

NorCal Wine

ARTICLES, WINE REVIEWS & EVENTS BY FRED SWAN

Domaine Carneros Le Reve, Ultra Brut, and Pinot Noir

By fredswan@norcalwine.com. Published on April 19, 2019.

Claude Taittinger, who headed Champagne Taittinger from 1960 through 2005, established Domaine Carneros 31 years ago to produce traditional method sparkling wines from cool-climate, California fruit. Domaine Carneros added still Pinot Noir to their offerings in 1992 and, later, began releasing still Chardonnay and Merlot. 95% of the fruit they use comes from their own properties, totaling 350 acres, all in the Carneros AVA. Domaine Carneros has been certified sustainable since 2013. Their efforts were recently acknowledged with the 2019 Green Medal Business Award, which goes to producers who are not only sustainable, but use those practices to lower costs and enhance efficiency. Their sustainability programs include reduced water use, water reclamation, owl boxes, composting, recycling, and a solar array which was the world's largest for a winery when it was installed in 2003.



2016 Domaine Carneros Pinot Noir Estate 92+ - An excellent Carneros Pinot Noir with a complex mix of macerated fruit on the nose: blackberry, blueberry, raspberry, and dried orange zest. Sarsaparilla, brown sugar, tagine spices, and drying herb add further interest. The palate is a harmonious orchestra of flavors with savory low notes, dark fruit mid-range, and orange at the top. Medium-plus body with well-balanced structure coming from both acidity and firmish, fine-grained tannins. Drink now through 2028. This wine is a blend of 11 Pinot Noir clones coming from four of Domaine Carneros' five estate vineyards. After a five-day cold soak, the de-stemmed fruit fermented in small, open-top vats. It matured for ten months in French oak barrels.

2012 Domaine Carneros Jardin d'Hiver Cuvée Ultra Brut 94 - Domaine Carneros Ultra Brut is a nearly even blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir which gets just a tiny amount of sweetness in the dosage. This "Winter Garden" release is a late-disgorged wine, having spent an extra two years sur lie in bottle. That amps up complexity, tightly integrates the bubbles, and softens the acidity just enough. The intense nose demands attention with dried lemon, buttered toast, crystallized ginger, poached yellow apple, and fresh green apple. The palate is medium-bodied with creamy mousse, high-acidity, and intense, mouth-filling flavors of green apple, toast, baking spice, and white mushroom umami. It's ready to drink now but will certainly improve with bottle age in a cool cellar. This particular late-disgorged Jardin d'Hiver was a very limited release and has already sold out. The good news is that Domaine Carneros plans a new release for this winter.

2012 Domaine Carneros Le Reve Blanc de Blancs 94 - Le Reve is Domaine Carneros' tete-de-cuvée. It's made entirely from estate-grown Chardonnay. With a dosage of just 0.9 g/l, it's a juicy, extra brut. The nose is rich with Meyer lemon, toast, yellow and green apple, crystallized ginger, sweet cream, baking spice, and pear. In the mouth there's medium body, elegant mousse, and very fine, soft, lasting texture. Flavors include toast, pear, baking spice, lemon, ginger, sweet cream, and pineapple candy. It's a superb sparkling wine and will age well.

