' which refers to a series of hills and mountains that essentially, in this case, form a funnel which has immediate effects on the vinicultural characteristics of the area."

Mendelson went on to mention other geologic characteristics like the warming Palisades and the diversity of the SLD soil profile, which both influence the textural profile of the wines. He also gave some background on the friendly rivalry and "name battle" between Stags' Leap Winery and Stag's Leap Wine Cellars (note the



Richard Mendelson displays the 1985 Accord produced by Stag's Leap Wine Cellars and Stags' Leap Winery, a symbolic bottling made to bury the hatchet in the companies' quarrel over naming rights.

particular placement of their apostrophes), but to gain a true grasp of the region, any somms would benefit from reading Mendelson's book, *Appellation Napa Valley: Building and Protecting an American Treasure*. "What makes an AVA special and what makes the SLD is the people—the terroir, yes, but the people and the steps they take every day to make the best wines possible," Mendelson said.

REASONABLY TALL TALES FROM THE HILLSIDES

In the heat of the afternoon, the somms gratefully sipped on the refreshing **Shafer Vineyards** Albariño as proprietor Doug Shafer waved in the direction of the swaths of hillside vineyards surrounding the modern-looking winery. "It's a box canyon, if you will, and all these fingers are Cabernet," he said.

Standing on the manicured lawn surrounded by the hills, the brazen and hilarious Shafer doled out SLD "folklore" that seemed more like accurate historical accounts by an eyewitness. "You guys woke up and the SLD was all socked in with fog today, right?" Shafer asked the somms. "Then the fog rolls back and this is the breeze we get. My dad [Shafer Vineyards founder John Shafer] lives up on the hill and he's got a pool, so when my kids were little, they'd come down and go swimming in grandpa's pool. We lived in St. Helena at the time, and well, by 5 o'clock, it's too damn cold—St. Helena would be 90 degrees and here it'd be 70!"

Shafer continued to tell personal stories involving characters like Nathan Fay, John Goelet, Bernard Portet, and John Shafer himself, "a Chicago boy who didn't know [expletive] about [expletive]." That boy ended up being one of the first American winegrowers to plant vines in the hills, "up there in the 'upper seven,'" Doug Shafer explained of the hillside vineyards that face the bay. "The first wine he made was a 1978 Cab, so we've basically been making the Hillside Select for 40 years." Today, the Shafer Vineyards Hillside Select is one of Napa's most iconic wines.



Pictured at the back table from left to right at Shafer Winery: Elizabeth Vianna, Winemaker for Chimney Rock Winery; Doug Shafer of Shafer Vineyards; Kirk Grace, Director of Vineyard Operations for Stag's Leap Wine Cellars; and Nancy Bialek, Executive Director for the Stags Leap District Winegrowers Association.

THE "THERE-THERE" OF THE SLD

Over lunch at Shafer Vineyards, **Chimney Rock Winery** Winemaker Elizabeth Vianna and Kirk Grace, Director of Vineyard Operations at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, joined Shafer to talk about what Vianna deemed the SLD "there-there"—what sets it apart in terms of terroir—as a segue into another demonstrative tasting of the ageability of SLD wines. Shafer poked fun at Vianna for using the unconventional term, but the brilliant winemaker proved it to be a viable concept. "I couldn't think of a better place to start the conversation of the 'there-there' than with Stags Leap because the



Doug Shafer, proprietor for Shafer Vineyards, among his vines.



proximity to the Palisades tells the secret, in my humble opinion," Vianna said.

Referencing a detailed handout that included maps, growing degree days, rainfall days, fog patterns, soil series, and bedrock depth, Vianna made a compelling case for the "textural hedonism"—as once described by wine expert and author Karen MacNeil—in SLD Cabernet Sauvignon. "The Palisades [and] that trapping of heat effect . . . give us the ability to have these tannins that are just silky, fleshy, velvety, and perfect," she explained. "You'll see differences in style as you go across SLD, but we all have different proximities to the Palisades that will change what the nature of our fruit is."

Grace, one of the most respected viticulturalists in the district, elaborated on Vianna's concept of the "there-there" as the reflection of the sun caught his silver belt buckle adorned with grapes. "A heaping teaspoon of soil can have up to 4 billion bacteria, 1 million fungi, and about 300,000 algae, and they all combine to create an organic matter in our soils," Grace explained. "One of the unique things about SLD which I've never seen anywhere else is that all of the soils have about 3.5 percent organic matter. Based on soil samples from all over SLD, the one thing they all had in common is that they're not too rich, yet not too nutrient-deficient. It's a Goldilocks zone."

ALL ABOUT THE BASE

After lunch, the somms toured the vineyards of one of the longest-reigning (and loveliest) families in the SLD at **Regusci Winery**. Like his grandfather, who purchased the land in 1932, Jim Regusci is a farmer first and foremost, so naturally the segment of the day, titled "A Farming Primer—Hands-On in the Vineyards," included inspecting a few soil pits and partaking in a bumpy gondola ride. Kelly Maher, Regusci's soil expert, chopped away at the interior wall of the pit while waxing poetic to the somms about getting the right root-stalk species planted in the appropriate soils.

"Everyone always goes to the wine-makers first, and then vineyard managers, but it truly is the 'soil guys' you have to start with," Regusci said. "If the soils aren't right—if Kelly doesn't do what he does so well—what ends up happening is that you don't know you're getting things wrong until ten years down the line. The soils are the most important part of what we do: It's literally the base."

SOMM Campers tour Regusci Winery under the shade of the property's gondola.



CLONE WARS

Toting gift bags full of Regusci farm-grown goodies like spiced walnuts, beef jerky, and fresh strawberries, the somms next headed to **Silverado Vineyards** for an exploration of the SLD's Cabernet Sauvignon clones. Silverado Vineyards President Russ Weis; Dick Steltzner of **Steltzner Vineyards**; Doug Fletcher, Vice President of Winemaking for Terlato Family Vineyards; and Ernie Ilsley of **Ilsley Vineyards** made up the accomplished panel.

"What happens to clones when they adapt specifically to their site, and why?" Weis asked as the seminar began. To help answer his question, the somms tasted through eight clones shared from the winemakers' respective vineyards: FPS 15, FPS 4, Martini, UCD 30, See Selection, CR 09, La Questa, and UCD 30.

Venturing beyond the samples on hand, the discussion also centered around other popular clones used in California, with the Eisele field selection clone being the most well-known in the SLD. Hindering this exploration, however, were



The wise and esteemed clone panel from left to right: Doug Fletcher, Vice President of Winemaking at Terlato; Ernie Ilsley of Ilsley Vineyards; Silverado Vineyards President Russ Weis; and Dick Steltzner of Steltzner Vineyards.

the different oak treatments (among other winemaking methods) applied to each clone; a pure expression of the fruit would have certainly been preferable, but it was interesting to hear the various approaches from each of the seasoned experts nonetheless.

For a review on Silverado Vineyards wines from SOMM Journal Publisher Meridith May, see page 129.



PITCH-PERFECT WINES

As the sun set and lit up the Palisades once more, the SOMM Campers arrived for dinner at the beautiful Dutch architecture-inspired Chimney Rock Winery in the southernmost reaches of the SLD. The group giggled as Vianna mentioned the "single row of Fiano" included in Chimney Rock's 120 acres of grapes, 80 percent of which are planted to Cabernet. "I was an intern here before the Terlato family bought the property, and I can tell you that not much has changed except we have a bit more cash to do things the proper way," Vianna said. "They've really invested in technology and the greening side of things; they built this brand-new winemaker facility, we're Napa Green Certified, 100 percent solar, and we recycle water."



The charismatic winemakers: in the front row, Celia Welch of Lindstrom Wines and Maayan Koschitzky of Quixote Winery, and in back, Michael Beaulac of Pine Ridge Vineyards, Elizabeth Vianna of Chimney Rock Winery, and Robbie Meyer of Malk Family Vineyards.

As the somms migrated into the chandelier-embellished Chimney Rock barrel room for dinner, they were accompanied by a handful of SLD winemakers as entertaining as they are laudable. Joining Vianna was Celia Welch of **Lindstrom Wines**, Robbie Meyer of **Malk Family Vineyards**, Michael Beaulac of **Pine Ridge Vineyards**, and Maayan Koschitzky of **Quixote Winery**, with each winemaker armed with a favorite selection to enjoy with the meal.



Taking advantage of her background in radio, *SOMM Journal* Publisher Meridith May asked each winemaker an atypical question. We learned that Beaulac would be a "helicopter ski guy" if not a winemaker before Welch described her own path to the wine profession. "I really loved writing and I thought I was going to be a journalist, until one day my mother sent me a blurb on how Masters in Journalism start at \$12,000. Even in 1978, that wasn't enough," she recounted. "Later, when somebody



The winery at Chimney Rock is inspired by Dutch architecture.

suggested winemaking, I thought, 'I'm not Italian, I'm not male, I don't fit any of the categories.' But I got into UC Davis, and lo and behold, there were all these really, really cool women taking the classes with me, and I thought, 'OK, here we go arm in arm.' It's been quite a journey."

Perhaps the most endearing part of the dinner came when Meyer revealed that Vianna played piano at his wedding. He then playfully asked her if she was ever in an a capella group, a question to which he already knew the answer, given their close friendship. "I was a Vassar Night Owl and so was Meryl Streep," Vianna said coyly, and her affinity for music was made obvious in her harmoniously blended, pitch-perfect Chimney Rock Omega Point Cabernet.

A MATRIARCHAL ESTATE

Buzzing from an early-morning hot air balloon ride courtesy of Aloft Napa Valley, the somms embarked on the second day of camp with breakfast and a lineup of SLD wines at **Taylor Family Vineyards**. Joining the three generations of Taylors were two more representing **Ilseley Vineyards**, Janice and Kim Ilseley, as well as Carol Lindstrom of Lindstrom Wines.

With decades of experience in the SLD, the Ilseley family has helped other wine legends settle there, from John Shafer to "Bob Mondavi," as Janice jokingly calls him. After spending 20 years in the region, Lindstrom also feels very much like a part of the tribe. "One of the first things I noticed when we moved here is how helpful everyone is in SLD," she said.

Standing proudly alongside her daughter Sandy and granddaughter Danielle, Pat Taylor, the radiant matriarch of Taylor Family Vineyards, shared the story of her and her late husband Jerry's endeavor to make a life in the SLD since 1976. "These ladies are breaking the stereotype by having a matriarchal lineage," said Master of Wine Martin Reyes, who moderated the discussion. "By the time the guys show up and want to get married, they have to join in the family business!" Jests aside, Jerry's presence lives on at the winery and was



SOMM Campers Barbara Wong, Sarah Arceneaux, Rachel Drive Speckan, and Julie Dalton make the crossing to the Abbey Road vineyard block at Cli Lede Vineyards.

especially apparent in the 2005 Taylor Family Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, which is beautiful and dense with cigar-box top notes. "My dad would carry a pouch of tobacco, and now when I drink this, I think of him," Sandy Taylor told the group.



From left to right, Martin Reyes, MW; Kim and Janice Ilseley of Ilseley Vineyards; Carol Lindstrom of Lindstrom Wines; and Sandy, Pat, and Danielle Taylor take in the view from Taylor Family Vineyards.

I'LL TAKE SUSTAINABLE FOR \$200, ALEX

Fleetwood Mac played in the background as the hip and incredibly sharp Remi Cohen, Chief Operating Officer of **Lede Family Wines**, welcomed the crowd in the winery's tasting-room courtyard. Cohen offered a bit of background on how Cliff Lede replanted the estate's vineyards in 2002 under the guidance of David Abreu, a well-known and respected vineyard manager. Abreu's influence is felt just about everywhere on the winery's two properties, "especially in Poetry Vineyard, [with its] very tight spacing and high density. The old selections from some of the best vineyards David farms are some pretty legendary and proprietary clonal material," Cohen said.



Abreu may have made his mark in the vineyards, but Lede's love for art and music is equally apparent here. The vineyard blocks are named after classic rock songs; the "Stairway to Heaven" block, for example, leads up to the Poetry Vineyard and a posh ve-room hotel (the only accommodations in the SLD).

Cohen, joined by Russ Weis of Silverado Vineyards and **Clos Du Val** Director of Operations Jon-Mark Chappellet, challenged the somms to a game of sustainable-centric Jeopardy as they sipped their wines. (Pro tip: Make sure Mastro's sommelier Julie Dalton is on your team. She takes notes.) All three winemakers emphasized the collective approach of protecting the environmental features of the SLD, from the rehabilitation of the Napa River to the efforts focused on balancing vineyards' natural ecosystems through the use of cover crops, preventative powdery mildew techniques, native plant "insectaries," and other methods. Lede Family Wines, for example, is Napa Green-certified, implementing sustainable practices like solar power, water recycling, LED lighting, and steam-cleaning barrels.

Sharing a poll he took of winemakers throughout the SLD, Chappellet revealed that almost all producers there feel they can be described as sustainable. The challenge when using the term "sustain-

able," as Chappellet pointed out, is "that it's poorly defined and poorly regulated." "We have Napa Green, Napa Green Vineyards, and Napa Green Wineries, and those are our local attempt to put some consistency and meaning toward what we mean when we say we are sustainable," he explained. "Those designations actually help a lot—without that, anybody could make that claim."

Before the charming Weis ran down an exhaustive list of Silverado Vineyards' own environmentally focused efforts (its 350 acres are also 100 percent Napa Green-certified) he said the "first thing [he] wanted to say about sustainability here in the SLD is that it's personal." "We can get excited about the technology and the ideas we're embracing, but the reason we're doing that is because we're living in the middle of it," he added. "There's a lot of little families here and their kids are running around in the vineyards."

THE NEW KIDS ON THE INTERGALACTIC BLOCK

Lunch atop a hill in front of Lede Family Wines post-Jeopardy made way for the millennial generation, as the somms were joined by the next generation of SLD proprietors. Alicia Regusci of Regusci Win-

ery, Michael Baldacci of **Baldacci Family Vineyards**, Danielle Taylor Coker of Taylor Family Vineyards, and host Jason Lede of Lede Family Wines shared their respective wines and fresh perspectives regarding their families' estates.

The young royalty of the SLD seemed to accept their destiny with open arms, but none perhaps more eagerly than the outspoken Lede. Growing up with a Bordeaux-loving father, Lede did *not* enjoy the small sips he was allowed, even when it came to the First Growths. But "as cheesy as it sounds," he says, it was his first sip of Poetry that prompted him to fall hopelessly in love. In the years following, Lede would work hard to prove worthy of a position at the family winery, earning an MBA in Canada and spending time at Mollydooker Wines in Australia.

Lede earned a Sales Manager title upon his return, with Cliff Lede—after much coaxing—even allowing him to name his own vineyard block. "I'm a huge Beastie Boys fan, so that little strip over there, that's the 'Intergalactic' block. Hopefully one day soon we can sit around and drink some Intergalactic Cabernet," he told the somms.



Alicia Regusci, Danielle Taylor Coker, Jason Lede, and Michael Baldacci represent the latest generation of family vintners in the SLD.



Winemaker Jeff Owens of Odette Estate strives to widen the drinking window with well-balanced wine.



Natalia Pecherkina, Sommelier at Halls Chophouse in Charleston, SC, accompanies Winemaker Michael Beaulac of Pine Ridge Vineyards as he leads the group through his network of tunnels.

LUCKY STAG: AN SLD ASSESSMENT OF THE 2017 VINTAGE

After lunch, the somms buckled down and spent the next five hours on a “barrel crawl,” during which they visited four different wineries to review the 2017 vintage. The first stop, Quixote Winery, showed wines with a structure as interesting as that of its facility, the only building in the U.S. designed by revered Austrian architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser.

Quixote Assistant Winemaker Robert Smith didn't seem too worried about the effects of last year's rampant wildfires while pouring the 2017 Malbec for one of the somms. “We're pretty happy with the way things turned out considering the fires,” he explained. “We'll be making some quality-centric decisions in the next year, but 85–90 percent of our grapes were in.”

Much of the discussion at Baldacci Family Vineyards centered around its oak program, with a fascinating tasting showcasing various species of French oak and their differences. General Manager Kellie Duckhorn also engaged in a frank discussion with the somms regarding Baldacci's dry Gewürztraminer; while the somms loved it, Duckhorn says it can be a tough variety to sell.

Odette Estate Winemaker Jeff Owens, meanwhile, presented both the 2016 and (unfinished) 2017 vintage of the only two wines offered by the boutique luxury label.

“What we have to offer here in Stags Leap is the ultimate combination of power and finesse,” he said, adding that he felt that the 2017 vintage would be in line with what Odette has produced thus far. “I think if you have ultimate balance you can appreciate a wine now and still might be able to enjoy it 25 years later.”

At the end of the crawl, we followed Michael Beaulac through his maze of cave tunnels at Pine Ridge Vineyards. Past a Dale Chihuly sculpture and through the Cellar 47 lounge to another nondescript tunnel, we came upon samples of the Pine Ridge Vineyards Cabernet and the beloved Pine Ridge Vineyards Fortis Cabernet. “We feature fruit from a few different areas,” Beaulac explained. “The Howell Mountain fruit is amazing and Oakville and Rutherford are great AVAs—and I'm not just saying this because of why you're all here—but to me the Stags Leap is the most compelling fruit that we bring in.”

Being a straightforward kind of guy, Beaulac gave an assessment of the 2017 vintage that was not as optimistic as the others. “Most of us were really fortunate here in Stags Leap, but there's wine out there that will be bottled and it won't be good,” he said. “That's my full disclosure, and I can say that because we had wine that was tainted [from another AVA] and somebody bought it—and we're not the only one. I think the SLD was lucky.”

ENDING WITH A GRAND OPENING

During the next stop at Clos Du Val, President Steven Tamburelli stepped over a four-by-four as he led the large group into a room that would soon become a wine library in the new visitor center, scheduled to open this fall. Guests of the winery will be able to enjoy Clos Du Val treasures dating back to 1972 in neighboring private rooms. (Regarding the ongoing construction process, Tamburelli said they're “using as many sustainable materials as [they] can.”)



Clos Du Val's efforts at expansion have mirrored its recent winemaking renaissance, which was best exemplified in the Clos Du Val Three Graces Red Blend served with dinner later that evening. “Our winemaker has complete license to do whatever the hell he wants to the wine, with no varietal or vineyard restraints,” Tamburelli said. “He's just been tasked to make the best wine he possibly can. This



The SLD SOMM Campers from left to right: Rachel Driver Speckan, formerly the National Wine Director for City Winery Chicago; Jared Sowinski, Director of Wine for The Phoenician in Scottsdale, AZ; Julie Dalton, Sommelier for Mastro's Steakhouse in Houston, TX; Michele Fano, Beverage Manager for Silverado Resort & Spa in Napa, CA; Brandon Boghosian, Wine Director for the University Club in San Diego, CA; Barbara Wong, Beverage Director for The Modern in New York; Marc Borel, Beverage Director for the Rainbow Lodge in Houston, TX; Frankie Villar, Sommelier for Maple & Ash in Chicago; Natalia Pecherkina, Sommelier for Halls Chophouse in Charleston, SC; Wendy Heilmann, Director of Wine & Spirits for Pebble Beach Resort in Pebble Beach, CA; Sarah Arceneaux, Sommelier for Brennan's Restaurant in New Orleans, LA; and Master Sommelier Fred Dame. Not pictured and/or obscured by the other campers are Didier Porteaud, General Manager for Ringside Steakhouse in Portland, OR; Scott Taylor, Beverage Director at Harris' Restaurant in San Francisco, CA; Dennis Wood, Wine Director for Chops Lobster Bar in Atlanta, GA; and Christine Soto, owner of Dead or Alive in Palm Springs, CA.

Guests of honor at the Clos Du Val dinner, from left to right: Richard and Marilyn Mendelson; Russ Weis of Silverado Vineyards; John and Ann Marie Conover of Odette Estate; Armen Khachaturian and Steve Tamburelli of Clos Du Val; Desmond Echavarrie, MS; Allison Steltzner of Steltzner Vineyards; and Shannon Muracchioli of Clos Du Val.

particular 2016 vintage all comes from the SLD: 54% Cab, 45% Cab Franc, and the rest Petit Verdot."

With the passing of each enlightening conversation, meal, or seminar, it became impossible to deny the powerful potential of the SLD. In a somewhat symbolic journey, the campers began their trip at the winery that topped the French in the

Judgment of Paris and ended it with a dinner at the producer that claimed first place in a rematch ten years later. As we all dined and savored the wine pairings, the winemakers and proprietors spoke of stewardship, sustainability, and collaboration with the utmost devotion: Outside, even as the golden Palisades grew dimmer, their warmth was still abundantly felt. **SL**

