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WINE INDUSTRY NETWORK

## Domaine Carneros Wins Best Sparkling for Third Time at North Coast Wine Challenge

by Laura Ness | December 14, 2018

**Winemaker Eileen Crane** came to California from Connecticut with no job and really no qualifications to make wine other than her degree in nutrition from her alma mater, UConn, where she had been teaching.

Says Crane, "All I had was a dream of making sparkling wine in California." Forty one years later, she's still making one of the most highly regarded sparkling wine lineups in the US, at Domaine Carneros Taittinger, where she is both winemaker and CEO.

When the results of the 2018 North Coast Wine Challenge were announced, and the 2013 Domaine Carneros Brut, Napa, was declared the Best Sparkling, it was cause for celebration at the beautiful chateau where Eileen and her colleagues make their widely lauded wine lineup.

And it wasn't the first time they celebrated a win in the sparkling class at the NCWC. Since they began entering the competition in 2014, Domaine Carneros has claimed Best of Show Sparkling three times. Their Brut Rosé won in both the 2014 and 2015 competitions for the 2010 and the 2011 vintages respectively, and in 2018, it was the 2013 Brut Traditionelle's turn as the winner.

For Crane, it's additional affirmation that she chose the right career path, and that her move west was both inspired and fortuitous.

Hired in 1987 to help build the Domaine Carneros facility and establish the sparkling wine line for the Taittinger family of Reims, France, Crane says the Domaine Carneros Brut was the very first wine she made for the new brand. While it was made in the classic brut style, with slightly more pinot noir than chardonnay, the first one was not vintage dated. But that changed.

"We began aging the Brut for three years, and if we thought the wine was worthy, we would age it 3 to 4 years, and even longer," says Crane. "Most champagnes are non vintage." It says a lot about Domaine Carneros' commitment to quality that their main product is a vintage dated Brut. They made 26k cases of the 2013 Domaine Carneros Brut, a classic blend of 51% pinot noir and 49% chardonnay, that exhibits excellent balance and purity.



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Having a win like this boosts the considerable success the wine already has in the marketplace, providing added excitement and opportunity for promotion, especially during the holidays. Domaine Carneros Director of Marketing, Phoebe Ullberg, says, "This wine has been part of our portfolio for 30 years. It is our darling and represents this estate and Carneros, with its beautiful balance and finesse."

Asked how they decide which competitions to enter and which wines to submit, Ullberg says they enter approximately 15 competitions a year, representing a range of locations around the country and styles of competitions.

Of the North Coast Wine Competition she says, "This is an important competition in the Bay Area and we feel it provides great brand recognition and reach. This competition speaks to our very valuable local clientele while also being very well regarded by the broader wine public. We've entered for five years and will continue into the years to come!"

Ullberg notes that Crane has great regard for the competition and makes sure that they enter every year. "The moment we received the award, she sent out an all-employee email announcing the award!"

Crane is delighted that sparkling wine has become such a significant part of the market in the US, noting that 15 years ago, there were only about fifteen players in the category. Now, there are many niche players, producing different styles. She says there is nothing like classic *méthode traditionnelle*.

"Our sparklings have an elegant style and little, tiny bubbles. Classic. Sophisticated. Timeless. Think Audrey Hepburn in a little black dress," says Crane. Perfect for the holidays, or for anything worth celebrating.