

# SAINTSBURY ON TERROIR

**T**erroir is something we think a lot about at Saintsbury. One simple way to think about terroir is to define it as a place with the potential to grow grapes that have the possibility of making compelling wines. We are lucky enough to work every day with wines made from sites that meet these criteria and are among the best in Carneros. We believe that it takes a great terroir to make great wine and that winemaking can either diminish the effects of terroir or enhance them. We strive to enhance those terroir-driven effects.

For more than 20 years we have probably worked with more Carneros growers and more Carneros vineyards than any other producer. We formed our views of terroir working with the many unique vineyards in Carneros and from our observations of this region. We've observed that on a vineyard-by-vineyard level, a certain "personality" is passed into the wines. And we've learned that some personalities are more desirable than others.

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In some cases we hope to showcase these personalities through single vineyard wines. With other wines we attempt to blend these characteristics to create something unique. Yet it is really impossible to say if it is the terroir of a vineyard or the hand of the winemaker that is more responsible for the final character of a wine. We consider our wines a partnership between the winemaker and the terroir.

You really need to look no further than Carneros to understand the effect of a specific terroir and its influence on the winemaker. The best Carneros wines are in large part due to the moderating effect of the region's cool climate, a necessity for great Pinot Noir and Chardonnay that benefit from

ripening more slowly. Carneros enjoys the near-constant influence of the marine layer due to our proximity to the cool waters of the Pacific. Terrestrial influences are equally important to understanding Carneros terroirs. Many of our soils are compact and shallow resulting in lower vine vigor and smaller vines. These produce better wine by concentrating the terroir-driven flavors in fewer grapes.

Yet it is not the relatively static influence of terroir that alone affects the final character of the grape. As grapegrowers we respond to the terroir by irrigating in this way, pulling off leaves in that way, pruning the grapes a particular way, and making any number of other viticultural decisions that will affect the final character of the grapes. The grapes we finally harvest result from an equal partnership between the grower and the terroir.

If that spark of personality that develops out of the vineyard's unique qualities makes it into the final wine, it is because the winemaker carefully nurtured it. We are well aware that the wine is as much a product of our winemaking decisions as anything else. We crush, press, ferment, punch down, age, top up, and bottle the wines. How we choose to do each of these, in total, will have at least as much impact on the character of the resulting wine, as does the character of the grapes with which we began. Yet, is our responsibility as good winemakers to assure that in making the wine, we don't overwhelm the terroir.

Our knowledge of how nature influences the grapes has grown tremendously here in California, and in Carneros, in the past couple of decades. At Saintsbury we've adapted both the way we grow grapes and the way we make wine as a result and we have every intention of furthering our understanding of terroir. But in the end, the Pinot Noir and Chardonnay that we bottle will not be merely an expression of the vineyard. Nor should it be. Rather, it will be a reflection of a partnership between nature and the winemaker's inspirations.



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