



Stags' Leap

SIDEWAYS LIGHT & THE CULTURE OF CABERNET PART II: HISTORY & THE MUSE

*While the muse always operates outside of time,
fickle and exuberant, wine stitches us down
to the very essence of timeliness and its passing,
vintages being vintages by virtue of date,
the silky expression of a cellared wine evoking
nostalgia for time past and gathering, as well as future.*

Once upon a time doesn't exist in Art. And if it did, it would invent a childhood of pennyroyal and mountain lions, legendary deer, a place that invokes coyotes doing a two-step beneath the moon, in shadows cast by oak and olive branches.

It is no longer possible to go back to the beginning of things, to the loosely documented years before the end of the nineteenth century, and see whether it was Art herself that invented Stags' Leap, or Stags' Leap that made of itself a convivial place for culture to gather. All that is known for sure is that when the first stone of the manor house was laid down in 1888, the spirit of the manor house began to exist there. She is known to enjoy a good party, and has a soft spot for artists.

In order to describe a Stags' Leap wine in its fullest sense, this has to be taken into account. One of its descriptors, as essential as aroma, flavor, or structure, would be how often the wine pours itself at occasions dedicated to art and poetry. It is a wine that has been crafted to not only complement food, but spark conversation, ideas, and creative projects. It's wine with a purpose.



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From the glittering salons of the nineteenth century Chase era through a period as a resort in the middle years of the twentieth century, the estate has always been especially conducive to creativity, with its entrancing mixture of wildlands and soulful stone buildings, ambitious projects, charismatic people, and the drive to produce exceptional wine.

During these years, there were many sightings of the ghost of the manor house, most often at late night parties and by those who walked the quiet hallways in the early dawn. With the closure of the resort, followed by the departure of the Grange family in the 1950s, the ghost also seemed to go away for a while. Perhaps she went on a holiday, or took a long nap.

The Grange era was followed by a dry spell, years during which the vines were neglected and the cellar became a den for spiders and unswept dust. Eventually, the vineyards were replanted. The wine began to be made again. Delivery trucks rumbled in and out over the stone bridges, under the avenue of walnut trees, carrying their cases of bottles all labeled with the leaping stag.

The modern era may have seemed a bit mundane to the ghost, compared to the elaborate courtesies and lingering parlor games of earlier times. That is, until Patrick McFarlin arrived with his charcoals and brushes from Santa Fe, and set up an easel in a corner of the living room and began to paint portraits of anyone he pleased. Once again, the manor house filled with the throb and tinkle of festive gatherings. *Pat's Downtown Club* went on for six brief weeks in the spring of 1998, with nightly salons, elegant foods, beautiful wine, glorious conversations, and trumpety and gifts of the moment.

Up the stairs of the manor house, on the second floor, Patrick's colorful portraits line the walls of the hallway. He rendered the painted faces in such bold, expressive strokes,



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the subjects still appear startled, as if he caught them in an act of becoming. The paper and canvas illuminations convey an immediacy, a palpable fragrance of time that remains fresh and open.

Looking at them as a group, it's not hard to imagine the energy of the gatherings that created them. A viewer can almost feel the crush of the crowd filling the rooms below on the first floor, the musical caress of crystal glasses in a toast, the way light would bend, and all attention be focused, on the spot where the artist moved at his easel, surrounded by an audience. The subject of the moment would be shifting in his or her chair. A flutter of laughter encapsulated each word that was slung. For those present, entire conversations were ripped out of the throat of history, and cast out across the room, while the ghost made bank in the corner, building up a store of passion and soliloquy for quieter times.

The centennial of the founding of the Stags' Leap estate was celebrated in 1993 with a gathering of five poets that included US Poets Laureate Mark Strand and Robert Hass, along with Stephen Dunn, Charles Simic, and Daniel Halpern. Poetry performances and salons filled a long weekend, with the poets participating as guest chefs and master conversationalists, in addition to giving readings of their work.

An artist-in-residence program has evolved as the next chapter in this collaboration between the wines of Stags' Leap and the arts. Selected artists are invited to spend a period in residence on the estate to pursue their work. Several times a year, the beautiful stone manor house will be the setting for delicious gatherings as each residency comes to completion.

Artist Robert Lobe has spent part of his 2004 summer crouched in a streambed near the new wine cave, molding aluminum in honor of a tree. Starting with sheets of aluminum



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alloy, Lobe forms the metal around the tree itself, using mallets for rough blocking, then pneumatic tools to further stretch, mold, and give texture to the metal, until he has a ghostly, glovelike form, down to the delicate leaves, rendered in aluminum.

Coming upon the scene in the middle of the day, the tree looks as if it is being prepared for a space walk by a master tailor wearing safety goggles. At night, the moon lights up a strange, silvery scene that speaks of evolution between plant and base metals. When the aluminum is finally removed, in sections, it will be treated to harden the metal, then reassembled into the final sculpture.

Lobe became interested in forming metal while dismantling an Aston Martin sports car. The technique of panel beating, used to form automobile fenders, comes from the French fine art technique, repoussé, used to form jewelry, masks, and the Statue of Liberty.

Originally working in Battery Park City Landfill in New York, he used the technique on rocks, working with discarded rubble blasted out of the excavation pit of the World Trade Center when it was originally under construction. His work has taken him to the rocks and trees along the coast of Nova Scotia, the Adirondack Mountains, the Berkshires, and sites in New Jersey. Stags' Leap is his first opportunity to work with the volcanic rock and plants at the Pacific end of the continent.

Lobe's project, as an example of the Artist-in-Residency Program and Salon Series is, appropriately, a celebration of art created in the moment, on the site. It is an opportunity for the property and its spirit to become part of the making of the work itself, with all of the intensity, excitement, and energy that becomes possible in such moments.



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Robert Lobe, Summer 2004 Artist in Residence. August 21–September 25.

Salon for Lobe Residency: Saturday, September 25

Watch for Robert Lobe's upcoming installation at Villa Montalvo in 2005

Paul Kos, Fall 2004 Artist in Residence. October 9–24.

Salon for Kos Residency: Saturday, October 23. RSVP: (707) 299-3031

For more information on the Stags' Leap Winery Artist-in-Residency Program and Salon Series, visit our website: <http://www.stagsleap.com/art/salonseries.html>



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Highlights in the Cultural History of Stags' Leap Winery

1888, Founding of the estate: Horace Chase and Minnie Mizner, married in 1888, built the manor house in 1890, and the spirit of the manor house was born; 1893 saw the completion of the first wine cave and the first vintage. The Chases entertained on a lavish scale, bringing Bay Area high society to the Napa Valley, along with the artists, writers, and musicians of their time, until they sold the property in 1909.

1918—1941, Resort years: Clarence and Frances Grange, owners of the estate from 1913, established the property as a resort in 1918. The manor house was once again the setting for sumptuous parties, salons, and theatrical performances. The Golden Gate Bridge opened in 1937; prior to that, guests usually arrived via ferry, train, and coach, or early model automobile.

1993, Centennial Poets' Gathering: Celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the building of the original wine caves and the first estate vintage. Poets Stephen Dunn, Charles Simic, Mark Strand, Robert Hass, and Daniel Halpern were hosted for a weekend on the property. Strand arrived as a US Poet Laureate emeritus, having served from 1990 to 1992, and Haas went on to serve in that position, from 1995 to 1997. The Pulitzer Prize for poetry touched this group in several places (Dunn, Simic, and Strand) along with numerous fellowships, honors, awards, and, most importantly, publications.

1998: Photographer Olaf Beckmann commissioned to create a folio of platinum prints of the Stags' Leap estate.

1998, Napa Valley: Portrait of a Community: Santa Fe artist Patrick McFarlin's innovative public painting salon, held in the living room of the manor house, resulted in over 100 painted and drawn portraits, along with literary portraits by writer Rod Smith



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and poet Theresa Whitehill. An exhibit of the work opened at the Napa Valley Museum in the spring of 1999, was the subject of a CBS Special, and has traveled to Atlanta and Philadelphia. The paintings are now in the collection of the winery. The work has been published in a catalog available from the winery.

<http://www.stagsleap.com/art/index.html>

2002, *Stags' Leap Winery: A Guide to the Estate*: commissioned as a multiple volume set of artist's books devoted to fundamental knowledge embodied in the estate of Stags' Leap as it exists after the turn of the twentieth century, a project envisioned and developed by winemaker and general manager Robert Brittan, to be published serially over the course of 2004 and 2005. Artists for the first two volumes are San Francisco painter Dana DeKalb (*The Book of Rules*, a compendium of games played on the estate, including bocce, billiards, and cribbage), and Vallejo artist Roberto Rovira (*Cartography*, an inventory of the property's natural history). Volumes to be published in 2005 are *Ne Cede Malis* (winemaking) and *History, Culture, and the Muse* (history of the estate).

2003, *Saudades*: an artistic evening of culinary poetry entwined with poetic food and wines, created by chef Shannon Hughes and poet Theresa Whitehill. The poems and menu are collected in the publication *Saudades*, published by the winery in a limited edition to commemorate the event.

http://www.stagsleap.com/art/2003_fall/saudades.html

2004: Establishment of the Stags' Leap Winery Salon Series and Artist-in-Residency Program, providing a working environment for visual, performing, and literary artists, as well as scholars. A formal salon culminates each artist's visit. Sculptor Robert Lobe and conceptual artist Paul Kos lead off the program with residencies and salons during the 2004 harvest season. <http://www.stagsleap.com/art/salonseries.html>



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For more newsletter articles, see: <http://www.stagsleap.com/art/literature.html>

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