



Clos Du Val

2004 Cabernet Sauvignon

Stags Leap District

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I recently sampled roughly 130 Napa cabs and cabernet-based blends over two days during a big trade event in the valley. There were some excellent wines that showed why the area has gained its stellar reputation; I'll get to those bright spots later on.

But I was left wondering: Have many of the valley's cab producers lost their way? Their wines have become so big, so exaggerated, so heavy that drinking them (I was spitting, by the way) would be almost a chore. ...

But wines with real personality and distinction, from any vintage, were few and far between. It's as if most of the wines were made according to a recipe.

Vintners tend to talk a lot about "*terroir*," a French term that connotes the idea that wines are a reflection of the place where the grapes are grown. To that end, the Napa Valley has even been carved into 14 smaller appellations, with a couple of more pending.

In theory, you should be able to distinguish a Spring Mountain cabernet, for example, from a cabernet made from grapes grown in the Stags Leap district.

I attended tastings staged by four of the smaller Napa appellations, and it was hard to find much difference from one to the next.

Trouble is, extreme ripeness tends to wipe out any differences that might have existed. At some point, all super-ripe cabernet sauvignon (or any other grape variety) tastes pretty much the same. Slather on plenty of new oak, and you further obscure any distinctiveness that might have existed.

Generic wine that's made to some sort of flavor profile might be acceptable when the wine costs \$8 or \$10 a bottle, but nearly all Napa cabernet costs considerably more.

Lest you think that I'm condemning all Napa wines and wineries, let me add here that I did taste some cabernets with elegance, personality and distinctiveness. ... Here were some of my favorites.

The 2004 Clos Du Val Stags Leap District Cabernet Sauvignon is big yet graceful, with black cherry fruit and fine, ripe tannins.

-- Laurie Daniel

CLOS DU VAL

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