



Stags' Leap

THE APOTHECARY GARDEN IN SPRING

The white unicorn's exquisite value for humans is its rarity. It is not common as Chamomile. *Anthemis nobilis* will grow even in abandoned city lots. A unicorn will only lay its head in the lap of a virgin, an issue of trust, and sexuality.

In the apothecary garden at Stags' Leap Winery, Chamomile is given its place on earth, framed with consideration, deliberately planted, as if a unicorn could see into the future or might occasionally have a lost weekend.

The garden is best navigated on the knees, not because of being sorry about anything, but because that is the level of most fragrance. Two archangels are taking inventory of the life forms. "Meyer Lemon," one murmurs to the other, "Chocolate Cosmos, Scented Geranium with the following fragrances: ginger, staghorn oak, peach, chocolate, apple, rose, nutmeg." "How many lavenders do we have?" the one with the clipboard and the barely concealed radiance, asks the other. "We have White Lavender, Tarragon, Muscatel Sage. We have honeybees, mocking jay birds, baby rattlesnakes."

The garden, designed by the celestial landscape architect Jonathan Plant, lays out the aromas of these plants in relationship to the aromas of the wines grown on the estate, holding up a sensory mirror. From the tasting terrace, the porch of the manor house, the garden beds are seen to fall away and down, fanning out, exercising a kind of odiferous discretion in the landscape.

In the center of the garden, an armillary sphere. At each of the four corners, columns of field stones trapped inside cylinders of iron bar, trellises waiting to be grasped and coated with honeysuckle tendrils. Created on the scale of human footpaths, explains the archangel Roberto, not automobile paths, and he gestures to the drive which sweeps past the gardens up and around the 1890s manor house with its columns of mortared field stone.



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The *lick-sissle* of sprinklers coming on. Sam Solano, winery deity, is instructing the new sprinkler system in manners. Turning it off, on, checking the gauge of the lines, and finally, taking his shovel and lifting up the baby rattlesnake and escorting it out of the domain of the people and back to its kingdom on the other side of a stone wall.

Horace Chase, when he established this estate in 1888, hired a full time stone worker to maintain and repair the walls, the well housings, the original winery building, the manor and carriage houses. Now artist Roberto makes four altars to the stones, directing our eyes with iron patina'd in soft rusts that match the syar flagstones, whose warm orange-red happiness will dim into mellow chestnuts and earthy colors, he says, once the face revealed when split finishes interacting with the air.

Roberto Rovira wanted his trellis sculptures to echo the use of stone elsewhere on the estate, not just the mortared pillars of the manor house porch, but also the whimsical setting by a waterless basin, once a swimming pool, framed by mortared stone columns, the first artificial fresh water plunge in the Napa Valley and possibly in all of northern California. The estate, later owned by Frances and Clarence Grange, was leased by the US Navy during the Second World War as a place for officers to rest, on their leaves from Mare Island Naval Base, twenty minutes to the south. An era when, some say, Canary Cottage first had its ghost, still warm, still breathing the fleshy blue air. The unicorn blinks.

The unicorn here is a stag. A stag that leapt to freedom while being chased by Wappo hunters, a stag that leapt to its death rather than be hunted down, a man named Stagg who lived just south of the estate at the time of its establishment, a figurative euphemism devised by Horace and Minnie Chase during their honeymoon, an English placeholder inspired by the number of deer in the area when they drove up the drive from their society wedding. After the honeymoon was over, they never did document their reasons for the name, or if they did, the piece of paper, or the oral confession, never survived. It has become a legend, a mystery, an adaptable fact, a gift of the fragrance and the light.



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