

ROBERSON WINE PRESENTS:

CABERNET LEGENDS
OF NAPA VALLEY

THURSDAY MARCH 19TH 2009

CABERNET LEGENDS OF NAPA VALLEY THE ESTATES

CHATEAU MONTELENA CALISTOGA

Montelena is well and truly a member of Napa royalty - this status was assured in 1976 when their Chardonnay triumphed at the 1976 judgement of Paris tasting, beating a host of great white Burgundies to first place. Recent times have seen plenty of upheaval behind the scenes as Michel Reybier of Bordeaux's Cos d'Estournel almost completed the purchase of the estate before the deal fell through due to undisclosed 'complications'. The will-they-sell wont-they-sell saga appears to be over for now, with the Barrett family (owners since the early '70s) redoubling their efforts and commitment to Montelena. Although their modern reputation (internationally, at least) was built on the success of their Chardonnay, Montelena has been recognised locally as one of Napa's best estates since it was founded way back in the 1880s. Despite their local renown it wasn't until the Barrett family came on to the scene and replanted the vineyards that things really took off. Thanks to wise decisions in what rootstocks to use, Montelena managed to avoid the outbreaks of phylloxera that ravaged the valley's vineyards in the 80s and 90s, leaving them with some of the oldest plantings of Cabernet Sauvignon in Napa.

Robert Parker describes Montelena as being "*A Cabernet Sauvignon superfero for nearly 30 years!*" and tonight we will be tasting the stunning 1991 vintage of their flagship estate wine.

ARAUJO ESTATE CALISTOGA

Araujo estate has spent the past two decades forging a reputation among connoisseurs as one of Napa's cult wineries, thanks to their Eisele vineyard, a spectacular site that yields fruit with prodigious concentration. The Eisele vineyard dates back to the 1880s when it was planted with white varieties, although even back then it was identified for the unique potential of its terroir. Cabernet Sauvignon was first planted back in 1964 and there are also a small amount of the other red Bordeaux grapes and some Syrah vines that produce a spectacular example of the variety.

The site got its name from Milt and Barbara Eisele, who purchased the land in 1969 and realised pretty quickly (with a little help from some well informed friends) that the fruit it yielded was of special quality. In 1971 they handed the produce to Paul Draper (of Ridge) and the resulting wine has gone down in history, not only as one of the first single vineyard cuvees made in Napa, but also as one of the region's finest wines. In the following years they sold some crops to Robert Mondavi before drafting in Conn Creek Winery to make the '74 vintage - a wine that also met with universal acclaim. From 1975 through to 1991 the Eisele fruit was turned into a string of spectacular Cabernets by Joseph Phelps and by the time the Araujo family purchased the estate in 1990 its reputation was assured. From their first vintage in '91 the Araujo Eisele Vineyard Cabernet has proven to be a world class wine that has regularly received scores as astronomical as the prices the wine fetches on the secondary market.

Since '99 Michel Rolland has joined the team as consultant, but this evening we will taste the 1998 vintage - a blend of 90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Petit Verdot and 3% Cabernet Franc.

DUNN VINEYARDS HOWELL MOUNTAINS

Randy Dunn began small and has slowly built a reputation for quality that began in 1979 with his enthusiastically received Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon. Controlled expansion over the years has increased the vineyard area and the number of cuvees to two - a Napa Cabernet, which we will taste tonight, joined the Howell Mountain bottling in 1980.

The unique situation of the Dunn winery on Howell Mountain is manifested in a restrained style of Cabernet that takes many years to open up and demonstrate its full quality. This is due to the high elevation of the vineyards which are at 2000ft, meaning that they are often above the fog that hangs in that part of the valley. A long, cool growing season give fruit of amazing purity and consistency year after year, which has allowed Randy Dunn to cement his position as one of Napa's leading proponents of Cabernet Sauvignon.

Tonight we will taste the Napa bottling from the 1989 vintage.

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HEITZ CELLAR ST HELENA

Heitz Cellar as it is today was born in 1964 when Joe and Alice Heitz moved from their tiny, low-budget winery and bought a 65 hectare ranch in St Helena. The estate remains family run to this day by brother and sister team David and Kathleen.

Heitz's prime sites are situated across some of the Napa Valley's best regions, including St Helena, Howell Mountain and the Rutherford bench. In the late 1960s and early 1970s it was their single vineyard wines that established the Heitz reputation, with 'Martha's Vineyard' going on to star in the Judgement of Paris tasting that took place in 1976.

Martha's Vineyard is not only the most famous wine in the Heitz stable, but one of the world's most renowned and sought after Cabernet Sauvignons, although strangely enough the vineyard itself is not even part of the Heitz estate! The site in Oakville was purchased by Tom and Martha May in 1963, and one of their house warming gifts was two bottles of wine by Joe Heitz (given to them by a non-affiliated third party). They enjoyed the wine so much that they made contact with the Heitz family to see if they would like to use the fruit from their wonderful little vineyard and an exclusive agreement was reached that continues to this day.

Tonight we will taste Martha's vineyard from the 1990 vintage.

OPUS ONE OAKVILLE

Robert Mondavi first met Baron Philippe de Rothschild (of Mouton et al) in Hawaii during 1970 and the two living legends began plotting a joint venture that would encapsulate the best of California and Bordeaux. That joint venture was founded in 1978 and our very own Paul Fisher claims to have been in Baron Philippe's bedroom (!) while the final discussions were taking place over what the new winery should be called. Once the name Opus One had been settled on, the first wine (1979) was released during the mid-80s at an unusually high price, capturing the zeitgeist and creating the super-premium category of Californian wine.

The 1990 that we are tasting this evening is a blend of 87% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Cabernet Franc and 3% Merlot. It was aged in 100% new French oak for a total of 18 months.

DALLA VALLE OAKVILLE

The 8.5 hectare Dalle Valle estate was founded in 1986 by Gustav and Naoko Dalla Valle and has since gone on to become one of Napa Valley's best estates, making wines from a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc.

Their most famous wine is the estate Cabernet Sauvignon (which is usually seasoned with a small amount of Franc) which spends almost two years in French oak (50 - 60% new) before being bottled. They also produce very small quantities of a cuvee from their Maya vineyard, the first vintage of which was 1988.

The superb vineyard site at Dalla Valle is red clay and volcanic soil at an altitude of 400ft, terroir that provides wonderful drainage and provides fruit with concentrated flavours. With Michel Rolland on hand to consult on the winemaking the results are silky smooth Cabernets, as the 2000 that we are tasting tonight is a great example of.

DOMINUS YOUNTVILLE

Dominus is the Californian offspring of Christian Moueix, and stable mate to illustrious Bordeaux properties including Petrus, Trotanoy, Magdelaine and La Fleur Petrus. The Estate was set up in 1983 when Moueix was part of a group that purchased the famous Napanook vineyard (now the name of the estate's second wine), although it wasn't until 1995 that Christian took complete control.

Despite his roots on the right bank of the River Gironde where Merlot is the dominant partner in the blend, the Napanook terroir was more suited to Cabernet Sauvignon and it is this variety that forms the backbone of the estate's wines.

Dominus is thought by many to offer a restrained interpretation of Napa Cabernet. It is not a particularly overpowering or voluptuous wine, but rather one of complexity, balance and elegance.

The wine we will taste tonight is a blend of 82% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Cabernet Franc, 4% Merlot, and 4% Petit Verdot, and was considered by Robert Parker to be one of the very best wines of Napa's 1996 vintage.

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STAG'S LEAP WINE CELLARS STAG'S LEAP

Warren Winiarski is one of Napa's most revered winemakers, and through his Stag's Leap Wine Cellars he has been producing benchmark wines from the region of the same name since the early 1970s.

After a stint working at Mondavi (in their very early days in the late '60s) Winiarski decided it was time to go it alone. Having tasted and fallen in love with the Cabernet Sauvignon of Nathan Fay, Winiarski seized the opportunity to buy a plot of land next door (in 1970) and replant what was a plum orchard with Cabernet vines - he named it Stag's Leap Vineyards. The 1976 tasting in Paris included the inaugural vintage of SLV (1973) which was made from 3 year old vines - amazingly, SLV won the tasting, catapulting Winiarski and his wine to worldwide fame.

In the finest vintages Winiarski makes 'Cask 23', a wine that includes only the very best fruit from SLV (and since its acquisition in 1986 the Fay vineyard next door). This is the wine that built upon the '76 tasting and cemented SLWC's reputation as one of the very best wine estates in the entire world.

This evening we will be tasting Cask 23 from the 1995 vintage.

SHAFAER STAG'S LEAP

Over the past thirty years since establishing Shafer Vineyards in 1978 production has skyrocketed from 1000 - 32,000 cases of wine and for the last twenty years the winemaking team of Elias Fernandez with Jon and Doug Shafer has remained unchanged. They seem to be doing something right, as their ever-growing mailing list and band of admirers are testament to.

The Shafer story began in 1972 when Jon purchased the 209 acre estate, initially selling the fruit to the local co-operative before local growers cottoned on to the quality and started to bid up the price for his fruit. In 1978 Jon decided it was time to put his grapes to the best possible use and began estate bottling it under the Shafer name and five years later his son Doug graduated from UC Davis with an enology degree. A year later the Shafers were joined by Fernandez and the first vintage of 'Hillside Select' was bottled - the wine that would go on to be described as "*one of the New World's most profound Cabernet Sauvignons*" by Robert Parker. Such is the consistency of their most prestigious cuvee that not a single vintage has been scored less than 90 points in twenty years.

We will taste the Hillside select Cabernet tonight from the 1998 vintage.

RIDGE SANTA CRUZ

Ridge was established in 1885 and after planting the vineyards and building the winery at Monte Bello, the first wine under that iconic name was released in 1892.

The modern era at Ridge can be traced back to 1969, when Paul Draper joined the winemaking team. He has produced wines that have cemented Ridge's place as a Californian institution, and one that was described by Robert Parker as: "a great winery that has never gone through an unsatisfactory period of winemaking, largely because of the perpetual brilliance of Paul Draper."

If Ridge is one of the USA's best wineries, then Monte Bello is certainly one of the country's finest wines. The world began to sit up and take notice of Monte Bello after the infamous 'Judgement of Paris' blind tasting, when it was ranked 5th in a line up of top Bordeaux and Napa Cabernet Sauvignons.

On the 30th anniversary of the tasting in 2006, a rematch was held with the judging done by luminaries of the wine trade from all over the world. On this occasion, Monte Bello was voted the number one red wine.

Tonight we are tasting the 1990 vintage, which is a blend of 85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Merlot, and 5% Petit Verdot.