

Regal refinement

Winter warmers from Chopin, Churchill, Louis XIII and the Knights of Alba

Uncorked

Stags' Leap Napa Valley

Price HK\$588 per 750ml bottle
Grape varietal

Cabernet Sauvignon

Just seven miles north of the Napa, in a valley within a valley, is the celebrated Stags' Leap winery. The estate was named "Stags' Leap" after an old native Indian legend about brave stags leaping across the crags of the palisades bordering the estate to escape pursuing hunters.

Stags' Leap was founded by Horace and Minnie Chase in 1893. Minnie was the daughter of a prominent US senator, and their home on the estate soon became the centre of social life, attracting artists, musicians and politicians from San Francisco and beyond. The faithfully restored stone winery and gracious manor house stand testament to Horace and Minnie's grand vision to create outstanding Californian wine using the noble grapes of Bordeaux.

Traditional Bordeaux winemaking techniques were employed by winemaker Kevin Morrissey to create the 2003 Stags' Leap Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon. The grapes were all hand picked before undergoing fermentation in small lots using a combination of open and closed fermenters. Gentle hand plunging during extended maceration has produced a wine with good colour and extraction with no harsh phenolic characters.

Two years' maturation was completed in 100 percent French oak barrels, about half of which were new. This Cabernet displays beautiful varietal characteristics with ripe cherries, blackberries and plum supported by a lovely violet lift. Notes of oak-derived spice, coffee beans, praline and dark chocolate are woven together by supple tannins. A dash of Cabernet Franc and Merlot adds a further dimension of complexity and fleshes out the middle palate beautifully. This is a wine that will reward careful cellaring for 10 or more years. If it doesn't strike you as unseemly, drink it with roasted venison loin and a red wine jus.



Left to right: Hong Kong's Knights of Alba - Claudio Salgado, John Dibble, Gregory De'eb and Stephen Lazar

Cloak and Tuber

Draped in heavy cloaks and gathered in underground cellars, they could be warlocks. Yet there's no dark art going on here, only fine wines and truffles. They are, to give them their full, medieval-sounding name, the Ordine dei Cavalieri del Tartufo e dei Vini di Alba (the Order of Knights of the Truffle and Wines of Alba), often shortened to the Knights of Alba. They are a wine and gastronomic fraternity sworn to upholding the prestige of products from the town of Alba and the surrounding Langhe area in Piedmont, in Italy's north. Most notable among the Piedmontese bounty are *Tuber magnatum Pico* - the famous white truffle - and the "big B's," Barolo and Barbaresco wines.

In November, Grandmaster Alfredo Boratto and his retinue of winemakers travelled from

the order's spiritual home, the 13th-century castle Grinzane Cavour, to the Crown Wine Cellars in Shouson Hill to swear in the first five Hong Kong-based knights. Only the second order to exist outside of Italy (the other is in New York), the Hong Kong knights are John Dibble, Crown Wine Cellars' General Manager Gregory De'eb, Jim Thompson, Claudio Salgado and Stephen Lazar. After the official ceremony, in which the inductees were bestowed with gleaming House of Savoy medallions, the knights and 30-odd guests got down to business in true Piedmontese style: a fine white truffle dinner with copious Barolo, Barbaresco and Moscato wines.

I Like Chopin

You say tomato, I say toma-tah. You say potato, I say vod-ka. That's what you'll be crooning after sampling the world's only luxury potato vodka from Poland. Named after the famous Polish composer, Chopin Vodka is distilled four times from naturally grown Stobranow or Podlaskie potatoes from Eastern Poland. These potatoes possess twice the starch content of other types, resulting in an exceptionally rich, creamy vodka with pleasing notes of green apple. Chopin, which won double gold at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition, is also known for its softness on the throat. Without that harsh burning, you'll be able to keep on crooning. You say tomato ...

CHOPIN

