



Stags' Leap

A HOLIDAY TRADITION AT STAGS' LEAP

The holiday season at Stags' Leap is rooted in the agricultural calendar, when the vines have gone to sleep, allowing respite from the green needs of growing plants. It is time for repairs and planning, maintenance, development—all the things which are nurtured by short days and resting fields.

The darkness and the cool air have their purpose, framing windows and doorways of homes where family and friends gather, encouraging festive relief and long cooking sessions, perhaps a game of cribbage by the fire. Candlelight, roasted nut meats, dark wines, and firelight—this is the anvil against which laughter strikes, the vocabulary of the winter solstice.

In winemaker Robert Brittan's lexicon, the holidays mean that it's time to taste the year's new wines for the first time. These are usually wines bottled the previous summer, which he evaluated in the barrel and when blending, but which he has deliberately not visited again, allowing them time to rest in the bottle. On Christmas Day, he brings them out and makes a ceremony of opening and filling glasses all around to see how they pour, how they stand in the glass, looking at them seriously with a bit of winter perspective, and most importantly, trying them with food and in company.

Merlot and venison, Petite Syrah and butterflies leg of lamb, Viognier with a salad of roasted apples and caramelized walnuts, fresh greens, with a bit of pungent cheese scattered over all... Once this year's rhythm and melody have been established, his household turns to the real business of the season, which is polishing an anecdote, perfecting the syntax of a joke or two, and providing a warm alcove by the fire for the child who insists on reading from cover to cover a story of long ago.

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