

▶ Domaine Carneros

by Karen Hart | April 12, 2021

A pop of a cork, a stemmed glass and tiny bubbles—nothing says celebration quite like a sparkling wine. And Domaine Carneros, perched on a knoll in Napa Valley, has gained a reputation for producing sparkling wines known for their elegance and complexity of flavor. As founding winemaker Eileen Crane, once said of their bubbles, “Classic. Sophisticated. Timeless. Think Audrey Hepburn in a little black dress.”

The story behind Domaine Carneros begins in the 1970s when Claude Taittinger, a family member behind Champagne Taittinger in Reims, France, began his search for property in the United States. In 1987, he selected a 138-acre parcel in the Carneros region, of which 100 acres had recently been planted with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, and built a chateau in homage to his family in France. To oversee the construction and development of the Taittinger-style bubbly, he appointed Eileen Crane, America’s doyenne of sparkling

wine. For the next three decades, she served as winemaker, and at the heart of the winery’s operations was its méthode traditionnelle sparkling wines. Later, the winery added Pinot Noir to its portfolio.

Domaine Carneros is also devoted to crafting still wine, notably Pinot Noir, which has a loyal cult following. We try a splash of the 2018 Domaine Carneros Estate Pinot Noir, which won Best of Class in March in the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition. Crafted with fruit from five different estate vineyards, the fruit offers a compelling and unique flavor profile. An elegant, velvety wine, it has notes of blackberry and plum. Winemaker TJ Evans, works exclusively on this still varietal from grape to glass, and notes that the clone of Pinot is important and expresses the wine. “Great wine starts in the vineyard,” he says. “Making wine is an ongoing dialogue—it is the sum of 100 decisions you make and the dialogue you go through the season.”

