

LA CREMA



Los Carneros Appellation Overview

Ancient History - How It All Began

The word “Carneros” means sheep, or more precisely, “ram” and points to the colorful history of the region, one populated primarily by ranchers before grape growing was introduced to the area. By the end of the 19th century the area was enjoying a thriving winegrowing scene, mostly propelled by wineries like Buena Vista and Gundlach-Bundschu, who had begun making wine in the town of Sonoma in the middle of the century (1857 and 1858 respectively).

As with all wine regions in the United States, Prohibition took the wind out of Carneros’ sails and effectively shut down winemaking until the 1960’s, when a renewed interest sparked wide planting. By the 1980’s Carneros had become a household name for great still wines made from Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, and for California sparkling wine.

The Rebirth of a Superlative Wine Region

All wine regions in their initial emergence experience great fanfare. People will make great proclamations: “The Next Burgundy” or “Pomerol’s great challenger!” Over ten, or maybe even 200 years, the region will morph and change into something different; a place that is evolving and learning and along with it, its consumers.

And so it was with Carneros. After being named an AVA in 1983, it became California’s first Chardonnay and Pinot Noir media darling, a region whose wines were thought of as the cool climate variety’s answer to Napa’s Cabernet Sauvignon. Sparkling wine also thrived, and major investors from Domaine Chandon to Cordoniu lined up to purchase vineyard land. Vineyards names like Sangiacomo and Durell began to show up on labels. In the south, the Santa Maria Bench was experiencing the same—Bien Nacido, in particular.

Nearly twenty years after it first came to fame, Carneros began to experience a decline. Plant material that had been considered cutting edge at the time began to look lackluster, as new exciting clones with more power and sex appeal were introduced. The plantings in the southern end of Carneros in proximity to the bay had been deemed as unwise in provenance; the sites were simply too wet, with too much clay, and in some instances, with too much salt.

Add to this equation the new cool-climate regions who were emerging on the scene: Russian River Valley, Santa Rita Hills and Santa Lucia AVA’s, upstarts with exciting clones and, as experience and time would have it, vineyards that had been planted with more thought process behind them. Carneros had been eclipsed.

But this is by no means the end of the story—anyone who has ever read a great novel knows that this is the classic storyline. Every great wine region (and concept, business, movement, relationship et al) starts with a bang, experiences a dip and then rights itself—that’s the natural rhythm for all things that really matter. Carneros’ better producers have quietly been reinventing the region, taking cues from the lessons they and the earliest growers learned early on, and making wines that have much more precision, structure and intensity than ever before.

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How did this happen? Observation. Learning from the past. Throwing out some of the old and adopting some of the new to create a hybrid of both. And more important than anything else: moving to higher ground.

The Vineyards

The Carneros foothills—A New Age of Plantings

Carneros' best vineyards now lie in a "golden triangle" of sorts, in the foothills of the Mayacamas Mountain range that spills out of Napa into the San Pablo Bay. These sites have higher elevations for the most part, and are comprised of rocky, alluvially deposited soils as opposed to the clay hardpack that dominates so much of Carneros.

In addition, the majority of these vineyards were developed in the 90's and in the 00's, with new clones, rootstocks and new thinking in everything from vine direction and irrigation to spacing.

Regional Overview	Los Carneros
Size	15,000 acres
Year AVA ratified	1983
Climate	Region I < 2,501 (Winkler & Amerine heat degree summation system). Cooling fog/marine influence and afternoon breezes are the biggest factors
Sub-AVA's	Sonoma Carneros and Napa Carneros
Distinguishing features	Rolling hills that cascade off the Sonoma Mountain and Mayacamas Mountain ranges.
Soils	Two types proliferate: Haire (yellowish color, marine derived) and Diablo (darker color, marsh deposits—fairly acidic). Some of the soils in lower elevations can be quite saline. More soil diversity is found in the foothills, ranging from rock to sand--decomposed volcanic soil is the primary parent material here.
Rainfall	22 inches per year
Benchmark Wineries & Negotiants for CH and PN	Acacia, DuMol, HdV, Paul Hobbs, Kistler, La Crema, Neyers, Patz and Hall, Ramey, Truchard
Benchmark Growers for CH and PN	Hudson, Hyde, Red Shoulder Ranch, Stanly Ranch, Sangiacomo, Truchard



La Crema's Vineyard in Carneros

La Crema's two vineyards in the Carneros are planted in the foothills of the Mayacamas, situated immediately across the road from Hudson Vineyards on undulating hills with multiple exposures and slopes. All agree that the quality potential is immense.

Huichica Hills

Pinot Noir: 80 acres

Chardonnay: 100 acres

Elevation Range: 100-300 feet

Number of blocks: 105

Cutting edge plant material. Clones 37, 667, 628, Flowers, Mt. Eden, Calera, Swan, 777, 2A, 113, 115, 76, 96

Soils: Sand and rocky clay loam.

Carneros Hills

Pinot Noir: 162 acres

Chardonnay: 11 acres

Elevation Range: 100-200 feet

Number of blocks: 42

Cutting edge plant material. Clones 667, 628, Flowers, Mt. Eden, Calera, Swan, 777, 2A, 115, 76, 96

Soils: Sand and rocky clay loam

Wines

Historically, the white wines of Carneros have long been characterized as elegant, vividly fruit-forward wines with high natural acids. The reds have been thought to be on the delicate side, with earth and red fruit qualities. Many of the Pinot Noirs in sites closer to the Bay have been described as ponderous.

The wines being grown today in the higher elevation, rocky sites represent a completely new breed. The most common descriptor is the *sensual textural element* that sets Carneros apart from other regions.

	Chardonnay	Pinot Noir
Aromatic/Flavor Profile	Peach, ripe lemon, gravel.	Red berries and cherries, floral, and spice elements.
Structural Profile	Supple and lushly textured with zingy acidity.	Silky, with a solid structural overlay and a gravelly finish.
In a word	Peachy and lush.	Velvet minerality.