

# Wine & Spirits

THE PRACTICAL GUIDE TO WINE

## TOP 100 WINERIES OF THE YEAR

### Nickel & Nickel

MULTISOURCE

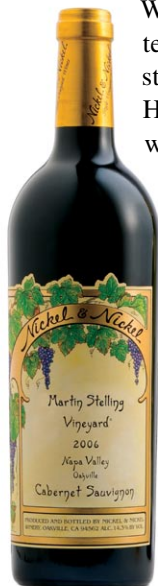


Darice Spinelli

**Founded:** 1997**Winemaker:** Darice Spinelli**Viticulturist:** Aaron Fishleder**Acres owned:** 250**Annual production:** 21,875 cases**Estate grown:** 24%**Owners:** Beth Nickel, Erik Nickel, Jeremy Nickel, Dirk Hampson & Larry Maguire**Know for:** Single-vineyard Napa Valley cabernets**Location:** Oakville, CA**Website:** nickelandnickel.com

In the mid-1990s, winemaker Dirk Hampson found a source for merlot to blend into the Far Niente cabernet—a vineyard across Highway 12 from the Chardonnay Golf Course, just east of Napa County Airport, called Suscol Ranch. "The dark, heavy soils with lots of clay are the kind of soils you usually have a bias to stay away from," he remembers. Yet earlier in his career, as a young apprentice at Mouton Rothschild, he had seen that merlot was often planted in poor-draining soils—the merlot vine's larger leaves allow the plant to transpire more water than other varieties.

When he went to blend in the Suscol Ranch merlot, he noticed its poignant briary, black tea character, something he didn't think would fit into the Far Niente house style. It also stood out for its density and power, so much so that Hampson bottled it on its own in 1997. He and his partners at Far Niente decided to create a new brand for these single-vineyard wines called Nickel & Nickel. They also restored the John C. Sullenger farmstead in Oakville, which they converted into a new winery in time for the 2002 harvest.



Today, Nickel & Nickel makes 13 single-vineyard Napa Valley cabernet sauvignons from St. Helena to Stags Leap, as well as single-vineyard bottling of merlot, syrah, zinfandel and chardonnay. The flagship cabernets come from Oakville and underscore the diversity of the 2,500-acre subappellation's terroir. Hampson is now director of winemaking for Far Niente, Dolce and Nickel & Nickel, and 2010 marks his 29th harvest with the Martin Stelling Vineyard. He describes the vineyard as a classic, west-side Oakville site, with alluvial sands that run out of the western hills and gently slope to the southeast; in 2006, they grew a lithe and fine-grained cabernet sauvignon, seductive in its mouth-watering cassis flavor. In contrast, the 2006 Vogt Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon from Howell Mountain transmits its mountain terroir in powerful, densely packed mineral tannins and black currant flavor—a wine that deserves a good ten or 12 years in the cellar.—D.M.

#### TOP-SCORING WINES

**94** '06 Oakville Napa Valley Martin Stelling Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon

**91** '06 Howell Mountain Napa Valley Vogt Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon