

# STAGS' LEAP WINERY

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# STAGS' LEAP

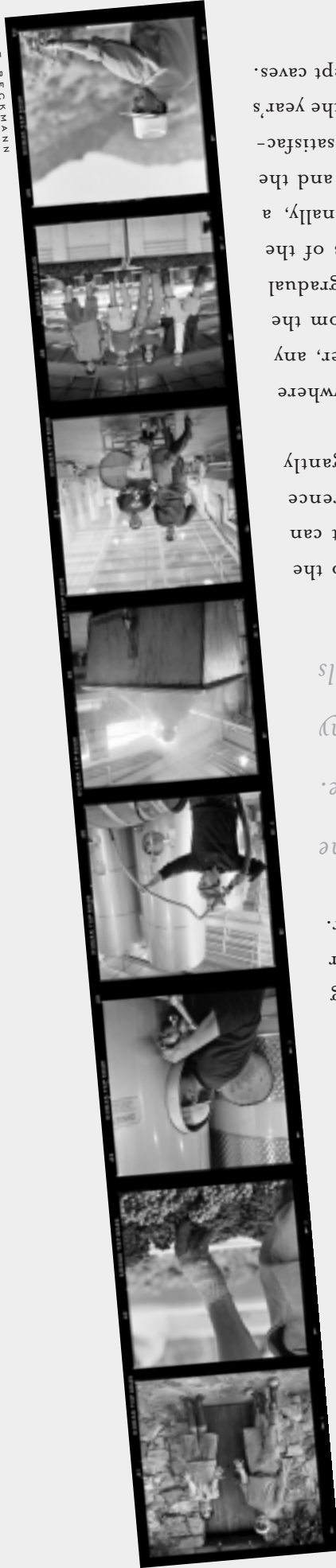


OLAF BECKMANN

FALL / WINTER 2003

WHEN GRAPES COME TUMBLING ...

OLAF BECKMANN



IN THE PAUSE before harvest, the cellar crew works at a steady yet controlled pace, taking a few extra hours off in anticipation of a looming orgy of labor. Passing jokes with the hoses, they thread their pulses with the couplings, through the forklift arm and into the pallettes, easing barrels down onto flatbed trucks, establishing the ground from which they will spring into action.

Very soon the waiting, the leisurely thought, is over. The impending ripeness of the grape and the increasing polish of its acidity reaches an ideal conjunction. The bunch of grapes hangs one moment aching on the stem, and the next, falls into the capable hands of the vineyard crew.

An avalanche of activity is started which continues through a dizzying series of weeks during which no one stops to measure up or divide or own or reason, except with the pulse. The relief of unambivalent action takes over.

Communication occurs by electric current.

For the blood, it is primordial, the chance to participate in the turning of the season, a genetic satisfaction in dancing across the earth, poised as an angel, energized by the transfusion of fall.

The grapes must be kept moving along, but with complete attention and mindfulness, a grace that allows for the myriad decisions required as the grapes arrive from the fields, as they are placed into the crusher and transferred to fermenting tanks and barrels. These decisions that can only be made while the grapes are flying are the ones that make all the difference in wine destined to stand in elegantly labeled bottles.

As the cycle winds to a close, anywhere from mid-October to early November, any residual burst of thermal calories from the fermenting grapes is balanced by the gradual winding down of the hip hop artists of the barrels, pumps, and hoses, until finally, a harvest party inevitably materializes, and the dancers can take five with complete satisfaction, celebrating the tucking away of the year's wine into quiet barrels and clean-swept caves.



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# WHEN GRAPES COME TUMBLING



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## SAUDADES: A POETIC FEAST, A GRATEFUL RECIPE

*This summer, chef Shannon Hughes and poet Theresa Whitehill were commissioned by Stags' Leap Winery to create an artistic evening of culinary poetry entwined with poetic food and wines, presented to a gathering on the manor house porch. They chose the theme of Saudades, a Portuguese word conveying a sense of piquant memory, a passion for things felt in the blood...*

WE CAME TO Stags' Leap with the intention of extrapolating the sensory memory of this place into spoken word and cuisine, to create a visceral interpretation of a place that evokes *Saudades*. For me it began within a landscape that is ancient and fertile and sacred. This landscape is where the muse resides.

Inspired by Robert's gorgeous winemaking, we connected this landscape to language, language to food, food to wine. All the elements were thrown into the pot of inspiration, fusing each sensation into the light above the promontory at dawn, the glint of water shimmering on vine leaves, a chirp of cicada at dusk, the musty smell of old stone steps, a pulled cork, a fragrant nose of Petite Syrah. *Saudades*...fate, longing, memory. —SHANNON HUGHES

### *Recipe: Wild Mushroom Bread Pudding*

*This recipe heralds the autumnal light. Paired with the Stags' Leap 2000 Merlot Estate Grown Reserve, it celebrates the wild mushrooms and foraged herbs, pungent with the oils that have been gathering all summer. Serve this with your holiday meal, at Thanksgiving or Christmas. It is heavenly with roasted acorn and butternut squashes, the tart lushness of cranberries cooked in wine and oranges, and of course, the wild game or domestic bird.*

Butter generously a 12 inch baking dish, preferably non-metal. Earthenware or glass is best. Sauté about 2 lbs of clean wild mushrooms: *Boletus Edulis*, Chanterelles, Morels, Oyster Tree, Shitake. Sauté in a large pan in a mixture of butter and extra virgin olive oil. If you have duck fat, that is preferable (use about 1/2 cup). Mince 6 shallots and 2 cloves of garlic; add to oil/butter; sauté till tender; add the mushrooms, a nice handful of fresh thyme, and finely chopped fresh sage. As the mushrooms soften, add 1 cup of sherry, and season with salt and pepper. Set aside.

In a bowl, crack 1 whole egg with 6 egg yolks; add salt and pepper and whisk until fluffy. In a sauce pan, scald (heat just to boiling point) 1 quart half and half, and 1 pint of cream. Add the milk mixture to the eggs while whisking.

I prefer Brioche for this recipe. Challa bread will work nicely as well, but you can use any good quality bread, except for rye. Slice bread into 1 inch thick slices and layer the buttered dish until evenly covered; layer with the mushrooms and add custard, till just covered. Repeat the layering. The top of the dish will have mushrooms. Cover in parchment paper and foil and bake in a 375 degree F. oven for 30 minutes, uncover and bake for another 15 minutes until browned. Let it settle a bit before cutting. *Blessings!*

*How does one translate  
earth and rock, water and  
vineyard into poetic form,  
into flavor and texture  
and nourishment?*

## 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.

*The year 2000 was  
a generous year for  
Merlot. Its soul  
comes through  
in a more  
playful way.*

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.

Working with Merlot 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.

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 & GENERAL MANAGER



LETTERPRESS MENU FOR SAUDADES  
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### FALL/WINTER 2003 RELEASES FROM STAGS' LEAP WINERY

VINTAGE	VARIETAL	RELEASE DATE	PRICE/BTL.
2002	Napa Valley Chardonnay	September 2003	\$ 22.
2000	Napa Valley Merlot	January 2004	\$ 31.
2001	Napa Valley Syrah	January 2004	\$ 29.
2002	Napa Valley Viognier	January 2004	\$ 25.

Watch for these future releases or confirm by calling 800 640-LEAP

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