



## Site Effects

NAPA VALLEY'S SAINT HELENA WINERY DRAWS ITS STRENGTH AND BEAUTY FROM THE SOIL.

**L**OCATED IN a tranquil corner of St. Helena, Calif., the small estate of Saint Helena Winery remains very much under the radar of the area's casual visitors. The property's modest production—fewer than 2,000 cases annually—is sold primarily through a mailing list, the members of which are granted visitation rights to this otherwise exclusive establishment. Seated on the back porch of the vineyard house, patrons can enjoy as many as three different estate Cabernet Sauvignons made from the vines that spread out before them, and a Chardonnay from a vineyard high on Sonoma Mountain. Although the wines of Saint Helena Winery have long received praise for their excellence, changes in the estate's ownership and winemaking team have significantly elevated the quality and style of its recent vintages.

The Silicon Valley veteran Peter Story purchased the vineyard in 1994. For several years he acted simply as a grower, selling



his fruit to such notable wineries as Opus One and Quintessa, but with the help of the renowned winemaker Mark Herold, he produced a single barrel of Sympa Cabernet Sauvignon in 2000, founding the unassumingly named new winery. Excited by the result, he increased production slowly over the next 10 years, with first Herold and then Sarah Gott as consulting winemakers. In 2010, Story sold the property to Federated

Elizabeth Tangney and Aaron Pott (below) have revamped the vineyard management and winemaking at Saint Helena Winery (left).

Insurance, a company established in the early 1900s by a group of Midwestern farmers and farm-equipment dealers.

Story recommended that the new owner bring on the consulting winemaker Aaron Pott, who had become acquainted with Story and his fruit while making wine for Quintessa. Pott soon hired Elizabeth Tangney, formerly of Bryant Family Vineyard, to take on the day-to-day role of winemaker and viticulturist, and together they made dramatic improvements in the vineyard by converting the estate to sustainable farming and slashing yields to almost half of their former level. The advantages of this revised regimen are apparent in the 2010 vintage. “We have moved from a very hands-off vineyard approach,” says Pott, “to trying to control every aspect of the vineyard, from pruning to yield to vigor to irrigation. It is a great property on a very lovely gravel soil, and the wine is one of elegance and wonderful complexity—evocative.”

The Chardonnay is modern and stylish, matching a vibrant acidity with a healthy dose of oak. The Estate Cabernet Sauvignon is darkly fruited yet poised, revealing tantalizing wisps of black olive and espresso. Fruit from the vineyard's premier block goes into Sympa—a carefully structured Cabernet with notes of dark chocolate and roasted herbs layered over a core of black cherry fruit—as well as the Grand Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon. The latter bottling is produced only in exceptional years using wines from the vintage's best barrels, which render a savory, brooding red whose weight is lifted on the palate by bright acidity and a sweet current of ripe blackberry.

“The vineyard,” Pott observes, “has its own style, and I am just trying to shepherd it along to enhance what is already there and not block out what is extraordinary about the site.” —KELLI WHITE

*Saint Helena Winery*, 707.967.9463, [sthenawinery.com](http://sthenawinery.com)