

The Wines of Chimney Rock



The Chimney Rock estate began to take shape in 1980, when Hack and Stella Wilson brought their love of wine and South African winery architecture to the Napa Valley. They purchased a 180 acre parcel – which included a golf course – situated on the east side of the Silverado Trail.

The first 59 acres were planted with a combination of red and white grapes, and the inaugural vintage of Chimney Rock estate wines was produced in 1989. In the early 1990s, a Cape Dutch-style winery and the tasting room were added to the estate.

However, shortly after the building was completed thereafter, phylloxera devastated the vineyard and necessitated the replanting of the entire property. But recognizing the unique characteristics of the Stags Leap District, the Wilsons decided to replant the vineyards using only red Bordeaux-variety grapes, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot. These new vineyards were planted with improved drainage, better matching of rootstocks to soils, and new clones to maximize the potential of the estate. The latter was a necessary and critical first step in making great and important wines.

In 2000, the Terlato family joined the Wilson family as partners in the winery with added resources and the goal of enhancing Chimney Rock's reputation for producing some of the world's great estate Cabernet Sauvignons. In 2001, the remaining land, covering 60 acres, was planted entirely to Cabernet Sauvignon.

Since the Terlato family assumed sole ownership of Chimney Rock in 2004, they have had a clear vision of the potential of this great estate. They have steadfastly supported and shepherded only the highest standards in viticulture and winemaking. The Chimney Rock estate now comprises 119 acres of vineyards divided into 28 distinct blocks, allowing for highly specialized viticulture suited to each specific site.

The distinctive character of Chimney Rock's wines springs from a simple yet extraordinary foundation: The Stags Leap District, Napa Valley's smallest and most acclaimed sub-appellation. Located along the Silverado Trail in California's Napa Valley, the Stags Leap District is home to many of the most elegant Cabernet Sauvignons grown on American soil. Pronounced fruit character, gentle but well-structured tannins, and silky texture are the hallmarks of Stags Leap District Cabernet Sauvignon.

The Stags Leap District, barely a mile wide and three miles long, is planted with 1,350 acres of vineyards. Beginning seven miles north of the town of Napa and embracing Chimney Rock Winery at its southern end, the appellation is bounded by rocky hillsides on the east and the Napa River on the west. Here, the natural environmental mechanics of warm sun and cool breezes mesh perfectly with coarse, gravelly soils. The distinctive Stags Leap Palisades, with their massive rocky pillars, store the sun's energy and nurture the fruit through leisurely ripening and maturation.

The District's name derives from the legend of a nimble stag, said to have escaped a hunter by making a fantastic leap from one of the towering rock outcroppings to another. Although grape growing goes back to the 1880s, it wasn't until Nathan Fay planted the Stags Leap District's first Cabernets in 1961 that other growers and winemakers were drawn to the area. One by one, we have all discovered the magic in this narrow pocket of land.

Sauvignon Gris is a copper-toned grape that is a close relative of Sauvignon Blanc, and in the right hands can be extremely aromatic and full bodied. The **2013 Chimney Rock Sauvignon Gris** from the Rutherford appellation has a delicate blend of floral and tropical aromas. Blessed with a fragrant bouquet of honeysuckle, lemon meringue pie and apricot on the nose and a succulent mouthfeel featuring flavors of tropical fruit, kiwi and honeydew melon, this wine is an elegant version from first sip to last impression. The hint of orange clove honey on the finish is particularly memorable. **\$36**

The **2013 Chimney Rock Elevage Blanc** Napa Valley is a New World white wine, full of plush, mouth-filling flavors that lives somewhere between a Sauvignon Blanc and a Chardonnay. This wine is bursting with citrus and tropical aromas including scents of white nectarine, and Imperial lemon, complemented by lingering shades of vanilla. Lively flavors of pear, peach and nectarine remain bright and crisp throughout the finish. **\$48**

The **2012 Chimney Rock Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District** is made from 100 percent Cabernet Sauvignon and hails from the heart of the legendary Stags Leap District. This powerful red wine delivers beautiful floral aromas of fresh violets, cedar and dried red rose petals on the nose. Complex flavors of fresh black plum on the palate combine with wild blueberry, ripe dark cherry, huckleberry and black raspberry on a supple and silky frame with mouthwatering acidity and a long, luscious finish. **\$88**

You don't need to go all the way to France to experience the elegance of a Bordeaux wine. With a blend of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot, the **2012 Chimney Rock Elevage Stags Leap District** mimics the elegance of a Right Bank Bordeaux. It has a remarkable nose, with scents of dark plum, accented by notes of earth and damp forest floor. Flavors of rich black cherry, blueberry liqueur and blackberry fruit is supple and amazingly sophisticated. While it is definitely enjoyable now, this wine has the structure and balance to age gracefully for an additional 10 to 20 years. I would recommend decanting this wine at least one hour before serving. **\$105**