

SAINTSBURY'S CARNEROS

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Saintsbury was hardly the first winery to recognize Carneros as a location particularly suited for Pinot Noir cultivation. While there are reports of Pinot being planted in the region as far back as 1900, the real commitment to Carneros Pinot Noir came in the early 1950's with the planting on the Stanly Ranch by Louis Martini. In 1962 Andre Tchelistcheff planted 80 acres of Pinot Noir at BV 5 followed by Rene di Rosa and his Winery Lake vineyard starting in 1963. Another significant addition to the Pinot Noir stock came in 1967 when Ira and Shirley Lee planted Lee Vineyard on Los Carneros Avenue. In the 1970's Francis Mahoney began the modern Pinot Noir winery era when he established his Carneros Creek Winery focusing on experimentations in clonal selections.

By the time Saintsbury undertook their commitment to Carneros Pinot Noir in the early 1980's there was every indication that this cooler region set in the southern most part of Napa and Sonoma Valleys bordered by the San Pablo Bay could be the home for great Pinot Noir. Both Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are early ripeners. To achieve complexity and depth of flavor, they both need to be grown in cooler areas that will allow for an extended growing season. The cool breezes that come off the San Pablo Bay with such perfect regularity provide these conditions in a manner that warmer areas in the rest of Napa and Sonoma Valleys cannot.

The typical clay-loam soils of Carneros also help create a near ideal condition for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay cultivation. The clay-loam soils tend to be shallow offering conditions of low to moderate fertility. This helps rein in the vine's natural propensity to grow vigorously. The result is a naturally smaller crop, leading to more intense and complex fruit.

We are firm believers that site selection is critical to obtaining great Carneros fruit. This means understanding that the soils and climate of Carneros are not uniform. For example, our Brown Ranch vineyard located in the slightly warmer northeastern section of Carneros known as the "Banana Belt", sports soils that are more volcanic and accommodate sandier and rockier soils. Here we've planted a combination of new "Dijon" clones that, when combined with the vineyard's rockier soils, brings us deeper, richer and darker fruit.

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The various styles of Pinot Noir we produce at Saintsbury is the most obvious way we've recognized the diversity of vineyards and growing sites in this region. What got us here, however, is experience: more than a quarter century working with different Carneros vineyards and different Carneros growers. It has taught us that constant interaction with this unique appellation provides us with the path to understanding it and making wines that reflect its character.

