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## Silverado Trail Blazer

*A Napa Valley mainstay upholds the region's pioneering tradition.*

THE EARLY PIONEERS of Napa Valley were often reluctant refugees or eager visionaries—descriptions that apply equally to Diane and Ron Miller, who, in a later (if perhaps not kinder) century, decided to plant roots in the soil of wine country. The couple's quest began in 1976, when—along with Diane's mother, Lillian Disney, Walt Disney's widow—they began to search for a retreat from the urban sprawl of Southern California. "We loved the wine country," recalls Ron. "We bought our home over near Yountville. But then Diane's mother was looking for her own home at about the same time, and she bought the property that the winery is now sitting on."

The winery in question is that of Silverado Vineyards, which celebrated its 25th anniversary last year. The facility, which occupies Mrs. Disney's acreage on Napa's Silverado Trail, is the hub of a winemaking enterprise that neither of the Millers could have envisioned when they arrived in the Valley. Indeed, they were quite content to sell the fruit that came from their vineyards to Clos Du Val, Chateau Montelena, and others. The latter winery, however, had figured largely in the famed 1976 Paris tasting at which international critics had selected California wines over the more illustrious productions of Bordeaux and Burgundy. The buzz that followed gave the Millers pause. "We became aware that the various wineries that had bought our fruit were pretty outstanding ones," notes Ron. "And we had this location, and the three of us—Diane's mother, myself, and Diane—elected to go into the wine business."

Neophytes though they were at the time, the Millers possessed two vineyards of impeccable provenance. The 81-acre Yountville property, now known as Miller Ranch Vineyard, was originally planted to wine grapes in the 1890s and produces crisp, deliciously mineral Chardonnays and Sauvignon Blancs. Yet the heart and soul of Silverado issues from the Stags Leap Vineyard, Mrs. Disney's land, which not only established the winery's reputation for

superb Cabernet Sauvignon, but also contributed significantly to that of the Stags Leap District itself.

First planted to vines in 1884 by Italian-Swiss immigrants, this vineyard infuses its Cabernet Sauvignon grapes with dark plum, black cherry, and dried herbs. The property's character was further evinced when the University of California, Davis' Department of Viticulture & Enology granted a Heritage

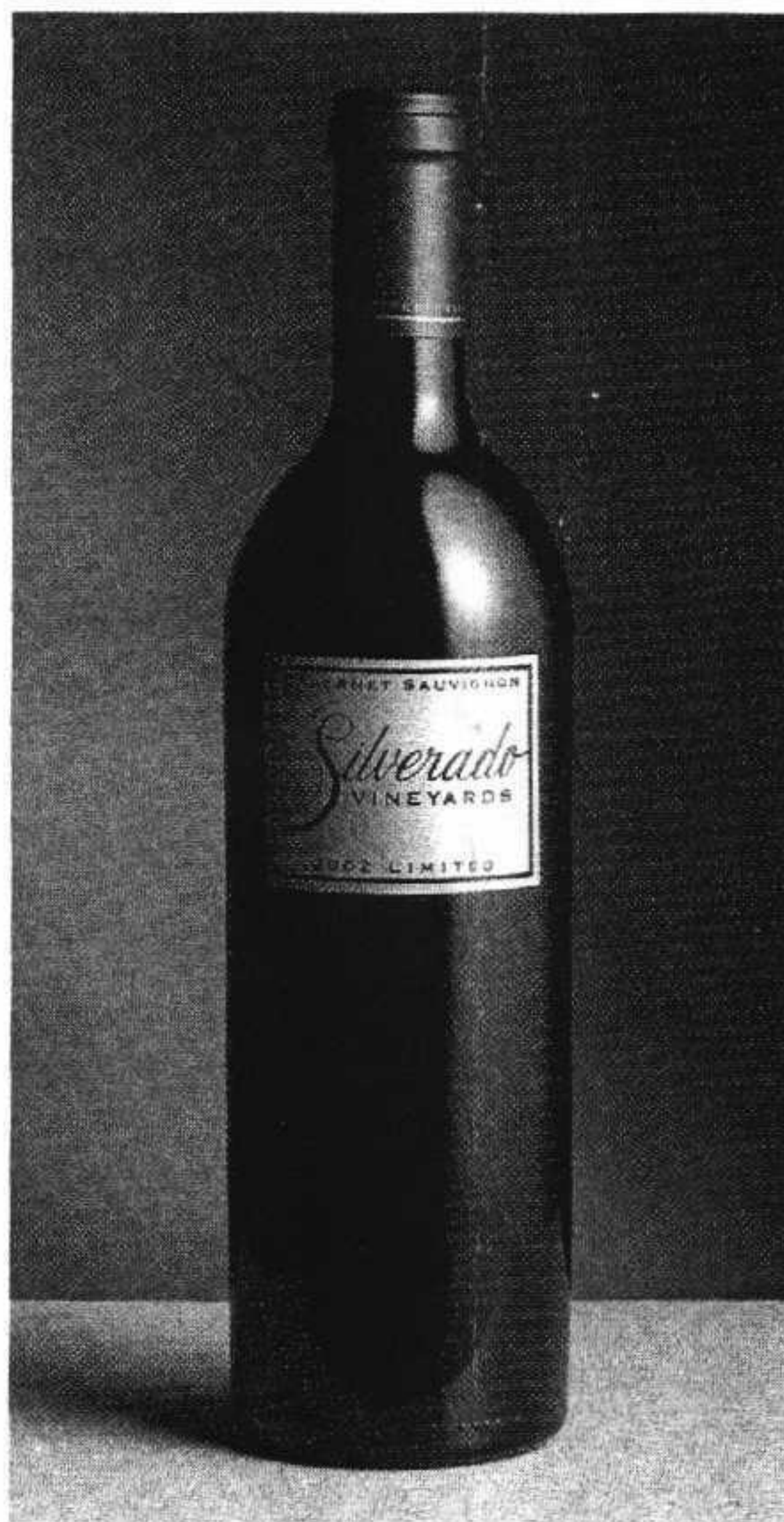
Field Selection Designation to one of the clones discovered in the vineyard. The Disney Silverado Heritage Selection Number 30 is one of only three mutations the school recognizes as unique.

"They've designated it as significantly different from the French stock and significantly suited to a site," says Russ Weis, general manager of Silverado Vineyards. "So we have this thing that's basically indigenous, which developed right here at this vineyard."

The clone and the vineyard impart silky tannins and plum and cherry essences, along with the berry fruit typical of Stags Leap. These characteristics have come to define, in particular, Silverado's Solo (\$78), a single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon entirely sourced from this vineyard, and the winery's Limited Reserve, which is produced only in the finest vintages.

"The Limited Reserve is Silverado's version of declaring a vintage," explains winemaker Jonathan Emmerich. "We make it only in years that, from beginning to end, are pretty stellar." Blended

from small lots within Stags Leap and the Mount George Vineyard (another historic site), the 2002 Limited Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon is dense and dark, with ripe cherry, chocolate, smoked oak, and sweet sage flavors atop exquisitely defined tannins. Unlike so many Stags Leap Cabernets, which emphasize powerful expressions of flavor, the Limited Reserve achieves strength through grace: The wines, like the first pioneer vintners themselves, are sturdy yet polished and, in their own way, making a little Napa history. —BRETT ANDERSON



Silverado Vineyards, 707.257.1770, [www.silveradovineyards.com](http://www.silveradovineyards.com)

*Silverado Vineyards' 2002 Limited Reserve (\$100) is a graceful, rather than overpowering, expression of the Cabernet Sauvignon grape.*

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