



ROBERT SINSKEY VINEYARDS

2000 SLD ESTATE

CABERNET SAUVIGNON
STAGS LEAP DISTRICT - NAPA VALLEY

photos by rob sinskey

text by rob sinskey and jeff virnig - edited by eric sothern



The First "Estate" Wine

By Rob Sinskey

It's odd that twenty-two years after planting our first vines, we are releasing our first Estate wine. But consider the spirit of the concept behind and beyond the narrow legal definition of "Estate." We have always been about total control from dirt to the dinner table. Our Carneros wines are, in essence, "Estate" wines. However, in the eyes of the law, only wines produced from grapes grown on vineyards adjacent to the winery where they are crushed are considered "Estate" wines. Since our winery is in the Stags Leap District, not the Carneros, we can not call our Carneros wines "Estate Grown." So, despite the fact that our wines are grown solely on our own

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land, our little four-and-one-half-acre hillside vineyard behind the winery in the Stags Leap District is our only "Estate" vineyard.

So why did it take so long? Our vineyard in the Stags Leap District is small, so in our early grape growing years, we made a proprietary wine from the Stags Leap District using our own grapes and some grapes purchased from two neighboring vineyards. As we became more experienced growers and our obsession with organically grown grapes blossomed, we became less enthused with the grapes we were purchasing. It just didn't seem right to expend so much energy growing the perfect grape only to blend it with others that were not grown with our same high standards of purity.

In vintage 2000 we cut the cord... no more purchased grapes! Thus, our first Estate wine is born.



Vintage Notes by Jeff Veruig

Already the wine pundits have begun to call 2000 vintage wines erratic in quality. I find this odd because I love our 2000 vintage wines. Furthermore, the millennial growing season was remarkable in that it did not pose too many challenges. One anomaly I did notice was that many vineyards developed large green canopies of leaves. This overzealous canopy phenomenon appeared on my radar screen because, under our organic growing model, our canopies don't get that big. Another difference is that within our smaller canopies, the individual leaves are more lime colored than the common dark green I see in conventionally farmed, synthetically fertilized vineyards managed by others.

You would think that large green canopies are good and maybe that is true from an aesthetic point of view. However, vines with large canopies do not typically make the highest quality wine as they require more water to sustain themselves, particularly during erratic weather patterns. A large green canopy diverts the plant's energy to sustain itself instead of directing that energy into grape development and ripening.

My theory as to why many in the California wine world saw inconsistent quality during the 2000 vintage is that we had a triple digit heat spike in June that worked against large vine canopies. Our vines did not suffer from this aberrant weather in the same way as others. Our organically farmed, hillside Stags Leap District Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot performed admirably. Not only did our vines have a smaller canopy to support, our SLD Estate vines have become conditioned to struggle with little or no water as the volcanic strata these vines grow in contain about 60% gravel and, even if we had lots of water on site, the water would just percolate through the soil. Less canopy and less water means that the vine was able to strike a natural balance and had no trouble fully maturing its small yield of less than 2.5 tons to the acre.

Folks from the Stags Leap District like to brag that the reason their wines are so yummy and balanced is that the SLD benefits from "Rutherford days and Carneros nights." This means that we have hot ripening days along with the evening air conditioning effect from the cool maritime influence of the San Pablo Bay. As a result, we can achieve perfect ripeness while preserving natural acidity and an elegant tannin structure. Certainly our 2000 Stags Leap District Cabernet Sauvignon is true to form.

Winemaking Notes By Jeff Veruig

I like my Ronco Rotisserie. It is a simple device that helps me make yummy food. I particularly like the concept of "set it and forget it." This slogan speaks to me. It means that if you work on the quality of your ingredients, heavy-handed technique is unnecessary. Our organically farmed vineyards produce fruit that needs little cellar adornment. The wines we make, unencumbered by heavy winemaking flavors, provide a clear window to their origin and vintage. We picked the Cabernet Sauvignon for this blend on September 24th 2000. I never had to worry about wine color and flavor extraction because the fruit was nutritionally balanced and the grapes had fully developed color. That gave me the freedom to employ the gentle cap irrigator instead of using the brutal pump over method. I only needed to use the irrigator twice a day during fermentation. This wine spent just 13 days fermenting on the skins before it was pressed to a tank to settle for 10 days, then it was racked to exclusively French oak barrels where it aged for 19 months in our caves. The final blend was 92% Cabernet Sauvignon and 8% Merlot.

Tasting Notes

This wine exhibits classic proportions of dark stone fruit and bittersweet chocolate with just a hint of olive and black pepper spice. The flavors carry through to the nicely balanced, rich mouth feel. The use of French oak elevates the flavors and emphasizes the rich impression without becoming the focal point of the wine. The tannins are noticeable, as is befitting a young wine, and they only serve to give notice that this wine will improve as it ages.





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About the photos:

It is only befitting that the photographs accompanying our first "Estate" wine were taken in our home. We believe that the preparation of the meal is a family event and we try to get all involved ... even those who are deemed too young to help. By participating in the meal, children are more likely to try new foods and they develop a greater understanding of where their food comes from. When the meal is served, the girls are served juice in plastic stemware and participate in the evenings toast. It is too easy in the "adult" world to exclude children. This is our way of including them in our family rituals and it gives us one more opportunity to interact with them.

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