

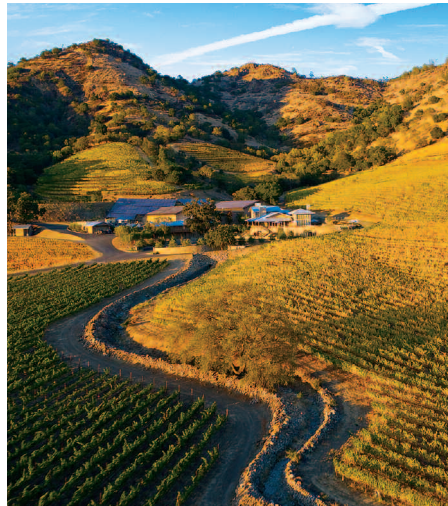


THE HILLSIDE SELECT® STORY

ELEGANT CABERNET SAUVIGNON FLAVORS FROM RUGGED VINEYARD SITE

Sheer rock walls tower along the eastern boundary of Shafer’s hillside estate vineyards, reflecting the warming rays of the afternoon sun and channeling cool breezes off the bay. These are the Stags Leap palisades from which this small appellation takes its name. They create a craggy amphitheater that is home to Shafer Vineyards and stand as a silent testament to the eons-old history of the place.

On this remote site Cabernet Sauvignon vines prod their roots through thin, volcanic soil before hitting weathered bedrock below. Thanks to scant nutrients and soil moisture the yields are meager; the berries at harvest time are small, about the size of blueberries. They’re dark and intensely flavored.



Shafer’s property has been the site of vineyard cultivation since the 1880s, but it wasn’t until the 1970s when John Shafer came to Napa Valley looking for a hillside site, that vines were planted on these rock-choked slopes.

Napa Valley viticulture was a different world in the 1970s, when Shafer acquired the neglected vineyards planted 50 years earlier by a farmer named Batista Scansi. White varieties sometimes grew side by side with red, modern trellising was unknown, and existing vineyards had been planted with little regard to what is now known about the relationship between terroir and varietal. On the Shafer property, vine spacing of the original hillside vineyard was on an 8 x 8 foot grid and cross cultivation by tractor proved perilous, as the machine side-slipped down the rocky slope.

Planting the steep upper vineyard called for dynamite to uproot truck-sized boulders and clear the land for planting, actions that earned the precipitous vineyard block its name of “John’s Folly.” Today, John’s Folly is the grand-dad of the hillside Cabernet blocks, an important component of Hillside Select Cabernet. It comes as no surprise that many

of the vineyard blocks bear the names of favorite ski runs, one of them Sunspot, named after a challenging slope in Alta, Utah.

Made from a single varietal, 100% Cabernet Sauvignon, Hillside Select gains complexity from the variety of clones and rootstocks planted in the vineyards, each of which adds its individual characteristics to the finished wine.

The exposure of each vineyard block is also part of the complexity equation. Upper and Lower Sunspot blocks, for example, obtain maximum sunlight because they face southwest, ideal in most vintages because the vines receive the last warming rays of the setting sun, but requiring close monitoring for sunburn if a heat spike occurs. Other blocks like John’s Folly, Rattler and Lookout have a southern exposure and are shaded by the contours of the hills earlier in the evening, ripening slowly and evenly, ensuring long hang time.

The range of vineyard exposures and diversity of clones, each ripening on a slightly different schedule, ensure that Hillside Select will be produced each year regardless of the vagaries of the weather, although quantities will vary by vintage.

Until recent years, a well-tended vineyard was notable for its neatness: the earth cleared of any other greenery that might compete with the vines. Along with the risk of toxicity to humans and other life forms, the herbicides used left the vines as even greater targets to voracious insects. Fighting these pests took another layer of chemical treatment. And the meager soil of hillside vineyards was vulnerable to loss from winter runoff, depleting an already precious resource.



In the 1980s, Doug Shafer, John's son, began a program of sustainable agriculture, planting native cover crops to offer cover to beneficial and predacious insects, control erosion, and serve as compost when the greens were turned into the soil at the end of their growing cycle. Above ground, Shafer erected hawk perches and barn owl boxes to attract birds of prey to naturally control unwanted rodents (this eliminated the need for rodent poisons). Each year, the thin soil of the hillside vineyards is enriched, and the reliance on chemicals in the vineyard is eliminated.

From the first vintage, the wine from the hillside vineyards showed the same intense fruit and velvety texture year after year. It was an expression of the land, a wine of a place, and it became Shafer's signature wine, Hillside Select Cabernet Sauvignon.

The hillside grapes are picked into small bins, so they arrive at the crush pad intact, not crushed under their own weight. Culled early in the growing season, the grapes are meticulously sorted again by hand in the field prior to harvest, arriving at the crush pad clean. At the winery, state-of-the-art crushing equipment continues the sorting, with a cage sized just for the diminutive hillside grapes removing the fragile stems, which tend to separate easily from the small hillside-grown berries.

Once in the fermenter, the hillside juice is given special treatment. The maceration and gentle pumping-over are designed to extract every nuance from the grapes. Even the barrels used for aging are selected individually from a shipment of the finest tight-grain

French oak; winemaker Elias Fernandez smells each barrel to choose the most aromatic for the Hillside Select Cabernet.

The wine ages in new French oak barrels for 32 months prior to bottling. The Cabernet rests for another year in the bottle before it is ready for release.

In the end only about 2,400 cases of Shafer's signature wine are produced each year, offered on a limited basis to lovers of fine wine and to top restaurants and hotels in selected markets throughout the world.