

TASTES *of* ITALIA

BASICS OF THE ITALIAN KITCHEN

SUMMER 2019

GRILL TIME!

FIRE UP THE FLAVOR



**Beef Steak
with Rosemary Rub**
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SICILIAN WHITE WINES

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ART OF THE PICNIC

THE WORLD'S FOURTH LARGEST WINE PRODUCER, CALIFORNIA IS KNOWN FOR ITS AWARD-WINNING WINE REGIONS. ONE OF THEM, CARNEROS NEAR SAN FRANCISCO, PRODUCES TOP-OF-THE-LINE CHARDONNAY AND PINOT NOIR, PERFECT FOR AL FRESCO DINING.

TEXT: PATRICK BARTLETT

WINES

WHEN PEOPLE AROUND the world think of California wine, the first region that always springs to mind is Napa.

Napa is an astoundingly beautiful place with wineries that will leave you breathless. But Napa constitutes just one-third of the wine region that stretches north from the shores of San Francisco Bay.

In fact, Napa and Sonoma counties include three large wine regions. Think of the letter “U.” The bottom of the “U” touches San Francisco Bay. The right (eastern) side of the “U” is Napa Valley, and the left (western) side of the “U” is Sonoma Valley, also translated as the Valley of the Moon in the indigenous Miwok language. The bottom of the “U,” on the shores of the bay, is Carneros, which straddles the bottom of both counties.

Carneros is the least-known of the three, but just as interesting. Along with Napa and Sonoma, Carneros boasts a unique microclimate. Napa tends to be the most arid, with warmer temperatures. Sonoma is closer to the Pacific and often enjoys cooler temperatures. Carneros, however, is heavily influenced by the wetter, cooler, foggier Bay Area weather. Both Carneros and Sonoma are better suited to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay than Napa, but the differing climates produce significantly different wines.

To a greater degree than any other California wine region, Carneros produces wine similar to French Burgundian wines, and it makes sense. Carneros was the first California wine region to be defined by climate rather than geographic boundaries. Like Burgundy, but unlike Sonoma, it is also noted for its abundance of sparkling wine producers, the most noted being Domaine Carneros. Most of the bubbly is made from Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grapes.

California defined one of its most distinctive wine styles with the round, buttery, oaked Chardonnays of Napa and Sonoma.

The Carneros styles are decidedly more French. They are noted for their higher acidity, which many feel is more balanced than their fatter, rounder Chardonnay counterparts. Styles of Chardonnay-making continue to evolve, and today the Carneros style has become the exemplar. It focuses more on the fruit. It is more often fermented in stainless steel and aged in neutral oak, producing the lighter, brighter styles akin to white Burgundy and Chablis.





**The Chateau at
Domaine Carneros** is
one of several wineries
in the region.

WINES

When it comes to Pinot Noir, you could say that Carneros never needed to establish its identity as ideal for Pinot Noir, at least not in California. The grape varietal is very fussy and hard to farm, but it loves the Carneros microclimate. It thrives in the cool fog and the filtered sun that work to moderate the heat of the interior. It's possible to grow Pinot Noir in warmer, sunnier climates, but they tend to get overripe and bigger in flavor profile, arguably losing some of the elegance of a Pinot farmed in its ideal climate.

The most famed Pinot Noirs in the world are Burgundian, and so it's no surprise that Carneros perhaps more than any other region is able to emulate the Burgundian style, and has emerged as one of the great Pinot wine regions of the world. Vintners use Pinot to craft mid-weight wines offering alluring notes of bright fruit and spicy-earth notes.

Besides thriving in Carneros, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir make a great picnic duo. Take some along on your next outing. A bottle each of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir will

complete the experience.

Carneros Chardonnay are food-friendly, thanks to their lighter, brighter style. If you're a fried chicken lover, this is a dream wine. Chardonnays also pair well with most cheeses, and pasta salads are a flavor-pairing triumph.

The perfect picnic would include bites aimed to please both wines. The Pinot Noir with its bright fruit and spice also dances beautifully with fried chicken. But, imagine if you brought some nice pate or duck confit to enhance your picnic. Now your Pinot Noir is reigning supreme. Or, you can stick with the Chardonnay for that as well—it's sure to hold its own.

Even if a trip to Carneros isn't in your near future, the Chardonnay-Pinot Noir combo can be. These two wines are meant to be together, a wine lover's yin and yang.

Patrick Bartlett is a freelance writer, wine and food educator, and winery brand consultant. He co-owns and operates Mood Wine, which focuses on wine tastings, dinners, and wine country tours. www.moodwine.com



Left: Pinot Noir grapes being harvested. **Above:** Chardonnay grapes.



A cheese board with figs and olives pairs well with many Carneros wines.

