



ALL: COURTESY PHOTOS



Above: Donum Estate President and Winegrower Anne Moller-Radke walks through the vineyards.

Left: "Sanna, Giant Head" is a sculpture by Jaume Plensa on the Donum Estate property.

Donum Estate pairs wine, art

A mid-week pinot noir tasting at Donum Estate in the heart of the Carneros quickly turned to an experience that exceeded all of my expectations. Entering the property from Ramal Road, we were greeted by "Sanna, Giant Head," a huge white sculpture by Jaume Plensa that was peaceful and welcoming. The day would be about pinot noir and art, the latter in the form of magnificent sculpture gardens. As a special treat, we had the opportunity to walk the estate with president and winegrower Anne Moller-Radke.

Moller-Radke first arrived on the property in 1981, after German investors purchased what was then the Buena Vista Winery. In 2001, she sold Buena Vista and began Donum Estate with the single focus of making extraordinary pinot noir and chardonnay in the Burgundian style. Since the purchase by investors in 2011, Donum Estate with Moller-Radke still at the helm has evolved to produce highly reviewed wines from vineyards in three



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ON THE VINE

distinct appellations and assemble sculptures by world-class artists like Yayoi Kusama, Ai Weiwei and Louise Bourgeois.

Before tasting the pinot noir, we were welcomed with a glass of **2015 Donum Estate Carneros Chardonnay** to accompany our walk through the vineyards and grounds. The only chardonnay produced, this vintage is aged in 40 percent new French oak with no malolactic fermentation, but stirred on lees regularly over four months. With citrus and floral hints on the nose, the rich stone fruit flavors finish with pleasant honey notes.

Glass in hand, we walked to the "Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads" by Weiwei, with the carved head of each symbol atop a pole in a circular ring of wild grasses and daffodils. Before entering the small building that solely housed Bourgeois' haunting "Spider," we passed by the compassionate "Care For Oneself," a large stainless steel depiction of a strong, healthy man holding his sick, weakened self.

Inspired, we trekked up the hill to sculptor Richard Hudson's "Love Me," a huge stainless steel, three-dimensional heart that mirrors back alluring distorted images of the surrounding terrain. Returning to the modern, chic tasting center by way of the "Contemporary Terracotta Warriors" by Yeu Minjun, we met up with our host, Phillippe Herrarte, who would guide us through the day's pouring. The afternoon sun was warm after a light morning rain, so Herrarte opened the entire south-facing wall, exposing a view of vineyards, outlying marshlands and, in the distance, the new San Francisco skyline. I can get used to this.

All the Donum Estate pinot noir we tasted was exceptional, but that would and should be expected from a team with this pedigree. At one sitting, we savored and compared flavors and nuance from three-fifths of California's best pinot noir producing regions: Carneros, the Russian River Valley and the Anderson Valley to the far north.

We began with two releases from the Carneros estate. The

2014 Donum Estate Carneros Pinot Noir is blended from the best of three blocks, while the earthy, single-block **2014 Donum Estate Carneros West Block Pinot Noir**, from arguably the best terroir in the appellation, delivered a spiced, red fruit and cherry bouquet with rich, layered flavors and a drawn-out finish.

Farmed by Moller-Radke since its inception in 1997, the Winside Vineyard is the source for the **2014 Donum Estate Russian River Reserve Pinot Noir**, combining Pommard and Dijon 667 clones, aged in 71 percent new French oak. Very aromatic, the red fruit flavors are acute, but nicely structured with a forest floor element through the finish.



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"Love Me" by Richard Hudson.

Mendocino County's Angels Camp Vineyard, near the Pacific Ocean, is planted with 10 different clones, seven of which were used in the **2014 Donum Estate Angel Camp Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir**. Aged separately, the best barrels were selected and blended before bottling. The rich flavors were ripe and spirited with definite oak influences. I would definitely recommend all of the wines, but when asked, I chose to revisit the Russian River Valley Reserve.

Donum Estate is building a new production facility that will bring the entire operation on-site. The experience here is rare; there is no other like it in the region. It also brings the exclusivity that befits such a property.

Due diligence is required to determine if it's all for you. As for me, I want to go back soon.

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