



Robert Parker
Wine Advocate

SHAHER VINEYARDS

2003	CABERNET SAUVIGNON	NAPA	(\$55.00)	RED	91
2005	CABERNET SAUVIGNON HILLSIDE SELECT STAGS LEAP	NAPA	(release date 9/09)	RED	(92-95)
2004	CABERNET SAUVIGNON HILLSIDE SELECT STAGS LEAP	NAPA	(release date 9/08)	RED	(92-94)
2003	CABERNET SAUVIGNON HILLSIDE SELECT STAGS LEAP	NAPA	(release date 9/07)	RED	95
2002	CABERNET SAUVIGNON HILLSIDE SELECT STAGS LEAP	NAPA	(\$190.00)	RED	100
2005	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ONE POINT FIVE STAGS LEAP	NAPA	(release date 3/08)	RED	(91-93)
2004	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ONE POINT FIVE STAGS LEAP	NAPA	(release date 3/07)	RED	(90-92)
2005	CHARDONNAY RED SHOULDER RANCH	NAPA/CARNEROS	(release date 3/07)	WHITE	(90-91)
2004	CHARDONNAY RED SHOULDER RANCH	NAPA/CARNEROS	(\$43.00)	WHITE	92
2003	FIREBREAK LAST CHANCE (Sangiovese/Cabernet Sauvignon)	NAPA	(\$42.00)	RED	91
2005	MERLOT	NAPA	(release date 9/07)	RED	(88-90)
2004	MERLOT	NAPA	(\$45.00)	RED	88
2003	MERLOT	NAPA	(\$44.00)	RED	90
2005	RELENTLESS	NAPA	(release date 9/08)	RED	(90-93)
2004	RELENTLESS	NAPA	(release date 9/07)	RED	92
2003	RELENTLESS	NAPA	(\$63.00)	RED	93

Shafer Vineyards, run impeccably well by the father and son team of John and Doug Shafer with assistance from their brilliant winemaker and vineyard manager, Elias Fernandez, now boasts 210 acres of estate holdings with 55 at the home estate in Stags Leap. This is an irrefutable reference point for high class wines, including their Firebreak cuvée, one of the best examples of a California Sangiovese-based wine. Sadly, 2003 is the final vintage for this offering.

Production of the non-malolactic, full-throttle Red Shoulder Ranch Chardonnay ranges between 4,500-6,000 cases per year. The exceptional 2004 exhibits plenty of honeysuckle, tropical fruit, and citrus oil characteristics, a subtle touch of smoky oak, zesty acidity, and a full, fleshy palate. Enjoy it over the next several years. The 2005 Chardonnay Red Shoulder Ranch reflects this vintage's cooler growing and harvesting temperatures. There are some honeysuckle and tropical fruit notes, but more pear and citrus are evident, and the oak is even less noticeable than in the 2004. This crisp white should drink well for 4-5 years.

The Shafer reds seem to get stronger and stronger, regardless of vintage conditions. The 2003 Merlot, which includes small amounts of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc, exhibits terrific mocha and berry fruit along with plenty of cherry, herb, and chocolate notes. Beautifully textured and deep, with attractive spice, sweet fruit, and beautiful ripeness as well as texture, it can be enjoyed over the next 7-8 years. A blend of 75% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 10% Cabernet Franc, the lighter-styled, elegant 2004 Merlot reveals notes of berry fruit, herbs, coffee beans, and chocolate. Drink it over the next 5-6 years. The 2005 Merlot, which includes 8% Cabernet Sauvignon and 6% Cabernet Franc, possesses crisp acidity as well as an elegant bouquet of berry fruit, menthol, sweet cherries, and spice. The tremendous aromatics are followed by abundant fruit. The 2005 should drink well for a decade.

As mentioned above, the last vintage of Shafer's Sangiovese is the 2003 Firebreak Last Chance (92% Sangiovese and 8% Cabernet Sauvignon). Performing even better than it did last year, it boasts a dark ruby color as well as a big, savory perfume of strawberries, cranberries, earth, spice, herbs, and tobacco. With medium body, soft tannins, juicy, vibrant acidity, and a tasty, medium-bodied palate, it should drink beautifully for 5-6 years.

With respect to the Cabernet Sauvignon program, the 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa includes tiny dollops of Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot. Showing better than it did last year immediately after bottling, it possesses a deep ruby/purple color, terrific fruit, a big, sweet nose of foamy soil, subtle oak, black currants, flowers, and cedar, great finesse and richness, a medium to full-bodied texture, soft tannin, and decent acidity. Drink it over the next 10-15 years.

There is a big change beginning in 2004, with the Napa designation being dropped in favor of the Stags Leap One Point Five cuvée. The 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon One Point Five is a combination of 98% Cabernet Sauvignon and 2% Petit Verdot. It reveals all the elegance and classicism one expects from the Stags Leap District along with beautifully sweet cherry and black currant fruit, flower, spice box, and mineral-like notes. Medium-bodied and pure with terrific intensity and a degree of opulence characteristic of the vintage, it can be consumed over the next 10-12 years. Made from a similar blend, the dark ruby/purple-tinged 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon One Point Five displays crisp acidity, excellent balance and freshness, loads of fruit, and an expansive, fleshy texture.

The overall impression is one of elegance and finesse.

One of California's finest blends of Syrah and Petite Sirah is Shafer's Relentless, a 2,500-case cuvée that debuted in the 1999 vintage. The 2003 Relentless is heading into a more closed, dormant stage. It reveals more oak than previously, and with coaxing, blueberry, blackberry, scorched earth, and spice aromas emerge from this young, full-bodied, dense, impressive red. This offering receives the same upbringing as the renowned Hillside Select Cabernet Sauvignon, i.e., 30-32 months in 100% new French oak. The 2003 Relentless should evolve for a minimum of 10-15 years. A blend of 76% Syrah and 24% Petite Sirah, the open-knit 2004 Relentless exhibits aromas of blackberry pie intermixed with roasted meats and ground pepper. An expressive, full-bodied, smoky, flamboyant, intense effort that is more evolved and approachable than vintages such as 2003 and 2001, it is a stunningly aromatic, rich wine to drink over the next 10-15 years. The dense ruby/purple-tinged 2005 Relentless (78% Syrah and 22% Petite Sirah) displays a more restrained, elegant style without the weight, power, and overall richness of its older siblings. Crisp and stylish, with medium body, beautiful fruit, and sweet tannin, it represents a downsized version of this typically big, mouth-staining cuvée. The 2005 should drink well for 10-12 years as its balance is impeccable.

One of the world's most extraordinary Cabernet Sauvignons is the 1,800-2,400-case offering of Shafer's Hillside Select. It was a treat to re-taste the utterly perfect 2002 Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside Select. A dark purple color is accompanied by a gorgeously powerful nose of pure *crème de cassis*, *pain grillé*, flowers, licorice, and spice box. Full-bodied with multiple dimensions, superb purity, layers of fruit, and a blockbuster finish, it is an amazing offering. This wine should drink well young yet evolve for 2-3 decades. The 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside Select is almost as good. Its dense purple color is followed by aromas of camphor, black currants, licorice, crushed rocks, and white flowers. While full-bodied, powerful, and enormously endowed, it is not as seamless as the 2002. Impeccable balance, purity, and length suggest it will drink well for 20-25 years. More of a front end-loaded example, the 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside Select offers attractive spicy cassis notes along with charcoal, new oak, and black currants in its flamboyant bouquet. Unusually evolved for a Hillside Select, it is a supple, fleshy, hussy of a wine filled with charm and seductiveness. Neither as powerful as the 2003 nor as layered and rich as the 2002, it is a beautiful effort that should drink gorgeously well for 15+ years. The most Bordeaux-like Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside Select in many years is the 2005, which is significantly lower in alcohol, and possesses more acidity as well as wonderful vibrancy. Sweet black cherry fruit intertwined with toasty oak emerge from this lush, ripe red. Befitting the vintage, it is not as weighty, powerful, or New World-ish as wines from riper California vintages tend to be, but represents a lighter-styled yet rich, intense example of this cuvée. We finished the tasting with a bottle of the 1978 Cabernet Sauvignon, produced long before the Hillside Select came into being, and this 28-year old offering still merits a mid-90 point rating. It was aged 18 months in a combination of French and American oak, and possesses an incredibly high pH. Performing like a brilliant Pauillac, it reveals notes of cedar, black currants, and spice box. So much for California Cabernet not aging well! Tel. (707) 944-2877; Fax (707) 944-9454