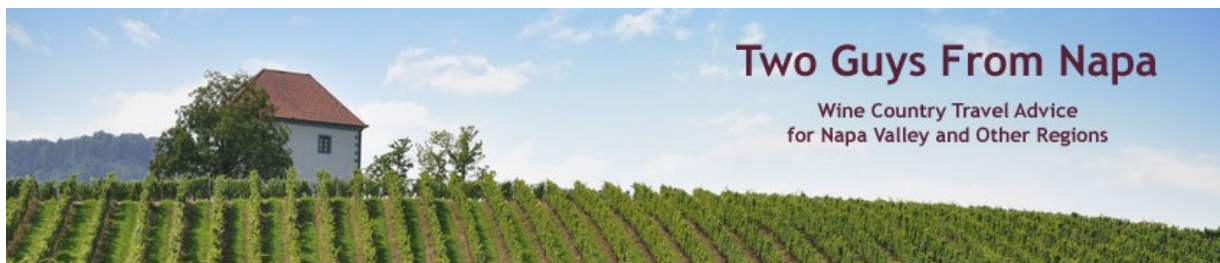


# Two Guys From Napa



## Loving Napa Valley's Stags Leap District: Our Favorite Experiences at Vineyard to Vintner

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May 26, 2015

Last month, we had the immense pleasure of attending the Stags Leap District **Vineyard to Vintner** event, a weekend of intimate opportunities to taste this appellation's world-class Cabernets (and other premium wines) while mingling with the winery owners and winemakers in their historic wineries (and private homes). During our "V2V" travels we were even able to visit some wineries not usually open to the public.

Known worldwide for its Cabernet Sauvignon, the Stags Leap District produces wines critically acclaimed for their lush fruit and soft tannins with complex layers of flavor. The district is bounded on the east by the towering Stags Leap Palisades, to the west by gently rolling hills and the Napa River, to the north by the Yountville Cross Road, and to the south by low-lying flatlands. Today, approximately 90% of the 1,200 acres (of the appellation's entire 2700 acres) are currently planted with Cabernet Sauvignon or other Bordeaux varietals.



*Napa Valley's Stags Leap District*



**The 2015 Vineyard to Vintners** offered Winemaker Dinners, Winery Open Houses, and then a Closing Brunch which provided a comprehensive peek at upcoming Cabernet Sauvignon releases. With only about 500 attendees, the activities felt intimate, attentive and exclusive. Keep reading and we'll tell you about our favorite wines, foods, and views as we learned (*and experienced*) more of this



appellation than we had ever before.

*2011 "The Leap" from  
Stags' Leap Winery, one  
of our favorite wines  
from the weekend*

## Favorite Wineries at the Stags Leap District Vineyard to Vintner

Nineteen wineries participated in the **Vineyard to Vintner** Winery Open Houses on April 25 and no, we didn't even try to visit them all. Of the wineries we were able to visit, these were our favorite destinations (and our favorite experiences while there):

**Baldacci Family Vineyards** – Founded in 2000 by owners Thomas and Brenda Baldacci, this family-owned winery specializes in the production of Cabernet Sauvignons. Michael Baldacci (*one of the couples' four sons*) serves as the Operations Manager and the theme of family (and love for family) is strong here. With 45 acres of estate vineyards now including property in Carneros and Calistoga, their overall portfolio now also encompasses Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer, Pinot Noir and Syrah.

At **Vineyard to Vintner** we thoroughly enjoyed both their **2005** and **2011 SLD Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon**. We also were impressed by the food offerings from **The Q Restaurant and Bar**: Pimento Cheese on Seasoned House Made Crackers and Pulled Pork Sandwiches featuring Cherry Wood Smoked Pork, Citrus Vinaigrette and a Raspberry Reduction made with **Baldacci** 2011 SLD Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon.



*Baldacci Vineyards 2011 Black Label*

*6236 Silverado Trail, Napa (707-944-9261) [Reservations  
Required]*

**Hartwell Vineyards** – Founder Bob Hartwell purchased the estate in 1986 and started his winery with a single acre of Cabernet Sauvignon that was first harvested in 1990. Mr. Hartwell's tradition of quality and style (and respect for old-world winemaking traditions) has now spread to his other wines including two Sauvignon Blancs, a Merlot and several Cabernet Sauvignons (including a dessert wine made from the varietal). Even today the harvested fruit is routed through the winemaking process via gravity and manpower until individual lots of fruit are fermented separately, for up to two years, before the blending process begins under the watchful eyes of winemaker Benoit Touquette.

Our favorite wines here that Saturday were the 2013 Estate Sauvignon Blanc, 2011 Estate Merlot and the 2011 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon.

*5795 Silverado Trail, Napa (707-255-4269) [Reservations Required]*

**Ilsley Vineyards** – The Ilsley family started a vineyard in 1954 and sold most of their fruit for decades to the **Robert Mondavi Winery**. Then, three third-generation siblings (Ernie, David and Janice) and their spouses evolved the family business into a winery in 2000 and their first wine was introduced to the public in 2003.



*Seis Primas Cookies at Ilsley Vineyards*

At **Vineyard to Vintner** we had the pleasure of enjoying their **2006** and **2011 Stags Leap District Cabernet Sauvignons** and pairing them with Beef Sliders with Red Onion Marmalade from Chef Rob Stainer. Unfortunately, the winery had sold out of their **2011 Seis Primas** wine (*named after the six girl cousins in the fourth generation of Ilsleys*) so we weren't able to see for ourselves how it compared to vintages we've enjoyed in the past. Instead, we consoled ourselves with some awesome Seis Primas Cookies.

*6275 Silverado Trail, Napa (707-944-1621)*

*[Wines Primarily Sold Online or Over the Phone]*

**Malk Family Vineyards** – This small producer of hand-crafted wines is headed by owners Brain and Nancy Malk whose goal is to make their Cabernet Sauvignon in a way which showcases the Stags Leap District terroir. Griffin, the couple's late (and beloved) Staffordshire Bull Terrier served as the inspiration for their adorable logo. The Malk Family vineyard lies adjacent to the Fay Vineyard at the base of the Palisades and covers only two acres.

During our visit here, the highlight was Malk's **2011 Cabernet Sauvignon** as we enjoyed the view from an old-fashioned tree



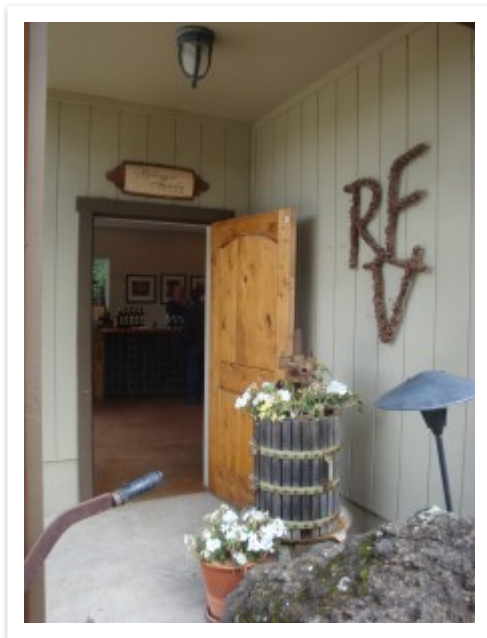
swing. We also appreciated the cheeses and crackers, as well as the strawberries which we overheard came from our favorite stand in the Valley (*west side of Silverado Trail, about 1/2 mile north of Trancas*).

*5850 Silverado Trail, Napa  
(858-795-0699) [Wines Primarily Sold  
Online or Over the Phone]*

**Pine Ridge Vineyards** – Established in 1978, Pine Ridge Vineyards produces classically proportioned, expressive wines that showcase the qualities of their diverse vineyards. Today, Winemaker and General Manager Michael Beaulac oversees the Estate's 200-acres spanning over five Napa Valley appellations (*including the Stags Leap District*). Pine Ridge is part of the **Crimson Wine Group**, a luxury wine company that owns some of the highest quality wine estates in the US such as **Archery Summit** in the Willamette Valley and **Seghesio Family Vineyards** in the Alexander Valley.

Our favorite wines at the Open House were the **2013 Let Petit Clos Chardonnay** and the **2012 SLD Estate Cabernet Sauvignon**. Winery Chef Susan Lassalette prepared delicious small bites to pair with the wines, including Smoked Trout Gougères with Cucumber and Grilled Lamb Skewers with Pistachios.

*5901 Silverado Trail, Napa (800-575-9777) [Open daily]*



**Robinson Family Vineyards** – A close-knit family runs this small boutique winery situated on the 78 acres originally purchased in 1967 by Norman (Bud) Robinson and his wife Helen (Dinky). Today, their daughter Susie Robinson Jinks and her husband Tom Jinks run the day-to-day operations while the next generation (Carrie, Kim and Robin) and their husbands (Joe, JD and Zack) provide support. The tasting area deck is surrounded by large ancient oak trees, lush vineyards and plenty of rock formations for a serene and scenic tasting experience. We also had a lovely view of the District from the Robinson's property.

There were plenty of Robinson family members offering several wines to taste, but our favorites turned out to be their **2011 Cabernet Franc**, **2011 Malbec** and **2011 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon**. We had the pleasure of



*View from Malk Family Vineyards*



*Robinson Family Vineyards*

Cookies.

pairing these with Wood-Fired Pizza slices, and you knew there were Moms around when the rest of the lunch menu included both a Green Salad and Chocolate Chip

*5880 Silverado Trail, Napa (707-944-8004) [Reservations Required]*

**Stags' Leap Winery** – Wine grapes have been growing on the lands of Stags' Leap Estate since the 1880s and the property itself has always been a working ranch. Stags Leap Manor, as it was called in the 1920s, was a fashionable country resort in the Napa Valley at a time when resort and spa business was big. Nowadays, the 240-acre estate houses a nineteenth century stone winery, a Victorian-era manor house and 90 acres of vineyards down a long, private road off of the Silverado Trail.

At Vineyard to Vintner, we enjoyed a variety of wines including their **2013 Viognier**, **2011 Petite Sirah**, **2011 "The Leap" Estate Cabernet Sauvignon** and **2010 Adentia Estate Cabernet Sauvignon**. In front of the manor we happily made the acquaintance of **Napa Valley Crust** offering up tasty Caprese Skewers and a very interesting Pizza with Salami, Meyer Lemon, Fresh Mozzarella, Pesto Sauce and Balsamic Glaze.



*Salami and Meyer Lemon Pizza from Napa Valley Crust*

*6150 Silverado Trail, Napa  
(800-395-2441) [Reservations Required]*

**Steltzner Vineyards** – Since 1965 the Steltzner family has been dedicated to producing wines of exceptional quality in the Stags Leap District. Richard Steltzner established his first SLD vineyard back while he was working in vineyard management and while the former winery building, production facility and some vineyards were sold in 2012, the family retained over 30 acres in the Stags Leap District and continues to produce wines. Today his children (Allison and Justin Steltzner) are helping him continue his legacy, along with longtime family friend and Winemaker Bob Pepi.



Although **Steltzner** no longer has a tasting room at the winery, they hosted visitors at the V2V Open House on their vineyard estate, poolside, overseeing the Pool Block vineyard. As it turned out, our favorite wines included the **2012 Pool Block Cabernet Sauvignon**, as well as their **2012 Martini Clone Cabernet Sauvignon** and the **2012 Stags Leap**



*Steltzner Vineyards overlooking the Pool Block vineyard.*

**District Cabernet Sauvignon.** We were able to enjoy a classic Cabernet-and-Steak pairing here due to the delicious Grilled Skirt Steak with Chimichurri and Smashed Potatoes being served.

*5 Financial Plaza Suite 104, Napa (707-252-7272) [Wines Primarily Sold Online or Over the Phone]*

**Taylor Family Vineyards** – In 1980, Napa Valley residents Jerry and Pat Taylor converted ten acres of the family’s 23-acre ranch to vineyards with the help of their children. In 2002, their daughter Sandy and her husband Phil Carlson were the driving force behind the creation of **Taylor Family Vineyards** as a wine brand and Jerry and Pat’s son Mike is now also a major partner in the endeavor. Currently, the winery produces about 1,000 cases of wine per year and Winemaker Gustavo Brambila has been with the Taylors since the first vintage.

The Taylors are very much into food and wine and the winery’s website includes over two dozen recipes. At the **Vineyard to Vintner** Open House, they offered a selection of outstanding cheeses including Beehive Barely Buzzed, Piave Vecchio, Vella Mezzo Secco, and Brillat Savarin with Truffle. In addition to the cheeses, there were nuts (including Sauvignon Blanc & Lavender Almonds) and a phenomenal spread of savory offerings of which our favorites were:

- Salmon Rilletes
- Strawberry & Goat Cheese Bruschetta
- Pears with Blue Cheese & Prosciutto
- Grilled Shrimp & Watermelon Skewers
- Blue Cheese & Steak Crostini

The spread was all thanks to Chef Lindsey Schmitt and could have easily kept guests entertained for hours. The variety of Taylor Family wines could also keep guests busy for a while and our favorites here were their

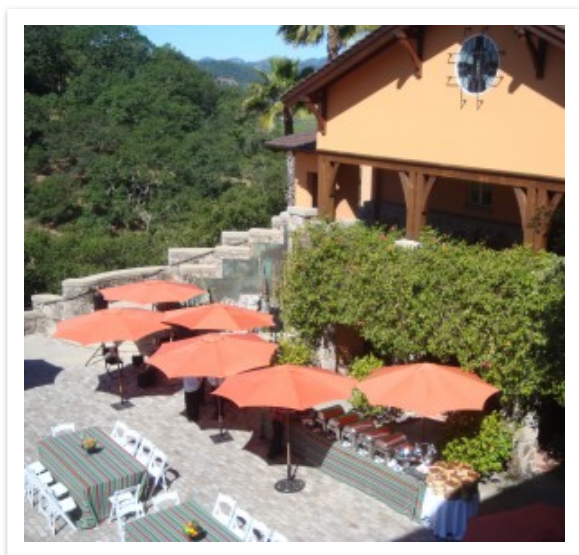
**2012 Hillside Chardonnay, 2012 Rutherford Cabernet Sauvignon and 2011 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon.**



*Small Bites at Taylor Family Vineyards*

*5991 Silverado Trail, Napa (707-255-3593) [Wines Primarily Sold Online or Over the Phone]*

## **Favorite Wines of the 2012 Stags Leap District Appellation Collection**



*Silverado Vineyards Patio*

(accompanied by a selection of Salsas and Cheeses).

A major attraction of the Brunch was a Sneak Preview of the upcoming Cabernet Sauvignon portfolio for the region, the **2012 Stags Leap District Appellation Collection**. Scheduled for official release on October 15, 2015, these wines promise concentrated ripe fruit balanced with bright acidity around a supple, yet intense, structure. 2012 was a glorious weather year for the District with bud break followed by steady spring weather and a long moderate summer.

The Appellation Collection, consisting of one 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon release from all of the Stags Leap District Winegrowers wineries, presents a wonderful opportunity for serious wine enthusiasts as well as for those looking to start a wine cellar. At the Appellation Collection tasting during the Brunch, not all 19 wines were actually available for tasting. Some wineries felt that their 2012 releases still weren't ready for consumption, even as a preview, and we actually appreciated the restraint they demonstrated (*and the lovely wines offered as a substitute*).

Of the wines we were able to try, these are the **2012 Stags Leap District Appellation Collection** selections we were most excited by:

- **Baldacci Family Vineyards** 2012 Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon
- **Chimney Rock Winery** 2012 Ganymeade Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon
- **Clos Du Val** 2012 SLD Estate Cabernet Sauvignon

On April 26, **Silverado Vineyards** hosted an awesome **Vineyard to Vintner Brunch**. All day Saturday at the Open Houses we heard from other people how wonderful the Brunch was and we discovered that for ourselves on Sunday. We enjoyed a selection of cold white and rosé wines before tasting the exceptional brunch fare from Michelin-starred **Meadowood Resort** served on the winery's umbrella-filled plaza.

Typical brunch starters were present such as fresh fruit and pastries including Chocolate Croissants and Raspberry Crunch Muffins. Then, chafing dishes offered Mexican Brunch options such as Tortillas, Scrambled Eggs, Chorizo with Potato Hash, Sauteed Shrimp with Onions and Zucchini, and Braised Beef with Guajillo Chiles



*Vineyard to Vintner Brunch*



*2012 Stags Leap District Appellation Collection*

- **Hartwell Vineyards** 2012 Estate Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon
- **Ilseley Vineyards** 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon
- **Malk Family Vineyards** 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon
- **Pine Ridge Vineyards** 2012 Stags Leap District Cabernet Sauvignon
- **Regusci Winery** 2012 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon
- **Stag's Leap Wine Cellars** 2012 Fay Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon
- **Steltzner Vineyards** 2012 Martini Clone Cabernet Sauvignon

This was our first time actually attending the **Stags Leap District Vineyard to Vintner** weekend, and it truly was an “unparalleled appellation experience.” We enjoyed outstanding wines, delicious food, gracious hosts, and a sneak preview of the appellation’s upcoming releases. If you were able to attend, we’d love to hear about your experiences (and what you think we missed out on the most).

**Stags Leap District Winegrowers** is a non-profit association of 19 wineries and 10 grower members whose mission is to grow the reputation of the appellation and share its quality with the wine-loving world. To learn more about the District, and next year’s **Vineyard to Vintner** (*April 29 – May 1, 2016*) as soon as possible, please follow the link at the start of the paragraph to their website or find them on **Twitter**.

