

Sparkling Toast to a Still Future

by Deborah Parker Wong

The Los Carneros was pioneered twenty five years ago by sparkling wine producers who brought cache and joie de vivre to what is, in effect, the gateway to Napa and Sonoma Valley wine country. 2016 has seen a flurry of expansion there by still wine producers who are confident there's a lifestyle proposition that goes hand in hand with selling Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.



Donum's 2014 Pinots will carry a new label inspired by the estate's bronze Chinese zodiac sculpture, "Circle of Animals," by artist and activist WeiWei.

A veritable force in raising the visibility of Carneros Pinot Noir, **Anne Moller-Racke**, President and Winegrower of **Donum Estate**, is spearheading an expansion that includes the construction of a new production winery and tasting room scheduled for completion in 2017. Once a dairy farm, the estate was planted to vines in 1985, came under Moller-Racke's supervision in 2001 as Donum and was purchased by Danish investors in 2011.

"Site is quality; clone is personality," said Moller-Racke as we tasted current release 2012s sourced from the winery's four vineyards: Donum and Lawler in Carneros, Winside in Russian River and Angel Camp in Anderson Valley. East Slope (\$90), a Calera clone on the Carneros estate, was

youthful, with rich black fruit, coffee, earth, camphor and generous tannins while Ten Oaks (\$72), from whole-cluster Russian River Pommard, had meaty red fruit and cardamom with silky tannins. Often compared to Burgundy and commanding a higher than average bottle price for the region, Donum will only benefit from having total control of its production.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DONUM

Donum President and Winegrower Anne Moller-Racke is overseeing expansion at the estate with the addition of a production winery and new tasting room.

Leisure and Libations at Liana

Second generation vintners **Lisa** and **Ariana Peju** of **Peju Province Winery** brought their vision of the wine lifestyle to Carneros when they bought the Acacia winery and vineyard in February. The 100-acre estate, which is home to the Lone Tree Vineyard, has been renamed Liana Estates, a contraction of their names and a naming model that has proven to be smart marketing.

A hard hat tour in late June revealed that the sisters are working with talented Lauren Pique Designs on a smart "rough lux" renovation of the existing winery and out buildings in keeping with their plans to offer a lifestyle experience to estate visitors. A grand opening is planned for late summer in time to welcome guests during the 2016 harvest.

While Liana winemaker Sara Fowler bides her time waiting on soil samples, she has several wines ready for their Liana labels. Fowler is a seasoned hand with aromatic white wines, and her 2015 Viognier, water-white with crisp, unripe peach and stony minerality, is a gem. When paired with made-on-the-spot mozzarella by Peju winery Chef Alex Espinosa, the allure of the Liana lifestyle starts coming in to focus.

Fowler makes a point of sourcing less common varieties from up and down the state, and a dry orange Muscat from Mendocino is singularly delicious. Her Liana Vintner's White, a Chenin Blanc-dominated blend, and red blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot are charming and bound to please. The winery plans to offer an ambitious program of immersive educational and team building experiences that include bird watching, flower arranging, oyster shucking, yoga, biking, cooking and dining. ■■



Ariana and Lisa Peju, the sister team behind Liana Estates in Carneros.

PHOTO: DEBORAH PARKER WONG