



The International Wine Review

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Report #48: The Wines of Los Carneros

Introduction



Los Carneros is one of California's leading wine regions with some of California's best vineyards and outstanding sparkling and still wines, especially premium Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Its unique terroir led to its establishment as one of the first American Viticultural Areas (AVA) in Northern California. Located at the southern end of the Sonoma and Napa Valleys, just above San Pablo Bay, it is also one of California's coolest growing regions. Long growing seasons, moderate temperatures, and soils of clay loam and marine sediments make it the perfect place to grow the grapes that have made it famous. Many of California's premiere producers of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and sparkling wine make their wines from Carneros fruit, including the wineries located in Carneros, which receive special attention in this report.

Today, there are roughly forty growers and thirty wineries in Carneros devoted to the production of high quality wines. They consist of small artisanal producers of estate-bottled wines, many of them family-owned, and large commercial wineries that produce both vineyard-designated wines and large volume medium-priced wines. There are also dozens of prestigious producers of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay outside Carneros (in Napa Valley and Sonoma County) that source grapes from the

In this Issue

Introduction	1
A Brief History	3
Geography, Soils and Climate.....	5
The Vineyards.....	7
The Grapes	9
The Sparkling Wines of Los Carneros	10
Los Carneros Producers and their Wines.....	13
Annexes	
Map of Los Carneros.....	27
Selected Vineyard Profiles.....	28

region to produce outstanding AVA and single vineyard-designated wines. All together, the wines of Carneros are among the finest examples of premium Pinot Noir and Chardonnay and sparkling wines being produced in California.

Los Carneros Spanish shepherders gave the name to Los Carneros, The Rams in English. A bronze ram's head from the traditional Chinese zodiac was one of the animal heads at Beijing's imperial retreat, later pillaged by foreign troops. In 2011 the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei recreated the oversized bronze heads and exhibited them around the world. Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads is now installed in Carneros at the Donum Estate. The huge ram's head on a ten foot pedestal is an appropriate symbol for the spirit of the Carneros AVA.



Weiwei's Ram's Head at Donum

Introduction

Continued from page 1

In this report, we focus on the wine region of Los Carneros, its growers, wineries and wines. We examine the history of the region and its emergence as one of California's finest producers of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and sparkling wine. We also examine the unique geography, climate and soils of Carneros, and the region's special attributes for growing Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. We further examine the vineyards and their management and profile key producers and their wines. In the final section we provide wine reviews and ratings of a selection of super premium and mid-priced wines of Carneros.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Carneros Wine Alliance, an organization of the growers and winemakers of Carneros. Over the years the CWA has provided technical support to its members and promoted the AVA and its wines. On this, its 30th anniversary, the CWA is renewing its commitment to educate the public about Los Carneros and its wines, and to help energize the wine industry of the region for the future. We believe Los Carneros has a very promising future for producing high quality Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and sparkling wine.

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