

# San Francisco Chronicle



*COME FOR THE WINE.  
STAY FOR THE ART.*



Photos by Preston Gannaway / Special to The Chronicle

Top left: Keith Haring's "King and Queen" is visible from Donum Estate's parking lot in Sonoma. Top center: "Zodiac Heads" is by Ai Weiwei. Top right: "Contemporary Terracotta Warriors" is by Yeu Minjun. Above: A piece titled "Love Me" by Richard Hudson dominates this view at the estate's sculpture park.

By Janet Fletcher

On approach, the Donum Estate looks no different from neighboring wineries: a country lane, leafy vineyards, hazy brown foothills in the distance. You pass a gate and reach a fork in the road, which is when you realize you've entered an alternate universe. Perched like a sentry at the fork is a monumental female head, alabaster white, emerging from the earth like an asparagus spear.

Welcome to Wine Country's latest high-end attraction. "Sanna," the fiberglass sculpture, is the creation of Barcelona artist Jaume Plensa and every visitor's introduction to the new sculpture park at the Donum Estate, an acclaimed Pinot Noir producer in Sonoma County's Carneros region. This former dairy farm near San Pablo Bay is now the backdrop for a museum-worthy contemporary sculpture collection. Works by Keith Haring, Ai Weiwei and Anselm Kiefer inhabit the hilly landscape so naturally it seems like they sprouted there.

When Allan Warburg bought the 190-acre vineyard property with two partners in 2011, sight unseen, he wasn't planning on keeping it. "He intended to flip it," says Anne Moller-Racke, the winegrower who launched the Donum brand in 2001 and has been managing vineyards on the site for decades.

Warburg, the majority

owner, a 51-year-old affable Danish-born businessman, made a fortune as the co-founder of Bestseller Fashion Group China, a retailer with thousands of stores in China. He began collecting the Donum Pinots in 2008, and when the estate's German owner put it on the market three years later, he leaped.

"I knew the wine well, and it was a good time to buy," says Warburg, who wasn't a sculpture collector at the time. But when he finally laid eyes on his new asset, with a glass of wine in hand, a little Wine Country romance started to bloom. The strictly business deal evolved into a love match, and Warburg began imagining outdoor art looming over the vines and between vineyard blocks to create synergy between two sensory experiences.

Now the pairing is clear: Come for the wine. Stay for the art.

Last year, Donum debuted its visitor center, a spare,



The giant head "Sanna," by Jaume Plensa, greets visitors at the driveway of the Donum Estate.

### If You Go

The Donum Estate, 24520 Ramal Road, Sonoma. For private tastings: info@thedonumestate.com; 707-939-2290.

skylighted, gallery-like space with glass walls that frame a panorama of vineyard and foothills. Designed by San Francisco's MH Architects, the building occupies the same footprint as the old farmhouse it replaced and nods to its dairy past with white board-and-batten siding and a gable roof.

A Donum visit begins here, with a tasting, in a quiet, glass-walled side room, with slender-stemmed glassware, wine poured from decanters, and wine notes tucked into an embossed leather folder. This is Wine Country hospitality for the upper crust, without the tipsy crowds, the merchandise, the charcuterie-and-cheese plates.

The wines, all from single vineyards, merit their renown — vibrant, balanced Chardonnays that aren't heavy-handed and silky Pinot Noirs with depth and spice. Give them their due but don't shortchange your time with the phenomenal outdoor art that Warburg has amassed since buying Donum.

A guided walking tour of the sculpture collection is optional — but don't forgo it. Put on your sensible shoes — the paths are decomposed granite and gravel — and spend some time hanging out with these massive pieces.

Some, like Richard Hudson's "Love Me," a 24-foot-high mirror-finished heart perched at the top of a rise, were commissioned with a setting in mind. For others, Warburg and Moller-Racke had to find or create the ideal site, framing a sculpture with rows of olive trees or nesting it in fields of lavender. Embraced by the natural world

around them, the works change your perception of that space. Walk right up to Hudson's lustrous piece and see earth, vines and sky rippled on the silvery surface like an agate. Jeppe Hein's "One Two Three" creates another, almost dizzying experience with nature and mirrors.

The Donum property lies on a noted flyway for more than 200 migratory bird species "and the birds don't see the difference between the art and a tree," Moller-Racke says. Keeping the 40 works clean is already a daily endeavor, but no one's complaining. The incessant bird-song, the minty scent of eucalyptus and the gleam of sunlit steel create a sensory symphony that make the art encounter more compelling, Warburg believes.

Warburg's buying spree isn't over yet. He views art as a way to connect cultures, and he wants more diversity in his Asia-heavy collection. The other-worldly "Mikado Tree," by Cameroonian artist Pascale Marthine Tayou, is one recent step in that direction, a burst of color floating above the vines.

"I love all different cultures," says Warburg, "and I wanted to create a place where artists from all over the world can express themselves."