

Robb Report

FOR THE LUXURY LIFESTYLE™

FROM THE ROBB CELLAR

Fine wines and spirits worthy of a place in your private collection.

IN CELEBRATION of America's 1776 bicentennial, wine merchant Steven Spurrier matched a group of California wines against the finest châteaux of Bordeaux and the great domaines of Burgundy in a blind taste test in Paris. English and French experts served as judges, applying their refined palates and noses to the task of determining which wines best achieved the precarious balance of color, texture, aroma, taste, and structure. The surprising results set off an inbroglio unknown in the City of Light since the storming of the Bastille. The consensus had been that the panel, being predisposed to Gallic productions, would overwhelmingly prefer the likes of Château Mouton Rothschild, Château Montrose, and Château Haut-Brion to the rustic offerings of Napa Valley. But these three *grands vins* placed second, third, and fourth, respectively, behind Stag's Leap Wine Cellars' 1973 Cabernet Sauvignon, which promptly put the small family winery established by Warren Winiarski, a University of Chicago professor, on the oenophilic map. The vintage that followed heralded another milestone for Winiarski, who, on tasting one of the barrels from a single lot in his S.L.V. vineyard, was so impressed by its beauty and balance that he decided to bottle it on its own. The cask was number 23 in the lineup, and so the wine was named Cask 23. The **Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Cask 23 Cabernet Sauvignon 2003** upholds the label's reputation for power and elegance. Its signature floral nose of sweet violets, wild berries, cedar, and roasted coffee prepares the palate for a silky display of berry, plum, and black cherry fruit, along with delicious chocolate and vanilla flavors. (\$175) www.cask23.com

ANOTHER LANDMARK release comes from Winiarski's Stags Leap District neighbors, the Shafer family, who introduced in March the **Shafer One Point Five 2004**, a Cabernet Sauvignon sourced primarily from the Hillside and Borderline vineyards. Established in 1972, when John Shafer, a former publisher from Chicago, purchased the Hillside Estate, Shafer Vineyards released its first wines six years later. John's son, Doug, joined the venture in 1983. "The family business story you hear most often is the second-generation tale," says John. "We call our story a generation and a half, since Doug and I have worked so closely for so long." One Point Five pays tribute to this father-son relationship not only in its name, but also in its complexity, youthful power, and promise of graceful aging. The 2004 vintage is textbook Stags Leap: a sultry medley of blackberry, chocolate, sage, smoke, and tobacco. (\$65) www.shafervineyards.com

