



Stags' Leap

SPEAKING OF DIRT: ESTATE WINES

When winemaker Robert Brittan is talking about his estate wines, he usually starts out talking about dirt. He describes a heady mixture of earth dominated by volcanoes, by rhyolitic rock that washes down from the Stags Leap Palisades and underlies the vineyards. From there, he'll describe for you the climactic conditions dictating how air is moderated within the intimate valley of the estate, and he'll mention the warm temperatures of the afternoon breeze as it moves through this place because of its high incidence of rock. Lastly, and with a bit of reverence, he'll bring up the heritage of the vines in the vineyard itself. You won't hear much from him about his winemaking paraphernalia. The activity and nuances of winemaking with accompanying tanks and technology are meant to be invisible accomplices, or perhaps better, escorts to the vines.

The property is blessed with heirloom vines dating back to the early decades of the Twentieth Century. In contemporary times these vines were making extraordinary wines in the 1970s, even before Brittan's arrival in the late 1980s. His approach has been to maintain this magical genetic heritage by identifying existing vines, then using those that he finds best suited to this location to bud over for replanting.

After years spent completely familiarizing himself with individual blocks, and in some cases, particular rows, groups, or even single vines that gave particular characteristics to the wine, he can truly say that these estate wines represent the Stags Leap of Stags' Leap. They could exist nowhere else on this earth. He spent over a dozen years verifying this for himself before attempting to release an estate reserve label.

It is a matter of paying attention and pursuing hunches: good fortune and patient work. He is constantly on the lookout for a specific clarity of varietal, identifying prime blocks. Brittan considers it his task to craft the best wine he can out of these hand-

selected and thoughtfully nurtured vineyards, allowing a specific block of grapes to speak directly through the wine, without interference.

These are the clearest expression of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Rhône varietals of which this place at this time in this universe is capable. The result, which swirls into your glass from out of black labeled bottles of Stags' Leap Winery Estate Reserve, is a revelation and a caress.

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