

Ballad of East and West

A CARNEROS WINE ALLIANCE BARREL TASTING REVEALS BOTH SIDES OF THIS COOL-CLIMATE AVA

by Deborah Parker Wong / photos by Ashley Teplin



Chris Kajani, newly-appointed Winemaker and General Manager at Bouchaine Vineyards, tastes with Anthony Truchard.



Cuvaison's Steve Rogstad with Chef and Winemaker Dario De Conti of Ca' Momi.

When producers from both sides of the Napa/Sonoma county line that bisects the Los Carneros AVA gathered at Cuvaison for the 30th annual barrel tasting of the Carneros Wine Alliance, Rudyard Kipling's "Ballad of East and West" came to mind. The AVA stretches east to west and encompasses portions of both Sonoma and Napa counties. Alliance winemakers offered first looks at the 2014 vintage and poured library wines as well. "It's an exception when we're representing Carneros," said Anne Moller-Racke, President and Winegrower at Donum Estate in Sonoma. "We're usually pouring under a Napa or Sonoma banner."

Anticipating the spectacular Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs that have long been the region's calling cards, it was the first wine of the day—a Tablas Creek-clone Roussanne from Anthony Truchard—that provided a glimpse of what the future might hold. "Carneros has a track record of success with Rhône varieties," said host and Cuvaison Winemaker Steven Rogstad, citing the Lee Hudson Syrah as a benchmark and noting that Albariño has also performed well in this cool-climate AVA. Rogstad points to Carneros's shallow soils—mostly Haire and Diablo formed by deposits left from the receding waters of San Pablo Bay—that help de-vigor the vines and, in future, he anticipates more Rhône and Sauvignon Blanc plantings.

In his annual vintage report, Thibaut Scholasch of Fruition Sciences called 2014 a "winemakers' vintage" with picking decisions having a strong footprint on wine style. Carneros, which typically gets less rain than Napa or Sonoma, was cool and dry prior to bud break, resulting in smaller canopies, followed by warm conditions post-veraison that led to early ripening. For Rogstad and Kristy Melton of Clos du Val, 2014 was a Chardonnay year; both had floral, earthy musqué clones in their blends. Barrel samples across a variety of clones from Hyde, Donum, Etude, Saintsbury and ZD showed plenty of structure and intensity.

The 2014 Pinot Noirs gravitated toward two different styles: floral, leaner and persistent versus spicy and structured with intensity. Schug's Pommard clone and Hyde's seven-clone blend were the poster boys for intensely floral and persistent, with a pure, focused Martini clone at Truchard, a Calera clone from Donum, a Swan clone at Cuvaison and 115 at Nicholson notably so.

Toeing the line between the two styles was ZD's spicy and ethereal Hanzell clone. The more structured wines included a Swan clone from Saintsbury, a Martini clone from Etude, Poseidon's Primo's Hill, a muscular Dijon clone from Cuvaison and Clos du Val's dark-cherried 667.

Time didn't permit a look at Bouchaine, Ca'Momi, Carneros Hill, Ceja Vineyards or Domaine Carneros, but the wood-fired pizzas fresh from Ca' Momi's mobile oven were a spectacular final taste. ■■



Anne Moller-Racke, President and Winegrower at Donum Estate, chairs the Carneros Wine Alliance board.