

Stags Leap District – one of Napa Valley’s legendary appellations

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With its long history, distinctive terroir, leadership, and international recognition for quality, Stags Leap District is one of Napa Valley’s premier appellations. The Stags Leap area was being farmed as early as the 1870’s by Terrill L. Grigsby who owned 257 acres of land at the desirable foothills of the valley, 80 acres of which were dedicated to grapevines. Grigsby was one of the valley’s largest vintners and earliest settlers “identified with the growth and prosperity of the valley since the first” (*History of Napa County*). In 1878, Grigsby was in the process of completing one of the largest wineries in Napa Valley at the time, a three-story, gravity-fed winery made of lava stone which



Regusci Winery in Stags Leap District

reporters at the time believed was too soft to age. Today, that same stone winery is still in commercial use under the ownership of Regusci Winery.

In the 20th century, Nathan Fay paved the way for Stags Leap fame in 1961 when he began planting cabernet sauvignon in a region most considered a little too south and too cool to ripen versus the popular zinfandel. But the resulting fruit was exceptional and highly desired by vintners such as Krug, Robert Mondavi and Joe Heitz who purchased the fruit in the 1960’s and 1970’s. The quality of fruit also compelled Warren Winiarski to purchase adjacent vineyard land in the early 1970’s when he established Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars. He later purchased Fay Vineyard in 1986 when it became available. Today, 80% of Stags Leap District is planted to cabernet sauvignon. Other pioneers of Stags Leap from the early 1970’s include Clos du Val and Shafer Vineyards, both of which remain icons today for quality.

A defining moment in Napa Valley history came on May 24, 1976 at a Paris blind tasting of *grands crus classes* Bordeaux and white Burgundies vs. Napa Valley cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay wines. The top red chosen by an esteemed French jury was the 1973 Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars S.L.V. The story was covered by Time magazine and broadcast widely, further elevating the reputations of Stags Leap and Napa Valley wines around the world.

Covering about 2,700 acres on the eastern side of the valley, Stags Leap’s unique climate and soils contribute to the intense fruit, fresh acidity and refined tannins that are characteristic of their signature red wines. The soils are mainly well-draining volcanic and alluvial soils. The vineyards on west-facing slopes receive long sun exposure for fruit concentration and ripe tannins but benefit from cooling Bay breezes in the late afternoon that accelerate through the narrow channel created by the Vaca mountains to the east and the series of knolls to the west. This cooling influence preserves the aromas and acidity in the grapes leading to well-structured and balanced wines.

Visit the [Stags Leap District Winegrowers Association](#) website for more information on the wineries of Stags Leap.