



David Stoneberg photo For years, Jack Stuart, left, Doug Wight and Stu Harrison have been neighbors on St. Helena's west side, although each has worked at different aspects of the wine industry. Recently, they released a new cabernet sauvignon, the 2005 Trivium, made from grapes harvested from the "Les Ivrettes Vineyard".

Three friends create classic Napa Valley cabernet
Wight, Stuart and Harrison release 2005 Trivium
By David Stoneberg
STAFF WRITER
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Lunch on that particular Friday was served only after a walk past rows of well-tended cabernet sauvignon vines in the historic Lewelling Vineyard on the west side of St. Helena.

Doug Wight knows the vineyard like he knows the back of his hand, which is not surprising, since his family has owned the 250-acre parcel since 1864. It was purchased by Wight's great, great-grandfather, pioneer horticulturist John Lewelling. Wight said Lewelling bought the property on Sulphur Creek because he needed its water for its power, to run machines. Lewelling grew grapes and had a winery on Spring Street.

Wight and his brothers, David and Alan, are the fifth generation on the land and are part of one of the oldest families to continuously farm grapes in the Napa Valley. He said he credits his grandparents for holding onto the land for "my generation," since it was difficult to make a living from the land. His father, for example, worked at the Mare Island shipyards, as well as farming the land.

Wight, who was born and raised in St. Helena, works with his children, Haley and her husband, Eric Dodd, Neal and Lynn. So Wight's granddaughter is the seventh generation to farm the land. "That's pretty unusual in this valley," he said.

Lunch was sandwiches, cheese and crackers — all from Dean & DeLuca Markets — served on a tablecloth-covered picnic table. Although the day was sunny and bright, lunch was served in the shade, under century-old olive trees, surrounded by vineyards on Wight's property. At the lunch were three longtime friends — Wight, Stu Harrison and Jack Stuart, who were releasing their joint-effort wine, the 2005 Trivium, a cabernet sauvignon made exclusively from grapes grown in "Les Ivrettes Vineyards," at a block in Wight's Lewelling vineyards.

Neighbors

Harrison, Stuart and Wight have been neighbors on St. Helena's west side for years, although the three have never worked together. They formed their joint partnership, the Stanfield & Stuart Wine Company, in 2005. "We started talking about it in 2001," Stuart said,

Stuart retired from Silverado Vineyards as general manager and winemaker after 25 years, at the end of 2004. He said he'd had enough of traveling and managing people at the company that produces 100,000 cases of wine a year. To Stuart, the romance of the wine industry begins with the hands-on wine making, wearing "boots and jeans," topping off the tanks and ordering barrels. "I'd gotten away from that in my career and to get back to that was a lot of fun," he said. Stuart has been in the wine industry for 33 years and has made wine every year since 1975.

Harrison, too, has spent his working life in the wine industry, and currently is part of the start-up team for Continuum, the winemaking venture that includes members of the Robert Mondavi family. Thirty-five years ago, he was studying accounting and finance in business school in Germany, and afterward worked at a small cellar in the Rheingau hill country of Germany. He moved to the Napa Valley and has spent his career in sales, marketing and managing small wineries. He helped launch both Domaine Chandon and Opus One, where he spent 15 years, and has worked at seven different wineries. Throughout his career, he has worked with grapes grown within two or three miles of the Oakville Grocery, he said with a smile. Now, though, it's time to come home, he added.

After graduating from Cal Poly at San Luis Obispo, Wight managed vineyards for the Louis M. Martini Winery before starting his own vineyard management company in 1977. In addition to the family's Lewelling property, he manages 500 acres of vineyards throughout the Napa Valley.

Daughters are inspiration

The 2005 Trivium is 100 percent cabernet sauvignon from the "Les Ivrettes Vineyard," which is French for "little tipsy ones." The vineyard block was named for the principals' daughters, Haley Wight Dodd, Caitlin Stuart and Cassie Harrison, who grew up and went to high school together. The three would gather with their friends in the vineyards and during their college years, Doug Wight said he found the evidence — empty bottles — of their celebrations while he drove a tractor through the vineyard block. The three are now off on their own careers, but are still friends. Haley and her husband, Eric Dodd, grow grapes on the Lewelling acreage with Doug; Caitlin, who works for a public relations firm, gives her father, Jack, a lot of advice; and Cassie is approaching her doctorate in sports psychology.

The wine

With their individual talents, Wight grows the grapes, Stuart makes the wine and Harrison sells it. Wight said, "I want the grapes to be ripe, but not overripe, otherwise the juice starts to taste like prune juice." Stuart calls the wine "graceful and elegant" and Harrison, who's in charge of the Web site, said the wine will be sold in nine states and adds the project "will grow from there."

The five and a quarter tons of cabernet sauvignon grapes were picked on Oct. 6, 2005 and after they were hand sorted, destemmed and placed in small open-top fermenters, the juice was punched down two or three times a day for 19 days. Stuart said the winemaking took place at Terra Valentine on Spring Mountain. He produced 318 cases of the 2005 vintage, 325 cases of the 2006 vintage and expects to produce between 375 and 400 cases for the 2007 vintage.

After malolactic fermentation was finished in the spring, the 2005 wine spent 19 months in oak barrels, 60 percent new and 85 percent French oak. According to tasting notes, the wine was bottled after egg-white fining and gentle filtration.

Stuart said he expects the wine's complexity to develop in the bottle over a period of time, just like his friendship with Wight and Harrison. "Great wines are like great friends," he added.

2005 Trivium Cabernet Sauvignon

"Les Ivrettes Vineyard," St. Helena

- 100% cabernet sauvignon
- 5.25 tons picked Oct. 6
- 19 months in oak barrels; 60 percent new, 85 percent French
- Production, 318 cases
- Alcohol, 14.5 percent
- Cost, \$60 for 750 ml bottle
- Produced, bottled by Stanfield & Stuart Wine Company
- Info, www.triviumwine.com.