

## ▶ THE FINE ART OF BUBBLY

Jennie Orvino | October, 2018 Issue

### “THE DOYENNE OF SPARKLING WINE”

Domaine Carneros, the French-style chateau high on a knoll above Highway 12 between Sonoma and Napa near the diRosa Center for Contemporary Art, is a Wine Country landmark. Its grand staircase rises to an expansive terrace where tastings begin at 10 a.m. under an array of wrought-iron tables with cream-colored umbrellas. Amidst the elegance of a marble-floored salon and formal gardens, the atmosphere is high-spirited and friendly. A flour sack towel on sale in the gift shop reads: “Brunch without bubbly is just a sad breakfast.”

Dubbed “the doyenne of sparkling wine,” Eileen Crane was selected by the distinguished Taittinger Champagne family in 1987 to build their American branch in the Napa Carneros appellation and be its founding winemaker. This was just three years after Crane had succeeded in building Gloria Ferrer Caves & Vineyards, overseeing the design and construction of the facility as well as developing its line of sparkling wines. She would do the same at Domaine Carneros, and continues as chief executive officer there to this day.

Because her father learned about French and German wines during World War II, Crane’s family had something rare in New Jersey in the 1950s—a wine cellar. She had her first taste of wine when she was eight. “We had wine on Sundays; I had my own special glass. Then one day, Dad pulled out a bottle of Champagne. I tasted it and thought, this is for me!”

In her early career, Crane did social work in Venezuela, taught nutrition at the University of Connecticut and attended the Culinary Institute of America. This prepared her to be eventually tapped by Claude Taittinger. “He said, ‘We are of Champagne, you are of Carneros. If you try to make an imitation of us, it is not going to be good. It would be like Picasso trying to paint like Renoir—a total failure,’” Crane recalls.



**DOMAINE CARNEROS.**



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Currently, Domaine Carneros produces 50,000 cases and in the next few years, their wines will be 100 percent estate grown. This puts the winery in rarified company; according to Crane, as there are only about 18 sparkling houses in the U.S. producing a quantity exceeding 5,000 cases.

The style of Domaine Carneros wines reflects Crane's aesthetic and years of experience. "I would describe our sparkling as classic, sophisticated, timeless, understated," she says. "Think Audrey Hepburn in a little black dress."