



WINE • TRAVEL • EATS

FROM NAPA AND BEYOND

Eileen Crane Winemaker at Domaine Carneros

BY AMBER - AUGUST 27, 2018

Domaine Carneros has long been a favorite of ours; combining a French-style chateau, stunning views, and great wines. Therefore, we were excited to have the opportunity to meet with Eileen Crane, the head winemaker, and president at **Domaine Carneros**. It is interesting that we all think of women in wine as a new concept, but it is important to note that Eileen has been at the top of her field for over forty years.



Pictured: Eileen Crane, Wine Maker and President of Domaine Carneros. Photo Courtesy of Domaine Carneros



DOMAINE CARNEROS.

Eileen grew up in an Italian family in small-town New Jersey. Her uncle's wine cellar first sparked her interest in wine. When she was first allowed by her family to try sparkling wine, she was fascinated by it and decided to make that her career. Like so many of Napa's winemakers, Eileen graduated from UC Davis' Enology and Viticulture program. She was then hired by Domaine Chandon as assistant winemaker and then by Gloria Ferrer; two of Northern California's most notable sparkling wineries. In 1987 Eileen was hired by the Taittinger family to create a new sparkling / Pinot Noir house. Two years later Domaine Carneros opened.



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While chatting with Eileen, she described Domaine Carneros as having an understated elegance; like Audrey Hepburn in a black dress. Just that image alone made me smile and I knew exactly what she was talking about. I thought she described it perfectly.



I asked Eileen what her favorite wine of the current line up is. She replied with: “My favorite wine is whatever I am drinking on that day – or whatever is in my glass that minute. We always see the Estate Brut (\$35) as our go-to sparkling wine; with the special occasion bubbles provided by the (\$115) Le Rêve Blanc de Blancs.” Not that we would turn down any of Domaine Carneros sparkling wines; all of them exhibit balance and elegance. As Eileen said: “All of the wines have a place in our glasses; it depends on the food or the occasion or the mood, or we wouldn’t make them!”

It is sparkling wine for which Domaine Carneros is best known but in 1992 they added still Pinot Noir to their range. We wrote about a [dedicated Pinot Noir tasting](#) back in 2016. The sparkling wine remains their focus; just 20% of production is Pinot Noir.



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Domaine Carneros is a wonderful place for a tasting. The wine, as already mentioned, is first-rate, but that is just the start. The views from the terrace are beautiful and the inside seating offers an elegant setting. Unlike many Napa wineries, you can enjoy wine by the glass as well as tasting flights. The wine is supported by a variety of meat and cheese plates. My favorite pairing option is the salted chocolate caramels from [Anette's Chocolates](#).



A selection of charcuterie and cheeses paired with the tasting flight of sparkling wine.

Eileen Crane told us that they are just about to open an **Orangerie** so that visitors can enjoy the views even when the weather is against sitting outside. It wasn't quite done so I could photograph it, but keep checking out my Instagram account and I am sure you will see it when it is unveiled.

Domaine Carneros has a membership program that offers several benefits: a member only terrace and tasting room, complimentary tastings and tours, and reduced rates to special events. One of the most popular events is the lobster event, which started as an annual event; it now happens three times a year and they are considering adding a fourth.



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Sparkling wine being poured with the magnificent Napa view in the background.



Tasting flight being poured at Domaine Carneros



The Chateau reflected in the glass of sparkling wine...



Le Rêve (The Dream) is their most premium sparkling wine and my personal favorite.



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The thing that is truly remarkable about Domaine Carneros to my mind is the fact that they focus on making quality wines and quality with every aspect of their business. Some people see it as a tourist spot, but I disagree. You get a luxury experience from the moment you step onto the property. Luxury in every single element with wine quality to match. That is what makes it a popular destination for visitors and locals.

Insiders tip: Get your reservation as your first reservation of the day and start your day with a toast of bubbly. You will find it much less crowded, and cooler in the summer to relax and enjoy the views.

I walked away from the interview with an even bigger appreciation for Domaine Carneros and the amazing woman behind the scenes powering it. We remain loyal fans of this classic beauty and the wines she creates. We highly recommend visit on your next trip to Napa.