

Wine Blog

"Juicy Tales by Jo Diaz"

Vineyard to Vintner ~ Celebrating Napa Valley's Stags Leap District ~ Part 1

I received an invitation to attend the Stags Leap Vineyard to Vintner annual event, being kicked off on Friday, April 29, 2016. I knew that this was an honor. It just happened over this past weekend, and I took them up on their offer for Saturday, April 30. It's an event that draws out vintners (winery owners), principals, and winemakers, so I knew that it would be a great way to spend an afternoon in Napa Valley.



BRIEF SEGUE

While at [Shafer Vineyards](#), it was hard not to notice one young couple living the life. They were so elated to be in Napa Valley. (Who isn't, but not everyone is wearing their

hearts on their sleeves, as they were.) Jose and I, plus this young couple, were moving toward the tasting room together. When we realized the views, Jose and I just naturally wandered off to first spend some time taking a lot of images of the that beautiful estate and its view; while the couple also saw the opportunities and took a ton of selfies.

We arrived inside the tasting room ahead of them, and winemaker [Elias Fernandez](#) was pouring Shafer Cabernets. It was my naïveté that I didn't realize Elias is Shafer's winemaker. (I didn't study anything before arriving, because I've been studying everything else for the last 24 years. The wine business is a continually opening lotus, and there's no end to what's inside that blossom.)

Elias Fernandez has been making wine at Shafer Vineyards for more than 30 years. Imagine... I was impressed with how much he knew, so when I later learned that he's the winemaker, it all made sense. As Elias and I were speaking with each other, I looked to my right and saw Doug Shafer. I really wasn't expecting to see him, but then... repeating from above... It's an event that draws out vintners (winery owners), principals, and winemakers.

As I was beginning to be curious to speak with him, and Elias had nodded for me to do so, up popped the chic, young couple. There was no way I was going to compete with that, so I let it unfold and listened.

Young man, "You're pouring your own wine!?"

With a smile... Doug Shafer, "Why wouldn't I be pouring my own wine?"

There is was, reality of the event...



Vineyard to Vintner is Stags Leap's crème de la crème, and we adventured onward... Not one to jam in more wineries that we can absorb, Jose and I knew that we were going to be limited to visiting four locations. We planned accordingly. The listed wineries participating were the following:

Baldacci Family Vineyards	Malk Family Vineyards	Silverado Vineyards
Chimney Rock Winery *	Odette Estate	Stag's Leap Wine Cellars *
Cliff Lede Vineyards	Pine Ridge Vineyards *	Stags' Leap Winery
Clos Du Val	Quixote Winery	Steltzner Vineyards
Hartwell Vineyards	Regusci Winery	Taylor Family Vineyards
Ilsley Vineyards	Robinson Family Vineyards	Terlato Family Vineyards
Lindstrom Wines	Shafer Vineyards *	* Wineries that we visited

For this first time at Vineyard to Vintner, Jose and I decided that we wanted to visit places we had never been, but had a long standing history worth exploring. Another year it could simply be the families which are small, and had opened their homes to visitors, while pouring their own wines. Another year could be returning to places where we had been in the past to see what's new. There's any number of configurations which would work. For this time, it was going to be satisfying our own curiosity of historic locations yet to be explored, and we were well rewarded: [Chimney Rock](#), [Pine Ridge](#), [Shafer Vineyards](#) , and [Stag's Leap Wine Cellars](#).



STAGS LEAP AVA

From provided copy, for anyone not familiar with The Stags Leap District American Viticultural Area (AVA)

[It] is located on the eastern edge of Napa Valley, among the foothills of the Vaca mountain range. Barely one mile wide and three miles long, this tiny region is critically acclaimed for the power and elegance of its Cabernet Sauvignon. Rock palisades to the east capture and focus daytime heat, but also funnel Pacific breezes down the hillsides to cool the vines at night. This distinctive climate and the region's volcanic soils with bale loam overlay, qualified the area for AVA status in 1989.



ANOTHER BRIEF SEGUE

While at Pine Ridge Vineyards, I was speaking with assistant winemaker Mike Conversano. I had just been poured their 2016 Le Petit Clos Chardonnay, and it was delicious. I did notice – went looking for – the amount of alcohol, just out of curiosity. It was 14.5 percent alcohol. I was pretty amazed that a wine with 14.5 percent didn't taste hot; but then, I also knew that a wine – treated correctly – could overcome that "hotness" associated with a higher alcohol, because of the original brix level at which a wine has to be harvested, to be in perfect balance. So, there I was, privately marveling. Jose asked for the retail price, just out of curiosity. It's a \$75 bottle of Chardonnay.

No surprise, we were standing in the Stags Leap district of Napa Valley; a.k.a, the high rent district.

But, here's the reality check, as Napa Valley continues to catch up to Bordeaux' rules and regulation for what grows best where and why...

Mike Conversano was telling me that they were about to be pulling out grapevines, all over their property: Chardonnay, Cabernet Franc, and Malbec, for instance. Why? Because the most expensive grapes in this area are Cabernet Sauvignon, and Pine Ridge is going to become more focused on that variety. Honestly, a wine has to only be 75 percent of the variety to be so labeled Cabernet Sauvignon, for instance. And, it only has to be 85 percent of the district to be labeled from that area. So, the differences can be made up from other varieties and from other areas. This is not to say that any shortcuts will be made in the production of these wines. That would be a ridiculous thing to do, diminishing their quality reputation. It simply means that they

can be even better and offer more Cabernet Sauvignon, in the long run. They're making an investment in their own future, and it should be even more delicious.

More to come from this very special event...

[Jo Diaz](#) on May 2nd, 2016 12:01 am



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