



Stags' Leap

A SEASON FOR MERLOT

The period of harvest through Thanksgiving is my favorite time of year. It is the culmination of everything I work for on this estate, and there's always something solid, real, and earthy to be celebrated, a genuine success and feeling of accomplishment and gratitude which I'm proud to share with my family and friends.

This is an appropriate season and time to acknowledge Merlot as its own variety, as its own reason to exist. People don't take Merlot seriously enough; I didn't. I came here thinking that Merlot was a blending varietal, and this property has proved me wrong. As I've learned how to work with Merlot, the existing grapes have all cried out to be relocated, with the exception of the Coyote Block, down in the bowl of the valley away from the base of the Palisades. It was already perfectly located.

Working with this varietal in this place was a process of coming to an awareness, finding the spirit of the grape—how to make it, how to craft it—and the result is an outstanding example of what this grape can do in California. What we make here carries our signature style: briary notes, and a softness. It definitely has the finesse of a Stags' Leap wine.

The year 2000 was a generous year for Merlot. The soul of the Merlot comes through in a more playful way. Let's just say that it expresses itself very well, and these qualities make it very interesting when paired with foods. In our case, the Reserve Merlot actually has more tannic structure than most Cabernets, but it's not as overbearing, so instead of standing aloof, it works with the ingredients in a holiday meal, a meal usually made up of intensely flavored game and root vegetables baked or roasted until they are caramelized. Its spiciness and herbal notes work well with mushrooms and earthy ingredients. It has lots of stuffing to go with the stuffing. This is where its gracious character stands out, shines.

—Robert Brittan, Winemaker and General Manager



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An Interview with Robert Brittan, Winemaker and General Manager

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