



October 1, 1989

Dear Friends:

Now that summer is drawing to a close, and golden leaves bring the promise of fall, we bring news of releases for which you've all been waiting.

The 1989 harvest began almost a month ago and the sound of the gondolas' rumbling-shake through the vineyards took our minds back to previous years. I think in all of our minds, the 1985 vintage stands out with more dramatic clarity than others.

We are pleased to announce the release of our Stag's Leap Wine Cellars 1985 Cask 23.

In order to understand the character of a particular vintage, it is frequently necessary to go backwards in time and understand how the character of the previous vintage might be an influence. In reflecting upon the 1985 vintage, you will remember that the 1984 harvest was one of the earliest ever. The vines were relieved of the need to ripen their fruit early in the season and before they, so to speak, were "closed down" by very cool nights and typical fall hints that dormancy was on the way. Thus the vines had what might be regarded as a period of coasting along, or as we like to term it, "leisure" without the burden of the fruit.

For humans, leisure is a wonderful thing. It is prized by those who have it and admired by those who wish its possession. It is different from "doing nothing" or "letting go"; it seems to involve a special state which takes place in those who possess it. Something like "leisure" might explain why the 1985 harvest was so great for the Cabernet Sauvignon from our vineyards.

We think it was such a time of "leisure" that allowed the vines to actually store the treasures of sunshine and energy for their lives in the year to come. There are few other explanations so satisfying and so close to describing what we actually observed.

1985 is the finest vintage we have seen so far for SLV, and the Cask 23 is the peak of that peak. If any comparisons to the other great vintages of this series are to be made, they would be to the previous distinctive highlight years of 1974 and 1978. But while 1978 has a full, smooth body as does the 1985 - the 1978 has more weighty flesh, only a shade from the perfection of the "richness-without-weight" goal for which we are striving. And, whereas the 1974 was forward with the sunshine of the season, almost heralding abundance and ease, the 1985 has a finer degree of tension between opulence and restraint. It is more demanding wine in a sense because its elements are on a higher level of balance and harmony. We cannot think of anything we would add to its elements to make it greater. There is nothing we would make less or take away: enchanting in the aroma - arresting in the complexity of its palate length and resonant in its finish - a firm texture of strength surrounded by supple flesh - the 1985 Cask 23 combines the elements in a way that fulfills to a great degree our winemaking aspirations for Cabernet Sauvignon.