



Stags' Leap

In the summer of 2003, 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, a genre which they had developed three years earlier at Shannon's restaurant, Pangaea, in Point Arena, California. Shannon's work as a chef has always had a keen sense of place, and what better palette and canvas for her talent than the historic estate and its mortared stone, vivid wildlife, and inspiring wine. They chose the theme of Saudades, a Portuguese word conveying a sense of piquant memory, a passion for things felt in the blood...

SAUDADES

Theresa Whitehill, her husband, Paulo Ferreira, and I came to Stags' Leap in July with the intention of extrapolating the sensory memory of this place into spoken word and cuisine. We came to create a visceral interpretation of a place that evokes *Saudades*.

I arrived at the estate, after a three hour drive from my home on the Mendocino coast. The heat of Napa valley quickly penetrated my skin and I welcomed the warmth and dry crackled air. We walked together all over the property, through the winemaker's apothecary garden, up along the slopes of the palisades, into the wine caves, and I began taking a mental inventory of the wealth of herbs, flowers, and food plants. I settled myself into Canary cottage and watched Theresa write, as she began her process of articulating all the images and sensations she was experiencing around her.



Stags Leap

How does one translate earth and rock and water and vineyard into poetic form, into flavor and texture and nourishment? For me it began within a landscape that is ancient and fertile and sacred. This landscape is where the muse resides.

What Theresa expressed in word and verbal form, I translated into culinary and sensory form. We collaborated on the concept and structure of images, flavors, sensibility, and sensuality. Inspired by Robert's gorgeous winemaking, we connected this landscape to language, language to food, food to wine.

On the shelf of the cottage I found a curious book, *Cunningham's Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs*. Having an interest in herbal medicine for many years, I was instantly intrigued, and quickly found a shady lounge chair and immersed myself in the fascinating world of myth and lore and magic and medicine.

There were so many wonderful and amusing concoctions and potions and many of them included ingredients I wanted to focus on and use in my menu—plants and herbs that were growing on the estate, fruits and flowers that conjured *Saudades* for me. I lay on the lounge and read these anecdotes out loud to Theresa as she mused and made notations, throwing to her bouquets of scent and flavors, mythological remedies for lovesickness, or homesickness, the place of *Saudades*, potions to fall in love by, or to free zombies from the half dead...(that recipe entails eating pistachios nuts, from the shell, preferably the red ones).

We were entranced and transported by all this incredible information. My favorite being a recipe for Invisibility... Soak poppy seeds in wine for fifteen days; then drink the infused wine for five days while fasting... This will enable one to become invisible at will. Hence the *Emulsion of Poppy Seeds and Champagne*, *Cooling the Braised Endives and Leeks* which we served as the salad course of our event...



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Our presentation of *Saudades* at Stags' Leap, on the manor house porch at twilight, was a weaving together of the poetry and the food, with each poem followed by the course specifically designed for that poem. Theresa's performance was in the true poetic spoken word vernacular; my expression accompanied her words with flavors, texture, a connection to her language, and the wine.

My menu was inspired by many different things... recipes based upon ancient remedies, potions to conjure love and protection, abundance and creative fullness... all the things we want all beings to have. I imagined simple combinations to nourish the already rich and fertile spark of care, conviviality, and friendship.

We will not talk of the long post lunch naps, Viognier-induced, nor the hike through rattlesnake territory above the vineyard, nor the valley at sunset, the twilight sky, the color of which I have only seen in Montpelier. We will not talk of the haunted croquet court or the moon garden resplendent in jasmine, phlox, and gardenia.

I used many foods growing on the estate: eggplant, ollalieberry, cactus pear, rose geranium, all the culinary herbs... Sitting on the manor house porch, watching the rabbits running through the vineyard inspired the rabbit loins wrapped in pastry. I could smell the pungent herbs of rosemary, lavender, and thyme emanating off their backs as they ran wildly past, the heat of the sun charging the olfactory hit.

All these 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, the 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, August 2003



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