

# SWANSON

## VINEYARDS

### THE STORY

#### THE BEGINNING

For more than half a century, the Swanson name has been recognized primarily for classic American food, as in the famous frozen dinner brand the family launched in 1953. While freezer case cuisine is commonplace today, at the time, the idea was ground breaking.

Twenty-five years ago, the Swanson family chartered another innovative course, this time into the world of wine. In the mid-1980's they were one of the earliest producers of Napa Valley Merlot, helping to establish what is now known as one of the world's greatest wine regions, yet at the time was largely undiscovered.

Today, while its wines are extraordinary, the mission of Swanson Vineyards is straightforward: to celebrate the simple pleasures in life, made better with wine. And the winery continues to evolve into something even more extraordinary. By collaborating with some of America's finest cultural talents, Swanson Vineyards invites its guests to reinvent how they live and entertain with wine and its many accoutrements. Swanson Vineyards' partners include Kate Spade collection co-founder Andy Spade; renowned illustrator Jean-Philippe Delhomme; interior designer Thomas Britt; chocolatier Katrina Markoff of Vosges Haut Chocolate; singer-songwriter Vanessa Carlton and her exclusive stationery line; avant-garde florist Torryne Choate; and renowned California painter, Ira Yeager.

The Swanson Vineyards story began in the summer of 1985, when W. Clarke Swanson, Jr. purchased a 100-acre property on Oakville Cross Road in the heart of Napa Valley. He hired André Tchelistcheff, one of the 20th century's most influential winemakers as a consultant, and, in the bold business style long associated with the Swanson name, planted Merlot in the heart of Cabernet Sauvignon country.

As the risk paid off with excellent, well-received wine (a "Cab-lover's Merlot"), the Swansons continued to experiment, planting other lesser-known varietals such as Sangiovese, Syrah, Semillon, Angelica, and Pinot Grigio. It was the same quest for innovation that drives Swanson Vineyards today, as Clarke leads its evolution into one of the most progressive wineries in the country. Clarke was one of the first Napa entrepreneurs to identify the direct-to-consumer model as critical for contemporary wineries, starting with his revolutionary introduction of the Swanson Salon 2001, followed by the launch of Sip Shoppe in 2010, and continuing with other creative approaches such as a collection of "special occasion" wines being released by 2011.

Swanson Vineyards now operates under the helm of winemaker Chris Phelps, an expert in both Bordeaux and Napa styles, honed at the venerable Chateau Petrus and Dominus, under the tutelage of Christian Moueix, and then later at Caymus, with Chuck Wagner. Phelps wines are refined and elegant and at the same time remarkably approachable. As Swanson Vineyards creative director Alexis Swanson Traina says, "We take our wines very seriously, but passionately believe in glorifying the mundane, every way we can."

#### THE WINES

After nearly three decades of cultivating a wide array of varietals, Swanson Vineyards has refined its portfolio to three core wines available across the United States: its signature Merlot, Pinot Grigio, and the family's proprietary Alexis Cabernet Sauvignon. These foundation wines have propelled Swanson Vineyards to high critical acclaim, and secured its presence on some of the most impressive wines lists of the world. The winery also produces a repertoire of outstanding, limited production dessert wines, plus a small collection of specialty wines available exclusively in the winery's Tasting Salon and Sip Shoppe, and through Club Membership. These include Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Sangiovese, Petit Sirah, Rosato, Angelica, Semillon, Late Harvest Chardonnay, and Fortified Petit Sirah.

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#### TASTING SALON + SIP SHOPPE

##### TASTING SALON

In 2001, Alexis Swanson Traina, daughter of Clarke and Elizabeth, proved she carried the Swanson's trademark spark for innovation, spearheading the opening of Swanson Vineyards Tasting Salon, offering luxury tastings by appointment only. The first of its kind, The Salon proved another groundbreaking business move, since at that time, Napa Valley tasting rooms were relatively rudimentary routines.

Swanson Vineyards is now credited with elevating the Napa Valley's by-appointment only wine tasting experience. Inspired by the famous political, art, and literary salons of 18th century Paris where educated discourse and passion for the good life reigned, the Salon is a destination for people who share passions for wine, food and travel. With the intimacy of an at-home dinner party, the Salon offers three seated tastings daily for up to eight guests. Lead by a skilled salonnière (keeper of the Salon), the tasting experience is interwoven with storytelling, wine insights and conviviality, celebrating the many ways to enjoy wines paired with some of the world's best chocolates, caviars and cheeses. As Swanson Vineyards' Creative Director Alexis Traina says: "We take our wines very seriously, but passionately believe in glorifying everyday rituals, every way we can." Old World in tone yet deliciously postmodern in texture, the Tasting Salon is a uniquely authentic experience that offers Swanson's treasured "touch of decadence" alongside a surprising approachability, providing an exquisite yet relaxed backdrop for all to experience the affordable luxury of wine.

"This is where we encourage our guests to reconsider the way they live with wine," says Alexis. "Be it through our tastings, creative food pairings, or selection of unique gifts."

##### SIP SHOPPE

This "candy store for adults" was born from the vision of some of the world's finest talents. Sip Shoppe partners include Kate Spade collection co-founder Andy Spade; renowned illustrator Jean-Philippe Delhomme; interior designer Thomas Britt; chocolatier Katrina Markoff of Vosges Haut Chocolate; singer-songwriter Vanessa Carlton and her exclusive stationery line; avant-garde florist Torryne Choate; and renowned California painter, Ira Yeager.

This delightfully whimsical shoppe showcases sips of Swanson Vineyards' finest library vintages paired with the perfect morsel, along with carefully curated gifts and select wines available by the case and the bottle. Featuring its own tasting menu, Sip Shoppe wines are poured in charming glass "Dixie" cups, mini Riedel Os, or tiny crystal cordials in 1.5 ounce sip sizes.

Tastings include caviar, chocolates, jellies and sorbets, in mini pairings such as Swanson Vineyards Pinot Grigio served with a large dollop of Swanson Vineyards' domestic caviar on a potato chip. Or guests can enjoy their signature tasting, the Salonnière, featuring "Alexis" Cabernet Sauvignon paired with Alexis Bonbon and served with the highly sought after dessert wine, Angelica.

The Swanson Sip Shoppe offers playful, sophisticated original finds in clever packaging designed to elevate the everyday, including a soon-to-be-released line of gift kits. First in the collection is the Newlywed Kit: six bottles of Swanson Vineyards' special occasion wine "Just Married," accompanied by an ostrich feather duster and a sage bundle (complete with instructions to clear out bad energy and create wedded bliss). Coming shortly, The Break Up Kit, The Stork Kit, The Please Forgive Kit.

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### THE HERITAGE

Carl A. Swanson was a Swedish immigrant who settled in Omaha, Nebraska in 1896. Considered the first “ground breaking Swanson,” he opened a grocery store that he eventually built into an agricultural empire of poultry farms and creameries. So successful was his enterprise that he earned the coveted title of “Butter King.” His sons Gilbert C. and W. Clarke followed him into the family business, evolving the company into prepared foods and making history with the first production of the now ubiquitous frozen TV dinner. In 1955, Swanson and Sons was sold to the Campbell’s soup company.

Carl’s grandson, Clarke Swanson Jr., enjoyed a successful career as an enterprising businessman in early American media: newspaper, cable television and then later, banking. But in 1985, he returned to his family’s agricultural roots, this time in the more rarefied world of grape growing. Under his direction, Swanson Vineyards become one of Napa Valley’s largest producers of estate-grown Merlot, in a Cabernet Sauvignon (or “Cab-lovers”) style, with dense and smooth structure, powerful extracted fruit and silky tannins.

While Clarke is known for his pioneering ways, his wife Elizabeth, a fifth generation New Orleanian whose mother was Cuban, is considered the creative energy at Swanson Vineyards, with the all-encompassing title of “dream maker, taste-maker, opinion-maker, keeper of the most special fairy dust.” In 1993, their eldest daughter Alexis joined the family winery as marketing director. Having inherited her father’s zest for rule-breaking business and her mother’s unstoppable joie de vivre, she has infused the winery with new vitality, by elevating the rudimentary wine tasting experience to an inventive concept that has included byappointment- only tastings, intimate branding and more recently the establishment of the Sip Shoppe. “The joy of what we do,” she says, “Is tapping into all our senses, and bringing the relevance of wine back into every wonderful moment of our everyday lives.”

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