

Top 100 Wineries

CALIFORNIA | NAPA VALLEY

Storybook Mountain

The Seps family captures the essence of the Napa Valley hills in cool, elegant, long-lived zinfandel.



COLLEEN SEPS
WILLIAMS



ON THE STEEP HILLSIDE AT STORYBOOK MOUNTAIN, the vines glimpse the morning sun. And where the hill curves northeast, their aspect turns cooler, with an open view toward Mount St. Helena—the volcano that generated the red soils surrounding their roots. That volcanic soil intrigued Jerry Seps in 1976; a professor of European history, he and his wife, Sigrid, were looking to resettle in Napa Valley; they followed the advice of André Tchelistcheff, who predicted the soils and cool exposure would make it an ideal place for zinfandel. Forty-four years later, Seps and his daughter, Colleen Williams, grow some of the most distinctive and beautiful red wine in Napa Valley. They both live at the vineyard, where Seps keeps detailed, hand-written notes on his daily work in the vines, tracking the progress in more than 100 small blocks. He farms under organics and ages his wines in caves dug into the hillside in the 19th century. Looking to the future, Seps is experimenting with touriga nacional; he planted a quarter of an acre in 2021 and will add another half-acre in 2023, curious about how the heat-tolerant and drought-resistant variety will perform in a changing climate. —J.G.

2018 Napa Valley Eastern Exposures Zinfandel (\$55, 96 points) The eastern exposures on Storybook's hill are often ten degrees cooler than down in Calistoga, resulting in an aromatic zinfandel. With a distinctly California-woodlands scent of madrone as well as pine and wild blueberry, it's a fresh and savory red, compelling to drink now. But the lively interplay of floral, herbal, fruity and umami suggests the complexity this wine will develop with a decade of age.

2018 Napa Valley Mayacamas Range Zinfandel (\$45, 94 points) This broad estate selection is meant to be enjoyed in its youth. The wine has grace and energy, delivering dark cherry roundness directly into the tannins and their bone-broth savor. Those tannins combine blueberry-skin freshness and a hint of bitter almond in a lasting, supple impression. Heady and beautiful.

2018 Napa Valley Estate Reserve Zinfandel (\$75, 92 points) This wine's bright fragrance carries a zesty cranberry highlight over the savory structure that grounds the fruit. This is a clean vintage of Estate Reserve, firm in its bitter-chocolate depths of flavor. Designed to cellar, this will show its elegance at ten years of age.

FOUNDED:
1976
**OWNER/WINEMAKER/
VITICULTURIST:**
Jerry Seps
**VP/ASSOCIATE
WINEMAKER:**
Colleen Seps Williams
ACRES OWNED:
120; 40 planted
ANNUAL PRODUCTION:
5,000 cases
ESTATE GROWN:
100%
FARMING PRACTICE:
Organic
(certified 2008)