

Vintages build family inheritance

Mention of the Stag's Leap region of Napa Valley conjures up the names of two prominent wineries, Stag's Leap Winery and Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. Both are widely known as makers of fine petite syrah and cabernet sauvignon, respectively and have earned their reputations over the years.

They are also known for, and get a lot of press from, their continuing litigation to do each other in regarding rights to their names. It is a region to be proud of, a name to fight for.

But there is a third winery in this immediate area, one that gets less press but which goes about each vintage producing wines of high quality. It should be better known. These wines are in limited national distribution but fortunately we are able to purchase them locally.

The winery carries the family name, Shafer, and it is truly a family-run-and-owned operation. John and his wife Bett have four grown children who are variously involved in the operation. John feels he is building a family inheritance with each vintage and he wants it to be associated with the very best he can produce. More on that later.

The wines, cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc (blending), chardonnay and now merlot (replacing zinfandel) are all grown on family property. The vineyards each carry a name and reflect the subtle microclimates so prevalent in the area. The plots are small and scattered, the grapes stressed and intense, the vines beautifully maintained. Special machinery is fabricated to cultivate the terrain. The winery, a model of efficiency, is self-contained and immaculate.

THE SHAFERS left Chicago and the publishing business in 1972 to adopt a second career and lifestyle for their family. Plantings were soon begun and their first wines came from the 1978 vintage. These originally included zinfandel but the focus has increasingly run to cabernet and chardonnay exclusively, with merlot rounding out the line beginning with the 1983 harvest. (The 1983 zinfandel carries the caveat "Last Chance" on its label).

John recently assured me, however, that if and when the market for zinfandel returns he is prepared to purchase these grapes and market them as a varietal once again.

Shafer cabernets emphasize the velvety, purple and violet tendencies of Stag's Leap grapes but carry greater intensity than those of the Wine Cellars. They are opulent and can be drunk when released but carry enough tannin to encourage some bottle development.

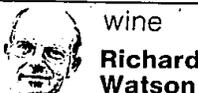
In addition to the two standard issues, beginning in 1982, there have been "reserve" cabernets. The 1982, soon to be available here, is a lovely, full and complex wine, and the 1983, called Hillside Select, may be even better. But my favorite is the 1984 vintage: select or standard issue, this is a vintage to be reckoned with from Shafer. Marvellous fruit and complexity already!

Shafer's 1981 chardonnay has lacked definition for me in the past. However, the next two vintages show that this grape is now the equal of its cabernet efforts in quality. The splendid 1982 is now available.

The 1983 merlot, recently sampled from wood, shows good earthy qualities that should continue to develop with sufficient bottle aging.

Its zinfandels have been sound, if unexceptional.

Shafer is a winery with a clear vision, peopled by individuals who know what they want. Earlier I mentioned its high standards. Evidence of this is demonstrated by two very tough decisions Shafer has made in the last couple of years. In this relatively small winery (14,000 cases) decisions to



wine
**Richard
Watson**

abandon a vintage release do not come easily. Shafer has twice elected to reject vintages, feeling they were not up to the standards of the winery.

THE 1981 CABERNET was sold off to another winery (I wonder which). It was a wine "uncharacteristic of Shafer cabernet." The 1982 zinfandel was retained but marketed at half its original price as a Red Table Wine. Decisions such as these take integrity and guts. Incidentally, the 1982 Red is around

locally at a very good price and is a very decent wine.

Shafer makes excellent wines for quality consumption. These are not quaffing wines for everyday use. They are among California's finest and deserve the praise they get from all facets of the press. The Stag's Leap area is not only litigation and hype. Shafer Vineyards is a good illustration of its quality production, even though it has not traded on the name.



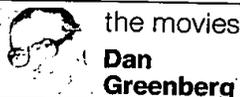
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Oscar nominees for Best Actor are F. Murray Abraham (bottom, left), Sam Waterston, Albert Finney, Tom Hulce and Jeff Bridges. Best Actress nominees are Judy Davis, Vanessa Redgrave, Betsy Spack, Jessica Lange and Sally Field.



the movies
**Dan
Greenberg**

Guessing who wins Academy Awards isn't so easy to do

Welcome to Greenberg's annual attempt to score a perfect zero on second-guessing the Oscar people.

Last year I came close, sitting around the house watching the Academy Awards and listening to my kids: "Yeh, Daddy, you missed again."

This year the movies truly are better than ever, and the 57th Academy Award nominations feature some of the best and most important films of recent years.

Since I had so much trouble with last year's prognostications, there's got to be room for improvement this year (famous last words) — so here it is.

Best Picture is always a difficult choice because the competitors represent such varied film genres. There is no real basis for comparing a musical like "Amadeus," albeit it is a dramatic, classical one, with the powerful documentary drama of "The Killing Fields."

Neither of those two can be easily categorized with the three excellent dramas also nominated: "A Passage to India," "Places in the Heart" and "A Soldier's Story." By the way, even those three, though comparable, are very different.

ALL FIVE NOMINATIONS are excellent, but I'll pick "Amadeus" as No. 1 because its conception is more unusual than the others, because it is so well done and because Milos Forman is so well regarded. I also think there's a subliminal nod implicit in his success and subconsciously (or perhaps even consciously) that motivates some votes.

Best Actor presents a sentimental difficulty when two fine performances are nominated for the same film (F. Murray Abraham and Tom Hulce from "Amadeus") so the solution is someone else. If that's the case this year, then Jeff Bridges in "Starman" should win, but I'm betting on F. Murray Abraham's superb performance as Salieri.

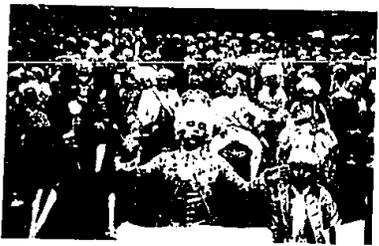
Besides the fact that I think she was far and away the Best Actress among this year's nominees, there's probably a sympathetic undercurrent for Vanessa Redgrave, even though "The Bostonians" was out of the mainstream. The three girls in "The Dustbowl Trilogy" — Sally Field, Jessica Lange and Sissy Spacek ("Places in the Heart," "Country" and "The River") probably cancel each other out. My vote is for Vanessa.

Best Director will go to Milos Forman, even though there's a lot of sentimental favoritism for Woody Allen and "Broadway Danny Rose," which will win Best Original Screenplay.

In spite of the considerable sentiment for Sir Ralph Richardson's excellent performance in "Greystroke" and the other fine performances, Adolph Caesar in "A Soldier's Story" has got to be the winner for Best Supporting Actor. Best Supporting Actress will go to Peggy Ashcroft in "A Passage to India," which will also win for "Best Cinematography."

AGAIN, TRYING TO second-guess the academy's voting behavior, it will go for "The Killing Fields" for Best Film Editing because the academy thinks it ought to get something. I agree, but in spite of my great regard for that film and its social importance and impact, the other choices were better. Of course, if "Amadeus" makes the kind of sweep of the awards that Forman did in 1978 with "Cuckoo's Nest," then the Editing prize will be his, along with all the rest.

As for Best Original Song — don't ask me, I'm not into the Top 40 stuff. All five songs were very popular, and that's the name of the game — so "Ghost Busters" should win that one and for Visual Effects. Among other lesser awards, I imagine Prince will win Adaptation Score for "Purple Rain," although not on my recommendation.



Tom Hulce (who is originally from Plymouth) is young genius Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in "Amadeus," one of the five films nominated for Best Picture of the Year. The Academy Awards Presentation will be broadcast Monday, March 25, on ABC-TV.

table talk

Italian dinner

An Italian Seafood Dinner will be held at 7 p.m. Monday-Tuesday, March 25-26, at the Lark in West Bloomfield. The multi-course meal includes a soup course of wild wood mushroom soup with crostini and an entree of deviled lobster risotto with roasted peppers, balsamic vinegar and herbs. Cavalliere Dino Valle and his group will sing operatic arias. Dinner is \$60 per person, plus tax and gratuity. For reservations call 661-4466. New chef at the Lark is Brian Polcyn, former sous chef at Southfield's Golden Mushroom, who is replacing Heinz Mengusar.

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