



Stags' Leap

FULL CIRCLE: WINEMAKER KEVIN MORRISEY

Kevin Morrisey studied cinema and engineering as an undergraduate, but perhaps the more pertinent education he received was from his roommate, Bruno Touissant, a native of France, who remains to this day a very close friend. Bruno taught Kevin how to decipher French wine labels. Once he realized there was a logic to them, and he had his first palpable sense that these wines had come from some specific *where*, he was irrevocably hooked. It would take him a few more years to realize how central wine would be to his life.

First he learned about craft. It wasn't immediately the craft of winemaking. Every Friday of autumn he was on a plane to a college campus somewhere in the states, and then he'd be out on the football field, running a sideline camera and changing his own film, a crew of one. The raw footage was later cut into highlight and recruiting films during the days when colleges made their own television contracts and budgets were big. It was great training, he sees now, stepping into the fire, having to fly with the action on the field, going from full sun to shade, adjusting the F-stop, focus, and zoom all at the same time. He discovered how easy it was to get faked out down there on the side lines, and that slow mo' is merciless during playback, showing up and prolonging the slightest mistake.

As cinematographer on films, commercials, and such cult classics as *Killer Tomatoes Eat France!*, and *Fast* he carries a respect for the complexities of a production that requires the choreography of a small array of highly skilled and talented people—something that doesn't escape him as he ponders the storyboard awaiting him this year, in his first harvest as Winemaker and Director of Operations at Stags' Leap Winery.

Aware that he has a theater tech from Philly on the harvest crew this season, Kevin's big smile comes across on the phone as he relishes the idea. "I know exactly what that guy is



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capable of,” he says. Harvest has all the excitement and intensity of a theatrical production. There’s a script; there’s the technicians and artisans. You have to balance intuition with obedience to the rules and laws of technical requirements. You have to respect the discipline. It’s true of any art. You have a vision of where you want to go, and you have an audience who is the ultimate judge of how successful you’ve been.

The conviviality of his filmmaking career led him to living in France for a few years, and introduced him to his wife, Karin. They took full advantage of their proximity to famous food and wines. When he decided to go back to school, winemaking was the obvious path. It had captivated him long ago. With an MA in Enology from UC Davis, he interned at the renowned Chateau Petrus in Bordeaux, and locally at Domaine Chandon before coming to Stags’ Leap Winery in 1998 as Enologist. After being promoted to Assistant Winemaker and five years at Stags’ Leap, he left for a position as Winemaker at Etude, and the chance to work with Tony Soter.

His original delight in discovering that French wines came from somewhere specific and palpable is now gratified in being welcomed back to make wines in a place renowned for its ability to provide a pleasurable, profound, and drinkable map of its origins.

He arrives back at Stags’ Leap as a papa to two girls, Zoë, 6, and Oona, 3, and with experience on the board of a Waldorf-methods charter school in Napa. “Consensus,” he says, shaking his head in wonderment at the governing principles of Waldorf schools. “You have to realize that anybody might hold the truth, or the best answer to a specific problem. Anybody can block the vote. Of course, you’re expected to restrain yourself, not do it all the time. Still...” He balances the two operating principles with which he has experience: consensus versus the autocracy of film production. And then there’s Stags’ Leap, in the shadow of a mountain that always seems to have a wild card up its sleeve.



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