



## Stags' Leap

### A NOTE ON APOSTROPHES

An apostrophe, spoken on a dramatic stage, is a comment to someone not present. It is a convention allowing actors to make thoughts known to the audience or provide information not possible through normal dialogue. An apostrophe in a leaf (from the Greek *αποστροφή*, turning away) signifies movement away from the light, a behavior of chlorophyll corpuscles on the cells of leaves.

Grammatically, an apostrophe points to something absent. While the plural form of a noun adds to the world more of something, captures more of its heat, its languor, the apostrophe indicates a removal. With that definition, an early spring day would be considered plural, a pivotal point of the year when everything growing from the earth shivers on the edge of bloom and leaf burst.

When apostrophes enter language, they do so to show things hidden (turned from the light). When words contract, an apostrophe points to a painless removal of letters (*she mustn't* and *I can't*). When words contract in history, as in a "sunnes light" (the light of a sun, contracted to a "sun's light"), the apostrophe rests in space pointing to a particular removal which we now know as possession. Stags' Leap would have been spelled "Stagses Leap" in the language of Chaucer (and who can resist the romance of *A Knyghtes Tale*?).

The spelling and punctuation of Stags' Leap was in constant flux from it founding in 1888 until a legal decision in the mid 1980s decreed that Carl Doumani, then owner, use the plural possessive. Before the court decision, Stags' Leap Winery had been referred to under a series of names. Along with the original coining of the term, Stag's Leap, by the estate founders Minnie Mizner and Horace Chase, there was: Stags Leap, Staggs' Leap, Stags' Leap, Stags' Leap Vineyard, Stags' Leap Vintners, Stags' Leap Winery, Stag's Leap Ranch, Stag's Leap Resort, Stags' Leap Manor, Stag's Leap Associates, and so forth. The name of the place was



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contagious, and eventually the nearby palisades came to be known as the Stag's Leap Palisades.

Decades of grammatical flux were finally settled with the help of a bit of controversy. In 1970, Warren Winiarski purchased land adjacent to the historic Stag's Leap Ranch and planted vines, naming his new venture Stag's Leap Vineyards, basing the name on the nearby Stag's Leap Palisades. A disagreement arose between Doumani and Winiarski over the right to use the name. After much wrangling back and forth as years went on, the issue was finally resolved in 1985 in court, with a judge's decision that both Stags' Leap Winery and Stag's Leap Wine Cellars would be allowed use of the same root name, Stags Leap, along with the image of a stag on their labels, but that each must use their apostrophes differently. Their historic struggle came to be called, "The War of the Apostrophes."

The winery currently uses the plural possessive. The other winery that shares the name, Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, uses the singular possessive, and both the geographical feature and the viticultural district are a plural group of unpossessive stags.

And what of the palisades that inspired Minnie Mizner to name her land after a leaping stag? There is a beauty in the naturally found apostrophes it produces, whether made by leaf or cloud. At the end of each summer day, the apostrophe of twilight hangs over the crags of the palisades, pointing to an encroaching absence of light, doing its best to gently usher us off stage so that it can carry the night to us on warm platters.

In 1986 Doumani and Winiarski symbolically settled their feud, collaborating on a combined vintage they called *Accord*, intended to be sold to the highest bidder at that year's Napa Valley Wine Auction. *Accord* was made by blending wine from grapes of both vineyards' 1985 vintage, which both vintners believed was destined to make superb wine.



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Whoever was the lucky high bidder at the Wine Auction that year has a rare treat on their hands, if they haven't already enjoyed it. To have one's wine and drink it too? That would be a good use of apostrophe.

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