

# LIPARITA

SINCE 1880

## PR HIGHLIGHT



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### Wine Uncorked: Liparita

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-Kathleen Bershad

Kathleen Bershad, restaurant reviewer, food writer, wine buyer, sommelier and founder of FineWineConcierge.com, featured Liparita and Spencer Hoopes in Fine Wine Concierge's monthly newsletter, Wine Uncorked.

The article about Liparita (in the November 2009 issue of Wine Uncorked) highlights Liparita's intriguing past, Spencer's acquisition of Liparita and his dedication to creating wine in the spirit of the Liparita of the past, and Liparita's inaugural appellation specific releases. Kathleen also rated the Oakville and Stages Leap Cabernets for taste and value – the wines scored well in both categories!

## Wine Uncorked

**About:** "Every month, whet your palate with Wine Uncorked – Fine Wine Concierge's monthly compendium of all things wine. This easy, informative read features information on wine regions and grapes, guest columnists, Q&As with winemakers and industry experts, and more." – Fine Wine Concierge

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### Wine Uncorked

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#### Liparita

In-the-know wine drinkers at the turn of the 20th century undoubtedly enjoyed Liparita La Jota. At the time, it was one of California's top wines, winning gold medals at the 1900 Paris Exposition and at the 1904 St. Louis Exposition.

The estate was founded in 1881 by W. S. Keyes, a wine connoisseur and geologist. He noted that the area's terroir was similar to that of the Lipari Islands (an area known for fine wine) and so dubbed his land Liparita, or "little Lipari." La Jota was added to the name as a nod to the Mexican land grant (originally given to George Yount, who is credited with being Napa's first winemaker) that once encompassed Keyes' vineyard.

The estate flourished until Prohibition demolished its success, though not the winery itself; the stone walls of the original building can still be seen on top of Howell Mountain.

This ghost winery and the La Jota name are now owned by Jess Jackson. The Liparita label has recently been dusted off and given new life through the efforts of Spencer Hoopes.

A self-described wine geek, Hoopes recently purchased the Liparita name (and corresponding rights) as well as the inventory from the previous owners, who made both red and white wine. He is taking things in a new direction, with the goal of establishing Liparita as a cabernet sauvignon brand offering a series of appellation-specific wines.

One thing that sets him apart, notes Hoopes, is his desire to put "quality in the bottle" while offering "underrated value." Although the operation needs to make money, he says, "I don't buy into the concept that you [should] charge whatever you can" for quality Napa cabernet.

With that in mind, Hoopes has just released the first vintage of the revitalized Liparita: a 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon with the Oakville appellation and one from the Stag's Leap District, priced at \$55 and \$45, respectively.

Each region offers something special, according to Hoopes. "I love the grapes from Oakville. The soil and weather produce fantastic fruit," he explains. "The Stag's Leap District is a little bit more lean. The wine is not as fruity or concentrated; it's more of a Bordeaux style."

Roughly 1,000 cases of the Oakville and 800 of the Stag's Leap District wines were produced. Next year, a wine with the Yountville appellation will be introduced. Production will be similarly limited.

Liparita is not Hoopes' first foray into the wine business. He started simply as a drinker, when a friend took him to a wine tasting in San Francisco. "I did five or six years of [just] tasting," he says. "It was a passionate hobby and I built a huge personal cellar, filled mostly with European wines." In the 1990s, he purchased a vineyard in Oakville and began making Hoopes Cabernet Sauvignon, first released in 1999.

Though the wine is successful, he was looking for something more. His eponymous label was "where I wanted it to be...and I wanted to be more actively involved in the business, to do more things and make more appellation specific wines."

This is a man who clearly enjoys his hobby; when he describes a personal project with friends to make 200 cases of pinot noir simply because they like pinot, he sounds like the kid who's just been handed the keys to the candy store.

The guiding principle behind Liparita is balance, according to Hoopes. Fruit is picked when the tannins are mature and the wine goes through (among other things) a cold soak before fermentation, a technique that imparts brighter fruit notes and deeper color to the wine. The result is harmony between the fruit, acidity and alcohol that gives the wines their supple, easygoing feel.

"These are well-made wines to open now," Hoopes (pictured) says, though they can age for 10 to 15 years.

But why wait? Hoopes advises pairing the Liparita Oakville Cabernet Sauvignon with lamb as "it really brings out the flavors" while the Stag's Leap District Cabernet is "really good" with ribeye.

While understandably fond of the inaugural 2006 vintage, Hoopes notes that the forthcoming 2007 and 2008 vintages are likely to be "spectacular." Consider it a word to the wise.

#### Tasting the Wine

**Liparita 2006 Stag's Leap District Cabernet Sauvignon:** Juicy with notes of soft cherries and red fruit. A touch of mint lurks in the back. Pairing it with ribeye brings out deeper, woodsy flavors. The finish is very subtle. Rating: C2 \$45

**Liparita 2006 Oakville Cabernet Sauvignon:** This is what I was looking for! The nose offers notes of dark berry fruit, cherry and a touch of earth. On the palate, there is great fruit flavor and nice depth. Rating: B2 \$55

The wines are rated A to F for quality (C is average) and 1 to 3 for value, with 1 a wine that tastes better than its price, 2 is neutral and 3 is a wine that isn't up to snuff for the cost. Prices are approximate retail.