



STAG'S LEAP WINE CELLARS 1990 CASK 23

Stag's Leap Wine Cellars' release of our 1990 Cask 23, (only the tenth in 21 years of production), begins a new era for this proprietary designation.

A blend which for the first time includes grapes from the Fay Vineyard also shows the benefits derived from viticultural practices begun in 1986 in both Fay and S.L.V. estate vineyards.

The use of Fay Vineyard fruit marks the culmination of more than twenty-five years of pioneering and winemaking. The taste of Nathan Fay's homemade 1968 Cabernet led to my search for vineyard in the area. Nathan was the first grape grower to plant Cabernet Sauvignon thirty years ago in what is now the "Stags Leap District" appellation. At that time there were only 700 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon in the entire state of California, and no Cabernet south of Rutherford. (Now, by contrast, there are 34,000 acres of Cabernet in California and 9,800 acres in the Napa Valley.) Nathan's Cabernet Sauvignon was the epitome of what I was looking for in the varietal, and Cask 23 is the peak of that quality which I refer to as the iron fist in the velvet glove.

This stunning wine originates from blocks 4 and 9 in the replanted Fay vineyard, and S.L.V. Blocks 1, 2 and 4. Fay block 4 is composed of primarily loamy soils

while Fay 9 on a slight incline exhibits shallow, gravelly soils. In the replanting, rootstocks and trellising systems were chosen to complement the different soils and to moderate vigorous canopy growth which can translate into undesirable flavors. In S.L.V., canopy retraining results in even ripening and greater consistency of fruit quality. Block 4 is a hillside block, while the other blocks, as in the Fay Vineyard, are richer soils. Hillside fruit in this area of the Napa Valley typically contributes richness and intensity, while the other soils provide voluptuous and fresh fruit characteristics.

Fay Vineyard contributes red berry fruit qualities with forward, voluptuous perfume and lush, silken texture. S.L.V., on the other hand, provides structure, magnitude and black berry flavors - elements more reticent than those from Fay, yet providing more complexity in the wine as it ages.

You will notice an additional velvety accent which is lent by 1% of Merlot in the blend. The beautiful, rich purple color is due to 3% of Petite Verdot which comes from the Fay Vineyard.

In my twenty years of winemaking at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, 1990 as a vintage, is equaled only by 1985, 1978 and 1974. That vintage, the fourth year of drought, was further complicated by rain during bloom which reduced crop size. Instead of adversely effecting the fruit, these conditions contributed to exceptional quality. We received the benefits of the drought without inheriting its problems. Rainfall, while low, was timed perfectly when root activity began. The fruit gained complexity from drought conditions without gaining overly extracted flavors which highly stressed vines typically produce. At the same time, complexity of fruit was additionally augmented by low crop size, and cooler but even temperatures through the summer provided long, even ripening time on the vine. Beautiful, Indian summer days stretched into mid-October allowing us to selectively pick the fruit as ripe flavor development was achieved.

A vibrant boysenberry color introduces this wine. Its fruit characteristics are heightened by an attractive aroma of spicy tea leaf and black plum. The distinctive beauties contributed by each estate vineyard is then realized in flavors enhanced by French oak. A lingering aftertaste leaves one to further savor this wine's dramatic qualities.

The wine was aged for 15 months in new French oak Nevers barrels. Suggested California retail price is \$65.00 per bottle.



Warren Winiarski