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EXPLORING WINE WITH TIM FISH

End of an Era at Domaine Carneros

Trailblazing California winemaker Eileen Crane is retiring after 42 years in the business

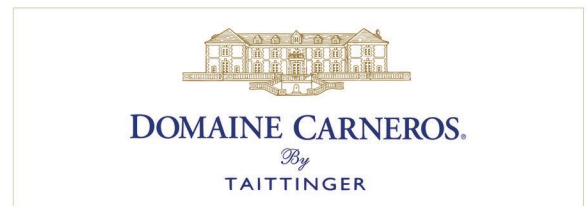
By Tim Fish ■ Apr 16, 2020

Eileen Crane began her wine career as a part-time tour guide at Domaine Chandon in Napa Valley. Today, she looks back on 42 years in the business as she steps down as CEO of Domaine Carneros, one of California's leading sparkling wine producers, and transitions out of her winemaking duties. "I started working at a Howard Johnson's when I was 16 and now I'm 71. Some people wait too long, and maybe I'm one of them," Crane says with a chuckle. She will stay on as lead sparkling winemaker through this year's harvest and then Zak Miller, who has worked with her for more than 10 years, will take over. Although she grew up in New Jersey with her father working in international finance, Crane's upbringing led her into the wine business. Thanks to her dad's extensive cellar, she was talking about and tasting wine early on. "I fell in love with sparkling wine as a kid," she recalls.

In a 2007 interview with Wine Spectator, she described the style this way: "It's like Audrey Hepburn in the perfect little black dress. It's not just a black dress—it's a perfectly lined black dress, with the perfect strand of pearls, the wrap, the whole thing. It's not fancy, it's not overdone. In winemaking, I do that."

Crane is also known for her early championing of eco-friendly farming and winemaking initiatives, starting in 1987, including natural pest management, composting, water reuse and extensive recycling that reduced waste by 90 percent. The winery was one of the first in California to adopt solar power, in 2003, and today it and the vineyard are certified sustainable.

With the world in flux due to the novel coronavirus, Crane has her plans for the future on hold, but she does know she'll remain a regular at Domaine Carneros when it reopens to the public. "I'll just come and sit on the terrace, whenever I feel the need for a glass of pink bubbles."



Domaine Carneros winemaker Eileen Crane has been a pioneer both for women in wine and for the sustainability movement.