

Book signing for *The Judgment of Paris* at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars

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This October, George Taber visited the Napa Valley. Taber was the *Time Magazine* reporter who broke the story of the now-legendary Paris tasting of 1976, organized by Steven Spurrier during the American Bicentennial. The occasion of Taber's visit was the publication of his book, *The Judgment of Paris*, in which he recounts in depth the history leading up to and the details of this paradigm-shifting event.

Not only were the Chateau Montelena Chardonnay, made by Mike Grgich, who was winemaker at Chateau Montelena at the time, and the Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Cask 23 Cabernet Sauvignon the two top wines at that Paris tasting, besting the likes of Grand Cru Burgundy and First Growth Bordeaux; overall, Napa Valley wines generally led the pack. Warren

Winiarski, proprietor of Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, for whom that tasting was a life-changing event, graciously invited members of the Napa Valley Wine Library Association to attend his reception for George Taber at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars.

Taber has pointedly acknowledged the essential contribution of the resources of our Wine Library to his research in producing this book. When Warren asked him to write something about this research, Taber expressed it thus:

"The Napa Valley Wine Library in St. Helena and the Sonoma County Wine Library in Healdsburg played important roles in the writing of the book, Judgment of Paris. People at both libraries were very helpful and endlessly patient as I researched the comeback of California wines in the 1950's and 1960's. They have priceless and unique collections of books, interviews and data about those crucial early years that to my knowledge exist nowhere else. The book could not have been done without their help."

Warren, Barbara and Julia Winiarski were all at the winery to welcome guests to the book-signing with George Taber. About 80 guests had accepted Warren's invitation and, of course, there were the many visitors the winery has during harvest. It was a treat to hear Mr. Taber reminisce



George Taber and Warren Winiarski

with Warren over the details of that afternoon tasting in Paris, nearly thirty years ago. Perhaps best of all, was the attendance of long-standing members of our Wine Library, Joanne and Newell De Puy. Joanne played a key role in collecting Napa Valley wines for that Paris tasting, and bringing them 'across the pond,' when she organized an unprecedented tour of Napa Valley winemakers, led by André Tchelistcheff, through the great vineyards and wineries of France in May 1976. From Joanne we learned that earlier that May, Spurrier had toured Napa Valley with Joanne and then visited Sonoma and the Santa Cruz area on his own. When he found he had too much wine to take back to France, from the twelve wineries he sought to include in his blind tasting in July, he asked Joanne if she could bring three cases to France with her. 'Of course,' she said. And could she pick up two additional bottles at Chalone? 'Of course,'

said, and did, the morning she left for Paris. Only one bottle broke in transit, and since Spurrier had bought duplicates, that wine would still be poured.

André was a stern taskmaster, keeping everyone to his rigid itinerary. In his charge, among others, were Ernie and Virginia Van Asperen, Andy and Betty Beckstoffer, Jim and Judy Barrett, Louis P. and Liz Martini, Nor and Ruth Mirassou, René and Veronica Di Rosa, and Bob and Nonie Travers. They were all at Chateau Lascombes with 50 Bordeaux vintners hosted by Alexis Lachine, when a member of the chateau staff hurried out to say Mr. Barrett was wanted on the telephone. 'Oh, it's one of his five kids,' worried Joanne. 'Something dreadful's happened.'

But it was something quite different. Jim knelt to the telephone, listened, laughed, and circled his fingers, signaling 'OK' to Joanne behind his back. 'Our wine just won first place,' he whispered to her after he'd hung up. 'Warren's won first in Cabernet. Don't say anything.' Joanne said she had to tell André. In deference to their Bordeaux hosts, the group kept quiet until after lunch was over and their tour bus had left the chateau's allée of trees, and then the whole bus just erupted, Joanne said, "like the Big Game."