Dark, Vivid, and Powerful.
Releasing 2012 Hillside Select®

Aging to Perfection.
The Romance of Older Wines

Protecting Beauty.
How Shafer Ensures Your Wine’s Purity
New Hillside Select® Release

One of the highlights of our year is introducing a new Hillside Select and we are especially pleased about this one. 2012 was a gorgeous year — the first in a string of sunny, warm vintages that harken back to the growing seasons we remember from our early years here in the 1970s.

The release of this wine marks an exciting milestone for us since it is our 30th vintage of Hillside Select. With that in mind we asked David White of Terroirist.com to write something on the romance and reality of aging wines.

We’ve also updated you on some of the latest advances in our cellar. We believe that after a 20-year effort we can say with confidence that the future is TCA-free. TCA (or cork taint) has been an infrequent problem thanks to our team running a scrupulously clean cellar. However our goal has always been 100% eradication and we believe we’ve achieved it.

Thanks so much for your support of our family and the winery. We couldn’t do any of this without you!

Warm regards,

Ordering your wine

The best way to secure your wine is to use our online store at ShaferVineyards.com. For those who do not have Internet access, we are able to take your order by telephone.

Remember that to remain on the Hillside Select list, we ask that you purchase at least one bottle of this release by August 1, 2016. In order to protect the wine from potential heat damage, we will ship your order during the cooler weeks of November 2016.

“Wine is constant proof that God loves us and loves to see us happy.”

— Benjamin Franklin

Join us on social media

Get behind-the-scenes photos and updates from Shafer Vineyards by joining us on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and Tumblr.
Purity and Power

A VINTAGE THAT CARRIES ON A LONG, DELICIOUS TRADITION

The 30th vintage of Hillside Select is in some ways a return to an earlier era.

“After several cool vintages, 2012 represents not just a change in the weather but the kind of year the Shafer team knows very well,” says Doug Shafer.

Shafer winemaker Elias Fernandez agrees. “The 2012 growing season took me back to the classic Napa Valley vintages I knew as a teenager,” says Fernandez, who grew up in Napa Valley. “The mornings started off with some fog and overcast; by midday it burned off and the sky was vivid blue. By afternoon we got heat in the 90s and by five or six o’clock it started cooling down so that if you ate dinner outside you needed a jacket.”

Ideal Conditions

The year 2012 started with a mild spring and a good dose of rain in mid-March that filled Shafer’s irrigation ponds and set the stage for healthy vine growth.

“We had a good fruit set giving us an average sized crop of Cabernet Sauvignon in contrast to the lighter crop levels we’d seen with this variety in the past three vintages,” says Fernandez.

Vineyard Location: 100% Shafer’s Hillside Estate Vineyard in Stags Leap District including vineyard blocks such as Sunspot, John’s Upper Seven, Hitching Post, and Venado Ilegal

Varietal Composition: 100% Cabernet Sauvignon

Brix at Harvest: 24.0° - 26.0°

Alcohol: 15.5%

Cooperage: 32 months in 100% new 60-gallon French oak barrels (Allier & Tronçais)

Suggested California Retail: $265
Summer stayed on the cool side with most days in the mid-70s to mid-80s and then in August Mother Nature did exactly what we hoped, which was turn up the heat, moving into the 90s.

“The wines of this vintage remind me of those of 1997, 2004 and 2007. There’s a voluptuous, mouth-filling richness, offering brightness and acidity. It seems like you can taste all those sunny days in June, July, and August...”

An Unrivaled Year

“It was a rare year in that we weren’t thrown any curves. We didn’t have frost in spring, we didn’t have cold weather during bloom or set, we didn’t get extreme heat, and there was very little rain. After 30 years of making wines I can tell you, grapes do not like surprises — they like long stretches of steady, consistent weather with that see-saw of daytime heat and nighttime cooling which creates a very nice balance of sugars and acidity,” says Doug Shafer.

On September 17 the Shafer team started picking, which put it about two weeks before harvest started in the cooler years of 2011 and 2010. Things wound down by the second week of October.

“The wines of this vintage remind me of those of 1997, 2004, and 2007. There’s a voluptuous, mouth-filling richness, offering brightness and acidity. It seems like you can taste all those sunny days in June, July, and August,” says Fernandez.

Winemakers Comments

“A beautiful reflection of both its rugged vineyard site and an ideal vintage. Room-filling, energetic aromas of juicy, dark fruit and white flowers are completed by complex, youthful core flavors of blackberry, cassis, and black cherry along with delicate herbs, graphite, and smoke. The wine is smooth and balanced as it moves through the mouth. The texture is seamless and light on its feet with classic Stags Leap District tannins that are ripe and ready for aging. There’s a lot of lush, vivid pleasure in the bottle now with more to come with a few years in a good cellar.”

— Elias Fernandez, Winemaker

2012 Hillside Select Reviews

“This is a beauty, with crème de cassis notes intermixed with spring flowers, a touch of toasty oak, blackberries, blueberries and cassis, as well as licorice, vanillin and a full-bodied mouthfeel. At this stage, it is more voluptuous and opulent than the 2010, simply because that’s the hallmark style of the 2012. No doubt this is a 30- to 50-year wine if you want to cellar it properly and nibble on it over a long period of time ... once again, a fabulous effort.”

— Robert M. Parker, Jr., The Wine Advocate

“A total hedonistic turn-on ... bursts from the glass with intense raciness and voluptuousness. Dark red cherry, pomegranate, spice and new leather flesh out on the opulent finish. Hints of torrefaction, mocha and French oak ...”

— Antonio Galloni, VinousMedia.com

“A wine with incredible finesse and elegance. Blackberry, blueberry, mineral, violet and lavender aromas. Wet earth floor and stone. Full body, very fine tannins and fabulous freshness. The length and polish is truly exceptional. The hint of austerity makes it irresistible. A joy to drink. But has a great future ahead of it.”

— James Suckling, JamesSuckling.com
The Romanticism of Old Wine

By David White

When I arrived to dinner with a bottle of Bordeaux from 1924, I was optimistic that I’d have the wine of the night. Some friends and I had taken over Chez Le Commis, an underground supper club in Washington, D.C., with a plan to open old Bordeaux.

My bottle hailed from Château Desmirail, a Margaux estate that was classified as a Third Growth in the 1855 classification of Bordeaux. While I knew that all the wines would be impressive — our table included a 1968 Lafite, a 1975 Latour, a 1979 Palmer, a 1981 Cheval Blanc, and plenty more — I couldn’t imagine that anyone would have a bottle as old as mine. It was in excellent condition, too, so I hoped my bottle would also be the most delicious.

I was wrong on both counts.

Old vs. Aged

The wine was toast. The color had somehow dropped, so it looked more like dirty pond water than wine. It smelled — and tasted — like weak, caramel-flavored vinegar.

Then one attendee pulled a bottle of 1919 Château d’Issan. He had recently picked it up at auction in a mixed case of old wine — and kept it hidden away for the first part of the evening. With the first whiff, everyone went silent. With the first taste, every jaw dropped. We simultaneously and immediately recognized the potential of old wine.

For starters, the wine was still vibrant. It was packed with savory, dark fruit, and backed by roasted nuts, eucalyptus, and cedar. As we searched for descriptors, the conversation turned toward those who made the wine. The Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1919, officially ending World War 1. So the wine was made while cleaning up from the wreckage of the first global war and hoping for a brighter future.

Cellar Secrets

Aging wine has an ancient history. In Greece’s earliest days, straw wines — those made from grapes that have been dried — were noted for their ability to age. In the Book of Luke, which was drafted in the middle of the first century, Christians learned that old wine is superior: “No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.”

Appreciation for aged wine almost certainly vanished after the fall of the Roman Empire, mainly because most wines at the time came from northern Europe, where they were light in body, alcohol, and sugar, and thus unable to age well.

That began to change in the 16th century as sweet, alcoholic wines from the Mediterranean gained attention for their ability to keep. By the 18th century, aged wines were appreciated across Europe. For one thing, fortified wines like Port, Madeira, and Sherry — which were packed with alcohol and sugar, perfect preservatives — became popular. Just as important, though, was the cork. Thanks to this invention, wine merchants — and even some producers — were able to bottle wines in airtight vessels that could easily be stored.

When wine is kept in a cool, dark place — envision an 18th-century cellar or a modern, 55-degree storage unit — it develops slowly and predictably, hopefully becoming more complex and interesting. Through the cork, oxygen slowly enters and exits the bottle.
Tannins — those chalky, drying molecules that come from stems, seeds, and skins — slowly soften and become better integrated. The exact chemical interactions that take place still aren’t completely understood by scientists. But over time, fresh, ripe aromas and flavors will fade as tertiary characteristics like earth, leather, and perfume emerge.

**Balanced for Longevity**

Not all wines improve with age, of course. Even with proper storage, many wines simply aren’t built to last. Just as the best young wines are balanced, those best able to age are free of overpowering alcohol, acid, and oak. When a wine is in balance, no single component dominates in a heavy handed way.

Old wine isn’t necessarily better; it’s just different.

Think about antique cars. If properly maintained, a Porsche 911 from the 1960s would offer a charming and beautiful driving experience. A 2016 Toyota Camry wouldn’t be the same, even though it has plenty more bells and whistles and a much more sophisticated engine.

Wine, too, can offer a window to other times and places. Consider that 1919 Château d’Issan. It brought my friends and me to an era long before we were born.

Wines can also help recreate special experiences. Those who stock up on bottles while traveling recognize that each bottle opened at home offers a quick visit back to their getaway. Those who toast their spouses with wines from the year they married recognize that opening wine is like opening a time capsule.

Romantic? Sure, but wine is there to nourish the romantic in us all.

David White is the author of *But First, Champagne: A Modern Guide to the World’s Favorite Wine* (Skyhorse, October 2016). The founder and editor of Terroirist.com, one of the world’s most popular wine blogs, he is a columnist for Grape Collective.
Beating TCA

At Shafer the aromas and flavors of ‘corked’ wine are history

For more than 20 years the winemaking team at Shafer has been fighting TCA on multiple fronts and they’re winning.

“The future of Shafer wine is TCA-free,” says Doug Shafer. “We’ve been working toward this for a long time and are thrilled to reach this historic point.”

While Shafer runs an extremely clean cellar, making TCA an infrequent issue, the goal for more than two decades has been 100 percent eradication.

“Once we started really looking for it in the early 1990s, we found more and more places where TCA could be present in the cellar,” says winemaker Elias Fernandez. “The difficult thing about TCA is that it hides in places you don’t even think to look.”

Knowing Your Enemy

TCA is an acronym for the chemical compound 2,4,6-trichloroanisole, which is responsible for the aromas and flavors often called “corkiness” in wine or “cork taint,” though if a winemaking team only looks at corks, they will miss many other places it can hide. TCA is a compound that is most at home in porous organic substances such as wood, cork, and cardboard — materials that are found in abundance in the traditional wine cellar.

“The first thing we did was to eliminate as much wood as possible from our cellar,” says Fernandez.

One of first things to go was the use of wooden pallets for storage. Shafer uses plastic pallets throughout the facility. In addition, in the cellar all the wooden barrel racks were replaced with stainless steel and the wedges used to hold barrels in place were replaced with new ones made from aluminum.

Putting a Cork in It

The most recent advances in this battle come from a new approach to corks and barrels.

In two of our wines — Red Shoulder Ranch Chardonnay and Merlot — Shafer has moved to corks produced by French company Diam. The manufacturer grinds natural cork, and using a process like that of removing caffeine from coffee beans, purifies the cork of contaminants at the molecular level. This material is re-formed into a wine cork and Diam guarantees them to be TCA-free.

While Shafer has tested Diam corks for seven years and finds them to be free of TCA taint, how do they hold up over 10 or 20 years? We don’t yet know. In the meantime the natural cork industry now offers traditionally made wine corks that are individually tested for the presence of TCA. Shafer is now using these corks in wines that customers tend to age the
longest — Relentless, One Point Five, and Hillside Select.

Barreling Toward a Solution
A few years ago Elias Fernandez identified a source of TCA hidden in the process of traditional barrel making.

“The two main parts of a wine barrel are the body, made of staves, and at each end there’s a round wooden piece called the head. The head seats into a round groove cut inside the staves and traditionally a seal is created there using a flour paste — essentially bread dough,” says Fernandez.

When barrels would arrive at the winery, Elias would check each one, first smelling each to see if he could detect TCA and then running a light around the interior.

Over time he began to realize that the flour paste used to seal the groove where the staves met the head was a problem.


He found instances in which mold had developed inside the barrel thanks to the presence of the flour paste. He strongly suspected that when he did find the scent of TCA inside an otherwise clean-looking barrel, the flour paste was offering a hiding place for it.

Break with Tradition
But getting barrel makers to change decades, if not hundreds of years, of tradition proved difficult.

One barrel maker, Dempots in Napa, listened to Elias’s reasoning and developed a system for sealing their barrels with a neutral paraffin wax as a replacement for the flour paste.

“We are very pleased with the change to food-grade paraffin and are not only making the change to our barrels here in the U.S. but in our cooperages in France, Spain, and Australia as well,” says Will Jamieson, master cooper/managing partner, Dempots Napa Cooperages.

At Shafer, Elias agrees it’s been a successful change. “My hope is that I will get the other barrel makers we work with to move in this direction too,” he says.
Hillside Select Tasting Notes

These are abridged tasting notes from Doug Shafer and Elias Fernandez. For the complete notes for all vintages visit our website: http://www.shafervineyards.com/wines/hillside.php

2012 A beautiful reflection of both its vineyard and vintage. Room-filling, energetic aromas of juicy, dark fruit, and white flowers are completed by complex, youthful core-flavors of blackberry, cassis, and black cherry along with delicate herbs, graphite, and smoke. The wine is smooth and balanced as it moves through the mouth. The texture is seamless and light on its feet with classic Stags Leap District tannins that are ripe and ready for aging. There's a lot of lush, vivid pleasure in the bottle now with more to come with a few years in a good cellar. Drink now – 20 years

2011 Offers youthful vibrancy along with the promise of the riches of age. Both in the nose and in the mouth it’s brimming with mulberry and bramble fruit as well as tantalizing layers of chocolate, black truffle, tobacco, herbs, nutmeg, cinnamon, and a slate-like minerality. A long, lifted finish. Drink now – 18/20 years

2010 Exudes dramatic color, high-toned, elegant aromas, and full, refined flavors of dark cherry, cassis, espresso, sweet vanilla, and wet earth with enticing rose petal, cranberry, blueberry, oregano, and sage. Smooth-textured tannins and a persistent finish. Drink now – 18/19 years

2009 Lively aromas and luxuriant flavors of black fruit that are rich and juicy down to the core, with enticing layers of cocoa, black tea, spice, subtle toast, and the kind of mouthfeel you only get with ripe, silky Stags Leap District tannins. Drink now – 17/19 years

2008 Aromatic elegance leads to rich flavors of blackberry, black cherry, dark chocolate, cola, cassis, black tea, with spice and warm toast. Ripe, silken tannins result in a pleasing, lengthy finish, smooth texture, and a refined structure. Drink now – 18 years

2007 Aromas and flavors of black fruit, mocha, black plums, cassis, juicy black and red cherry, black tea, with spice and warm toast. Ripe, smooth, and an elegant structure. Drink now – 17 years

2006 Aromatic beauty and a core of chocolate, black plums, cassis, herbs, black and red cherry, black tea, and vanilla and spice. Ripe tannins and good structure. Drink now – 15/16 years

2005 Enticing aromas of blackberry and cassis, flavors of black cherry, currant, cassis liqueur, black plum, dark chocolate, spice and tobacco. Round, smooth tannins. Drink now – 15 years

2004 Enduring aromas and flavors blackberry, cassis, dark chocolate, juicy black cherry, and black pepper integrated nicely with silky tannins. Drink now – 14 years

2003 Expansive and juicy. Aromas and flavors of blackberry, black cherry, and spice with a rich cassis, blackberry, toast, mocha, herbs, and a seamless integration of soft, ripe tannins. Drink now – 12 years

2002 A harmonious, expansive, silky liquid feast of black cherry, rich plum, black fruit, cassis, and dark chocolate shot through with toasty vanilla, blueberry, and cedar. Drink now – 12 years

2001 Elegant blackberry, currant, black cherry, cola, and cassis; rich, stylish dark fruit flavors, with a balanced seasoning of minerals, smoke, vanilla, tobacco, and herbs. Drink now – 10 years

2000 Pleasing black fruit, pepper, mineral, sweet-spicy vanilla, and dried herbs. Showing age characteristics of cedar and tea. A core of sweetness and supple, mature tannins. Drink now – 4 years

1999 A richness of raspberry, blackberry, cola, and briar fruit; showing more mature notes of tobacco, herbs, and minerals and a core of sweetness. Drink now – 6 years

1998 Deep color at the core of the glass with soft tannins and luscious blend of currants, vanilla, and mineral in the mouth and a long finish. Drink now – 3 years

1997 Elegant characteristics of cedar, tea, and tobacco. Even so, it continues to offer rich mouthfeel, dark color, with flavors of chocolate, spice, and black fruit. Drink now – 8 years

1996 Alluring aromatics and elegantly balanced fruit flavors. Showing plush black currant and dark spice with a long finish. Drink now – 3 years

1995 Shows richness, composure, and lovely, dark-fruit complexity. Powerful, ripe, and elegant, with velvety brick color, and maturing flavors. Drink now – 3 years

1994 Showing delicate, complex layers of tea, cedar, tobacco, and leather. This is bottle bouquet in a delicious phase. Drink now – 3 years