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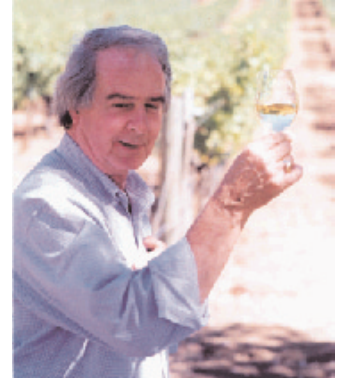
Industry Profile: Stag's Leap Wine Cellars

Warren Winiarski's means is golden

Stag's Leap Wine Cellars embarks on new project

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-Warren Winiarski



Stag's Leap Wine Cellars puts new cab on the market

Julia Winiarski struggled with the right words as she composed a card to her father three weeks ago on the occasion of his 75th birthday. After all, says the youngest child of one of America's most influential vintners, Warren Winiarski "doesn't do things casually. He's compelled to master them and understand them.

"I never met anyone else like him," she reveals.

Winiarski's 38-year-old daughter has come home following a four-year stint in Seattle, after 10 years working at her father's winery - Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. Like her father - who seems to be a seeker - Julia Winiarski is assessing her options and artistic proclivities, and thinking of studying to become a glass blower.

Warren Winiarski too - who has studied political science and is a lecturer on the liberal arts -- has always seemed to be a man who takes stock. In so doing, every few years, he seems to find something else that moves him forward.

The man who made a wine 30 years ago that was instrumental in putting the new world on the international wine map, has now introduced a new line to his portfolio.

Just about every winery on any given day of the week brings another wine to market, one might say about now. But in inimitable Warren Winiarski fashion, his Cabernet Sauvignon-based wine he calls "Artemis," has an intellectually compelling story.

Artemis -- named for the Greek feminist goddess of the light and the hunt, who chose the forest and mountains over marriage and the city life - represents according to Winiarski, "a new vision for our Napa Valley Cabernet."

The wine will be priced at \$45 and supplants Stag's Leap's simply named Napa Valley Cab; and which will be its "gateway wine" to augment the more expensive Fay, SLV, and Cask 23 Cabernet wines. (SLWC's Hawk Crest wines will continue to be produced.)

Artemis will be sourced primarily (about 20 percent) from Nathan Fay's vineyard, which Winiarski purchased in 1986, and which comprises the heart of the Cask wines.

For Artemis, 10 percent of the grapes will come from the other of SWLC's estate vineyards, while the remainder of the fruit will be from purchased fruit. (The aforementioned Napa Valley Cab, which Artemis replaces, traditionally had less than 10 percent of its grapes from the estate.)

The first Artemis, the 2001, is comprised of 91.6 percent Cabernet and 8.4 percent Merlot. That adds up to 100 percent, but somehow, and a sliver of Petite Verdot got into the final blend. The wine spent 19 months in French oak, 45 percent of which was new, and the listed alcohol is 13.9 percent. Thirty-thousand cases were produced.

"The old vision (of the Napa Valley Cab) was to represent no specific region of the Valley, but the entirety of the Valley," says Winiarski, explaining the philosophy behind the project. "The new vision is built on the basis of our estate."

He then goes on to articulate the concept further by saying that it's built on the "Golden Rectangle" theory or architecture or the mathematical hypothesis called the "Golden Mean."

"With a square, where everything - all the sides - is equal, there is no tension," he says. "But with a rectangle - the interior articulation of Fay and SLV vineyards, for instance, which are influenced by both volcanic and waterborne soils that I call 'fire' and 'water,' when combined - are not meant to obliterate the differences."

But it's not always unproblematic combining unequal elements. Tension brings uncertainty, even danger. Warren Winiarski, according to his daughter Julia, will have it no other way.

"He looks for harmony and tension," she explains, "striving for perfection.

"That's why I struggled with writing the (birthday) card. I might not have always agreed with the course he takes. He doesn't always take the easy way. (But) his integrity is so far out of the mainstream ... that things resonate for him."

Charlie Hossom, a longtime viticulturalist, who has been at Stag's Leap for just about a year, calls it Warren's "It" project.

"Only Warren knows what 'it' is," says Hossom. "It's a textural component in the wines with a pebbly, granular grit. Warren's the 'It' taster. He's the only one who can identify it.

"So, now we're chasing 'It.'"

But associate winemaker Nicki Pruss, who has been with Winiarski for five years, puts it in more comprehensible, but nevertheless, elusive terms.

"We're trying to capture the fruit at the peak of perfection," she says. "I'm trying to get the yolk out of the fried egg."

To achieve that, to extract the precise clusters from the defined spot in one of SLWC's vineyard, Pruss spray paints symbols on the ground on the property, and marks the rows with orange and blue tape. They are hieroglyphs and signposts that point the vineyard workers to the exact vines from which to pick.

With unequal proportions from different elements, gleaned from diverse portions of the vineyard, Stag's Leaps' Golden Mean wines, one might say with only some degree of hyperbole, are something akin to Mozart's sometimes disparate compositions.

To which Winiarski says, "Mozart's sonatas were to the ear. What we're trying to do, is to the palate."

His daughter elucidates in another way.

"He wants to build beautiful things," Julia says in a quite, thoughtful tone. "He wants his life to matter, to create beauty, to have things make sense and to understand things in order to get their full expression whether it's a plant, architecture, or a grape vine."

In other words, Warren Winiarski wants it to be golden.



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