

Diamond Series



Vine Cliff Winery

Like a flashy thoroughbred horse whose fashionable pedigree imparts breeding and class, Napa Valley's Vine Cliff Winery stands confidently among the wine industry's elite establishments from a number of points of view.

First of all, Vine Cliff's history traces back to the original estate of Gorge C. Yount, one of Napa's founding scions and namesake for the popular Southern Napa town. Five years after Yount's death in 1865, George Burrage and Thomas Tucker purchased a portion of his estate and started wine production approximately a year later. The site was situated on a rocky hillside on Napa Valley's northeast side and quickly became the largest winery in the valley.

When Burrage and Tucker died prior to 1890, wealthy San Franciscan John Fry purchased the property with its incredible winery and tunnel complex and set out to make Vine Cliff the finest winery in the State. He had made his fortune in Nevada silver and through San Francisco real estate investments. He also had important connections to the important Napa Valley Wine Company, a dominant force in the late 19th Century wine industry.

Phyloxera destroyed both the vineyards and winery and by 1900, wine production had come to an end.

It wasn't until eighty-five years later that the proverbial phoenix arose and Vine Cliff was rescued from obscurity. The winery's modern day benefactors are the Sweeney Family of Northern Virginia, who gained prominence in the hotel business and finally settled in Napa Valley. In 1985, Chuck and Nell Sweeney purchased the estate and set about to restore it to its former elegance and standing.

At the same time, the winery was officially proclaimed a "ghost" winery, or a winery that had fallen on hard times and had to be abandoned.

Of the original winery and tunnels, only the rudimentary first floor and most of the tunnel complex remained. For the next decade, the Sweeney Family embarked on an ambitious building plan that today ranks Vine Cliff among the finest facilities in the entire world. The winery's centerpiece is a state-of-the-art gravity fed production plant that compliments its world-class buildings and vineyards.

The Sweeney's 44-year-old son Rob who serves as Vine Cliff's general manager makes most of Vine Cliff's day-to-day decisions. Rob returned to Napa Valley in 1990 to manage the family's vineyard operations and lend a hand in running the winery. Upon his return, Rob immediately introduced a number of specific ecological farming practices to Vine Cliff, a subject about which he is most passionate.

"If I had my own way," he recently confided, "Vine Cliff would be 100% organic. Due to the steep slopes that constitute our vineyards and the incredible rockiness that persists throughout the area, I prefer to call it integrated pest management, at least for now."

It is also interesting that Vine Cliff Winery's annual production has recently shrunk to around the 10-11,000-case range, down from approximately 17,000 cases around

the turn of the century. This can be attributed to the winery's decision to plant a number of new vineyards in specific appellations with the ultimate aim of being a completely estate-producing winery.

Vine Cliff hopes to reach the 20,000 case level sometime in the future, but Rob Sweeney feels the ascent will be quite gradual.



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“We are in no real hurry,” Sweeney further explained. “The idea has always been quality. To that end we have never left a stone unturned that could help us attain our goal. I am immensely pleased with the strides our winemaking has achieved in just the past few years. I can honestly say that we are narrowing in on being the very best we can be.”

While Rob Sweeney carries the mantle for Vine Cliff’s everyday operations, he credits his parents with continuing roles in the operation. His father Chuck is the financial heart of Vine Cliff; a person Rob calls “a true visionary.” Rob’s mother Nell is the creative force of the winery and has final say regarding labeling, brochures and much of Vine Cliff’s point of sale.

The Sweeneys are truly a hard working family, firmly dedicated to the continuing job of improving both the quality and image of the winery. As for Rob Sweeney, he’d just as soon greet you with a shovel in the vineyards than behind his office desk.

Such a reliable formula is destined for greatness. Many wine industry insiders believe Vine Cliff has already achieved such status.

Accolades and Tasting Notes



95-Points, *Wine Enthusiast* magazine — “This blend of Oakville and Calistoga fruit is marked by intensely ripe cherry, cassis, cocoa and oak flavors and fabulous balance. Superbly rich and massive, with rich, smooth tannins, this lovely Cab maintains elegance and structural integrity through the long, polished finish. It’s better than most Cabs that cost far more, making it a fantastic value.”

Best of the Year 2005; Top 100 Wines of 2005, Wine #14, *Wine Enthusiast* magazine — Vine Cliff 2002 Cabernet Sauvignon; 86% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Cabernet Franc, 4% Petite Verdot.

Reorder

Every once in awhile a wine comes along that throws the California wine world for a loop; one that defies conventional wisdom; one that seems too good to be true. The Vine Cliff 2002 Cabernet Sauvignon is such a wine. In terms of quality this wine could easily fetch twice the price. Ripe Bing cherry, blueberry and deep black plum fruits. “Floral aroma with violets and lavender laced with spicy oak, hints of cocoa, caramel and sweet expensive leather. On the palate, sweet, juicy upfront ripe cherry and plum fruit. Soft supple texture. Big rich mid-palate with long chewy tannins on the finish.” Try not to lick the page.

The good news is we have a reasonable amount in inventory. The not-so-good news is it’ll be gone in a wink.

Winery Direct: \$45.00 / bottle

Diamond Series Price:

3 bottles-\$43.00 / bottle

6 bottles-\$41.00 / bottle

12 bottles-\$39.00 / bottle

(Plus shipping)

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