



the wine chef

Eileen Crane Of Domaine Carneros And The Dream Come True

August 13, 2018

"We don't need to be the biggest, we just want to be the best."

— Eileen Crane, founding winemaker/CEO, Domaine Carneros, Napa Valley



DOMAINE CARNEROS.



CONSIDERED ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WINERIES IN AMERICA, DOMAINE CARNEROS HAS STUNNING GROUNDS AND BREATHTAKING VIEWS.



EILEEN EXPLAINS HER APPROACH TO SPARKLING WINEMAKING. ALL OF THE WINES WERE SERVED IN BEAUTIFUL LALIQUE CRYSTAL STEMWARE.

When Eileen Crane, founding winemaker of California's **Domaine Carneros**, was a little girl of only eight, she would help her father pick out the wine for her family's Sunday dinner. He even let her taste it. "We only had wine on Sundays and one Sunday he pulled out a bottle of Champagne," said Eileen, "and I tasted it and I thought, **'this is it.'** Dad was sorry he ever brought that bottle out because every Sunday I asked for Champagne.





the wine chef

Eileen Crane Of Domaine Carneros And The Dream Come True

August 13, 2018

Eileen's passion for bubbles never abated. In 1978, after studying science and the culinary arts, she packed up her bags and drove across the country to work at Domaine Chandon, the first French-owned sparkling wine producer in Napa Valley. She began as a tour guide and then as a pastry chef. Determined to learn winemaking, Eileen quickly worked her way up to the position of Enologist. Six years later she was lured away by Gloria Ferrer Caves in nearby Sonoma, where, as the winemaker and vice president, she was not only responsible for developing the company's line of sparkling wines, but also for the design and construction of a brand new facility.

While Eileen was busy forging her winemaking path in Napa, the Taittinger family from France was searching for a suitable location to make a unique, California expression of their light and delicate Champagne. It took them nearly ten years to find the perfect spot, but in 1986, Champagne Taittinger asked Eileen to build a winery for them on a 138-acre parcel of land they had found in Carneros, Napa Valley. Closer to the ocean than the rest of Napa, the cool, windy, foggy mornings and bright afternoon sunshine of Carneros is perfect for making sparkling wine.



the wine chef

Eileen Crane Of Domaine Carneros And The Dream Come True

August 13, 2018

FRENCH ELEGANCE IN AN AMERICAN WINERY

Champagne Taittinger is one of the most revered Champagne houses with a history tracing back to the 1700s. When Eileen was hired, Claude Taittinger said to her, “You are of Carneros and we are of Champagne. We don’t expect you to make imitation Champagne.” Through many initial



tastings together, Claude and Eileen found that, stylistically, they were of the same bent, both preferring a lighter style over a heavier, more powerful one. From the beginning, the Taittingers have entrusted Eileen with creating the most appropriate blends without the help of a master blender sent over from Champagne.



the wine chef

Eileen Crane Of Domaine Carneros And The Dream Come True

August 13, 2018

CREATING THE DREAM: LE RÊVE

One of Eileen's greatest accomplishments at Domaine Carneros has been the creation of the prestige cuvée blanc de blancs (meaning "white of whites" and made exclusively of Chardonnay).



Back in 1987 Claude told Eileen that, just as Champagne Taittinger has the finest blanc de blancs in France — the Comtes de Champagne — he would like Domaine Carneros to have the finest blanc de blancs in America. He said, “We think in terms of decades, of generations, so take your time creating the best!”

Thirty one years later, it's clear that Eileen has succeeded in turning Claude's vision into a reality. “Over time I fine-tuned things and tasted the older wines to see how they were evolving. I handled things a bit differently with experience,” she said. “Unlike the great chefs who make their best dishes 30 times a night, a winemaker only makes wine once a year, so it takes a very long time to learn the trade.”



the wine chef

Eileen Crane Of Domaine Carneros And The Dream Come True

August 13, 2018

For every wine Eileen and her team makes, they do an enormous amount of blending trials. "For Le Rêve we choose the ones that will result in a wine with great body and a great finish," says Eileen. "It's not always the same clones or varieties each year and sometimes we come down to just one percent of a particular variety and if that small amount still influences the flavor and the nose we keep it. We're sort of crazy that way, but we feel if you can make it better with just one or two percent, then why not?"

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF LE RÊVE

A retrospective tasting of Le Rêve Blanc de Blancs, going back to 1988, with Eileen in attendance was recently held at the Lalique showroom on Fifth Avenue. Lalique is known for its breathtaking crystal pieces fashioned by the most skillful glass masters. The wines' unique characteristics were showcased beautifully in their **James Suckling 100 points universal glasses**.



STUNNING LALIQUE PERFUME BOTTLES NEXT TO A 100 POINTS UNIVERSAL GLASS FILLED WITH DOMAINE CARNEROS BUBBLY.



the wine chef

Eileen Crane Of Domaine Carneros And The Dream Come True

August 13, 2018

We tasted Eileen's very first attempt of Le Rève which has never been released for sale. "The '88 was my prototype; my first shot at it." says Eileen. "The first time I tasted it in a social setting, I had a winemaker's epiphany and said to myself, **'I did it.'**"

My tasting notes on the 1988 Le Reve: "Wow! Like a fine Sherry, slightly oxidized and with a nutty finish yet still so fresh with mouthwatering acidity. Amazing!" Below are some notes of the other vintages in the tasting:

1992 - "Smells like toast!"

1998 - "Whoa! Smells like honey. Rich and dense with notes of mushrooms."

2004 - "Golden color. Big aromas of yeast"

2005 - "Yellow color. Creamy, subtle yeasty aromas yet still has that Californis fruit shining through. A distinct minerality; saltiness. Tasted blind, I may have guessed it was a Champagne."

2011 - "Yellow color. Great acidity with that California fruitiness. Long, enjoyable finish. Classic cool weather Carneros bubbly."

I was impressed by how well all of the wines had aged — still so full of life and with that vibrant California fruit.



the wine chef

Eileen Crane Of Domaine Carneros And The Dream Come True

August 13, 2018

I was also impressed with Eileen who, after the lunch, walked around the room to speak with each guest individually. She's friendly, with a self-deprecating humor, and you can tell that she really enjoys telling the stories behind her wine.

For lunch, the le Rève wines were expertly paired with an Asian-inspired menu prepared by [Olivier Cheng Catering & Events](#). We savored Tuna Crudo with avocado and radish, miso-glazed black cod and an iced passion fruit soufflé with a sesame tuile. Eileen commented that “oftentimes people think sparkling wines only go with caviar and foie gras and smoked salmon, but it’s such a versatile wine and can go with an array of flavors, herbs and spices, like in today’s lunch.”





the wine chef

Eileen Crane Of Domaine Carneros And The Dream Come True

August 13, 2018

VISITING DOMAINE CARNEROS

Modeled after an 18th century Château in Champagne, Domaine Carneros features formal gardens, an elegant salon, and large outdoor terraces with exquisite views of Napa Valley.

Click [here](#) for information about tours and seated tastings. Reservations are required, so booking in advance is a must. Conveniently located in Carneros, the winery is just four miles from the town of Napa and five miles from the town of Sonoma.

Opening very soon (August 2018) at Domaine Carneros:

a jardin d'hiver (winter garden) overlooking one of the best areas of the property, with fabulous views and a restaurant serving asian-flavored bites paired with the sparkling wines.



A RENDERING OF THE SITE OF THE NEW WINTER GARDEN.



the wine chef

Eileen Crane Of Domaine Carneros And The Dream Come True

August 13, 2018

FIND THE WINE

In addition to Le Rève (\$115), Domaine Carneros produces many distinctive styles of sparkling wines starting with the classic vintage-dated Brut cuvee (\$35). In 1992 they added a rich, complex still red wine made from Pinot Noir (\$42) to their portfolio.

Find the Brut in NYC at [Astor Wines](#) and [Sotheby's](#) or visit wine-searcher.com to look for other Domaine Carneros wines. Remember to ask for them at your favorite restaurants.

Cheers!