

## Beyond Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in Carneros

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**Cultivating Albariño, Pinot Muenier, and St. Laurent**

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On Nov. 13, the Carneros Wine Alliance (CWA) hosted “Unusual, Unknown and Aged Wines” seminar and tasting, showcasing some of the top wine producers from the Carneros American Viticultural Area (AVA) who are making use of the region’s specific mesoclimate and varied topography in unique ways.

Carneros has built a reputation on Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and sparkling wine production, but the region is not limited to these two grape varieties alone. The CWA event brought together a few winemakers who are looking beyond the usual suspects the dual Napa-Sonoma AVA has to offer.

*Artesa Vineyards & Winery 2017 Albariño*

While it may be one of the best-known white varieties in Spain, Albariño is still relatively rare in California. According to last year's crush report, there are only 300 acres planted state wide, with just 72 tons coming out of Napa and Sonoma combined. According to Susan Sueiro, president, owner and general manager of Artesa Vineyards & Winery in Napa, Calif., Artesa is responsible for 21 of those tons.

"We have five acres in two blocks," Sueiro told *Wine Business Monthly*. The larger, 3.4-acre vineyard was planted in 1990, with a proprietary "suitcase" clone from the family's (the Codorníu Raventós) property in Spain. The second, 1.5 acre was planted in 1997 with cuttings from the first block. "So there is literally no other vineyard like it in the U.S.," Sueiro said.

The Artesa estate Albariño vineyards are planted along steep hillsides at the northern end of Carneros, providing the vines with well-drained sandstone slopes. "This gives the vines great exposure to breeze and fog, helps protect from frost and restricts vigor in the vines," Sueiro said. Additionally, Artesa's blocks are planted on east-facing slopes shaded from the afternoon sun by Milliken Peak, slowing the ripening process and preventing sunburn.

Sueiro called out the vineyard's proximity to the San Pablo Bay, which allows a big diurnal shift in temperature that, she said, Albariño needs to thrive, retaining acidity, minerality and salinity, but also completely developing the fruit flavors.

Director of winemaking Ana Diogo-Draper said the winemaking methods employed for Albariño are very specific to each vintage. "Sometimes we do 100% whole cluster pressing, sometimes we use skin maceration — 2017 was too hot for that — we ferment primarily in stainless steel, with a small percentage (about 3%) fermented in puncheon to tame the back palate," she said. In the future, Diogo-Draper looks forward to experimenting with concrete fermentation tanks as well as utilizing native yeast for a portion of the Albariño fermentation.

Diogo-Draper said what she enjoys most about the Albariño from Carneros are the floral notes: honey dew, honey suckle and jasmine. "Floral notes are so important to me," she said. "You get a lot of elegance from the coastal influence from the bay, but also the concentration from the hillside...there's an elegance (in Carneros) that's hard to rival anywhere else in California."

### *Bouchaine Vineyards 2015 Estate Pinot Meunier*

Pinot Meunier is one of the three main grapes in Champagne, and while many growers within France's Champagne region are now bottling Pinot Meunier as a single-varietal sparkling wine, it is very rare — anywhere — to see it as a still red wine. This is what Chris Kajani, winemaker and general manager of Bouchaine Vineyards poured during the CWA tasting.

"We refer to it as the savory cousin of Pinot Noir," Kajani said. "Spice, fresh herbs and savory earthy layers on the palate. It's a shape-shifter, pairing beautifully with an array of foods."

According to Kajani, each Pinot Meunier block on the Bouchaine estate is considered unique and farmed according to its specific topography, aspect, soils and vigor. "Our vineyard terraces overlook the bay to San Francisco, and we see the same weather patterns as the city:

foggy, cool, breezy days almost all summer long,” Kajani said. She calls these the idyllic conditions for growing the thin-skinned grape Pinot Meunier, as the maritime influence allows for slow ripening and the ability for the fruit to maintain its acidity.

When asked about specific vineyard techniques, Kajani said that at Bouchaine it’s all about sustainability: permanent cover crops, an “insane” amount of compost, beneficial insect releases and falconry to mitigate bird damage. “We also utilize an all-female vineyard crew, as their attention to detail is bar none,” she said.

The Pinot Meunier is hand-harvested at night to ensure it comes in cold with skins intact. The grapes are cold-soaked for five to seven days, undergoing native fermentation in open-top tanks. The Pinot Meunier maintains skin contact between 14 and 18 days with minimal punchdowns. The wine is then pressed in a “gentle” basket press, with pressed juices incorporated into the free run juices during blending. The wine is then aged for 11 months in French oak, 30% new, before bottling.

#### *Schug Carneros Estate Winery 2017 Ricci Vineyard St. Laurent*

St. Laurent is a widely planted grape in middle Europe, enjoying parallel success with Pinot Noir in the region. Yet the grape has very little presence in the U.S. “I think (vineyard owner) Dale Ricci here in Carneros and one other grower up in the Foothills are the only two people that grow it – and Schug is one of a handful of domestic producers,” said Michael Cox, winemaker for Schug Carneros Estate Winery in Sonoma, Calif.

Cox said there’s nothing “unusual” in the winemaking process of the St. Laurent. “It’s only a few tons, so we ferment in bins with hand punchdowns and use a Pinot Noir yeast,” he said. After press, the wine goes to large 500L neutral oak puncheons so the winemaking team can “focus on the fruit that the wine offers.” The wine is bottled the following summer – the same time as the estate’s Pinot Noirs.

Because St. Laurent so closely resembles Pinot Noir (indeed, it is thought to be the child grape of Pinot Noir and Savagnin), the vines enjoy the same kind of climate and soils as Pinot Noir. “The maritime summers and moderate winters (in Carneros) allow flavors to develop fully without over ripening,” said Cox. “This is a lower acid varietal and ends up only getting into the low 13% alcohol range. The color is that of a riper Pinot Noir, but carries more weight, despite the lower alcohol.”

St. Laurent also has a thicker skin than Pinot Noir, according to Cox, which makes it more resilient to the intense winds that blow through the Carneros region from the San Pablo Bay. Cox said yields of the St. Laurent are actually better than the Pinot Noir, coming in at about four tons per acre versus two.