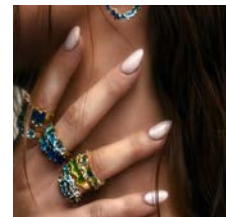


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A Delicious Tasting at

FERRARI-CARANO VINEYARDS & WINERY

| BY TRACY ELLEN BEARD



More than forty years ago, during a wine-purchasing venture in Sonoma County, California, Donald and Rhonda Carano fell in love with the area. They purchased an old farmhouse and 30 acres of vineyards in the Alexander Valley. In 1981, the Ferrari-Carano Vineyards and Winery was built on their 80-acre estate in the Dry Creek Valley in Healdsburg, California, and is named after Don's grandmother, Amelia Ferrari. The Caranos are both second-generation Italian Americans from Reno, Nevada, where they owned the Eldorado Hotel/Casino. Over time, the family acquired a total of 250 acres of prime Sonoma County vineyards in the Alexander and Dry Creek Valleys.

Donald took his winemaking seriously, and 70 of the 80 acres at Ferrari-Carano Vineyards and Winery are planted, and 10 acres house various buildings, including the main house, designed like a magnificent Tuscan residence. However, this structure was constructed as a tasting room, barrel room, administration offices, and a private space for entertaining. Don's wife was an avid gardener. She hand-picked and strategically designed the property,



including the Italian cypresses and the vintage lampposts.

NEW OWNERS

Bill Foley, owner of a well-known wine portfolio containing some of the world's most excellent vineyards with wineries from four different continents, purchased the property in 2021. His investment portfolios include resorts, hotels, wineries, investments, and entertainment companies. Bill also owns the Vegas Golden Knights, which won the Stanley Cup in 2023.

After purchasing the winery, Bill renovated and remodeled the main spaces in 2021 and 2022 to modernize the winery. In November 2021, he imported and planted numerous century-old olive trees near the fountain where guests can enjoy outdoor winetasting.

FERRARI-CARANO WINES

Sara Quider is the head winemaker at the estate. She sources the grapes for Ferrari-Carano

wines from five regions, each one selected for its unique terroir.

- Alexander Valley features deep, fertile soils in the mountain, bench land, and the valley floor.
- Russian River Valley is known for being a cooler region with marine fog, gravelly soils, deep forests, and open grassland
- Dry Creek Valley boasts warm, well-drained soils.
- Napa Carneros region has a cool climate and plenty of fog.
- Mendocino Ridge/Anderson Valley has warm, well-drained soils.

A WINETASTING VISIT

During my recent visit, I toured the tasting room, walked through the stunning gardens, and then sat outside by the fountain to enjoy a Reserve Wine Tasting. Antonia Mata-Marquez cares for five acres of flowers and plants in the garden. Antonia says, "My vision is to create an all-sustainable garden that feels welcoming to every guest. I want people to have an incredible

experience that will entice them to want to come back."

The gardens surrounding Villa Fiore, Ferrari-Carano's Guest Experience Center, are Italian/French in style. The level garden boasts geometric shapes that form its structure, which is filled with herbs, trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals, and edible flowers and vegetables. The winery chef uses the garden ingredients in the Sunday lunches and other catered events.

The Reserve Wine Tasting includes delicious pours from five vineyard-designated wines. My tasting began with the 2020 Fiorella Chardonnay from the Russian River Valley APA. Each reserve wine from this area is named after one of the Foley children, or in the case of Fiorella, after their cat. Fiorella exhibits a fragrant bouquet of pear, honeysuckle, Meyer lemon, and creme brûlée. The flavors of apricot, vanilla, brioche, and buttercream come through, leaving a rich and creamy mouthfeel in the finish.

The 2019 Sky High Ranch Pinot Noir is one of the winery's high-end red blends. Grapes picked from 1600 feet high in the Mendocino



County Anderson Valley are tiny and have a bit more tannin structure than others. These tiny grapes create an aroma of cocoa, plum, blueberry pie, and cola and taste like pomegranate, black cherry, and caramel. This balanced wine features a velvety texture.

One of the top cabernet blends from the Southern Alexander Valley is the 2016 Prevail West Face Alexander Valley. These stressed vines grow full-flavored grapes. The blend boasts aromas of toffee, nutmeg, and vanilla, and the touch of syrah adds a bit of spice to the wine.

Both the 2018 Prevail Lookout Tree with cabernet franc and the 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon were delicious, silky, and smooth.

Finally, the 2016 Prevail Back 40 from the Alexander Valley included intense aromas of toffee, currents, and leather with hints of nutmeg. The rich, full-bodied wine had a long, smooth finish and plenty of tannins.

I savored a charcuterie plate with my wines. Pete and Kate Seghesio provided the salamis served alongside three delicious cheeses: a triple cream brie, a Manchego, and a cow's milk cheese known as Barely Buzzed that featured an espresso lavender rind. The Barely Buzzed was from Beehive Cheese Company BLLC in Utah. The board included strawberry preserves with a red wine reduction from the Chalk Hill Estate Vineyards' culinary garden.

Ferrari-Carano offers a variety of experiences for guests to enjoy, stunning seating both indoors and out, and incredible wines to savor. Book an appointment today to visit this little piece of Italy in Sonoma County, California. ❖