

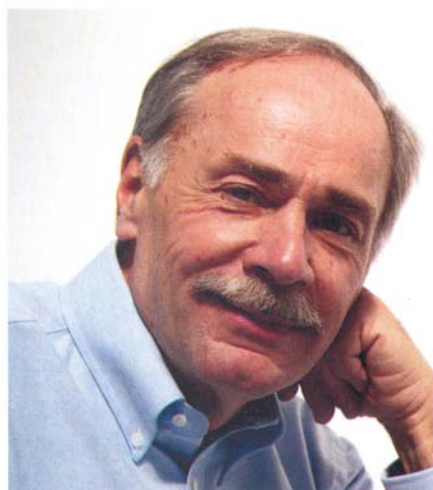
Decanter

OCTOBER 2004

Stateside



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Carneros comeback

A NEW WINERY named Donum Estate has burst onto the scene with a brilliant 2001 Pinot Noir. Total production is a scant 300 cases and the bottle price is a lofty \$60. But what made this discovery newsworthy is the wine's origin – Carneros.

In recent vintages most exciting new Pinot Noirs have originated from Russian River Valley, Santa Lucia Highlands, Santa Maria, Edna Valley and Willamette Valley. Everywhere, it seems, but Carneros. While Carneros continues to turn out many fine Chardonnays and a few wineries now enjoy success with Merlot and Syrah, Pinot Noir from here has dropped far off the radar screen.

Ironically the Carneros District was all the rage years ago as it offered California's first genuinely cool-climate region suited to Pinot Noir. Acacia and Saintsbury were pioneers and today they are still doing their best to keep the focus on Carneros Pinot Noir. But

little by little the spotlight shifted away to other so-called cool-climate regions.

Donum is a new Pinot Noir specialist hoping to make 'the ultimate Pinot Noir' from Carneros. Although the brand is new, the people behind it are highly regarded veterans. Consisting of 28ha (hectares) planted in 1989, Donum is managed by Anne Moller-Racke. Her winemaking team is Kenneth Juhasz and consultant Ken Bernards (owner of tiny Carneros winery Ancien), and Dr Phil Freese is her vineyard consultant.

Over 20 years ago Anne was in charge of developing and managing 405ha in Carneros that were then part of the Buena Vista Winery. It was, at the time, the biggest single vineyard in Carneros and contained numerous varieties in addition to Pinot Noir. While there Moller-Racke became one of the most knowledgeable viticulturists in the area.

When Buena Vista was sold to Allied Domecq a few years ago, the Racke family

retained two vineyards, Donum and the nearby Ferguson Block. It also kept the Robert Stemmler brand. Part of the Pinot project has Moller-Racke reviving this for Pinot Noir. To date Stemmler includes Pinot Noir from the Ferguson Block (400 cases in 2001), another from Carneros, and a third soon to appear from the Nugent Vineyard in the Russian River area. Covering 4.5ha, Nugent is also under the watchful eye of Moller-Racke. So before long she will have five Pinot Noirs. Could this be a new beginning for Carneros Pinot Noir?

Norm Roby is co-author of Knopff's New Connoisseur's Handbook of Californian Wine