

CALIFORNIA COMFORT

BUILDING ON DECADES OF SUCCESS, CARMENET EXTENDS THE LINE & CONTINUES TO REWARD FANS

BY W. R. TISH

America's wine boom, now two-decades strong, is so old it's easy to forget that the trend's roots were decidedly French.

Americans, always keen on shortcuts, equated most things French—from Chablis to Champagne, from Pouilly-Fuissé to fussy sommeliers—with quality.

Carmenet Winery was founded in Sonoma by Chalone Wine Group in 1983, when French cachet was in full swing. Easily pronounced (“Car-men-ay”), the wine was based on a principle of producing Bordeaux-style blends. To reflect that inspiration, the winery was named Carmenet—an archaic French term for the family of grape varieties used in traditional Bordeaux.

Carmenet gained critical acclaim and broad recognition, transitioning through ownership by Beringer and then to Bronco Wine Co. in 2006. Today, the brand is as strong as ever—named an Impact Hot Prospect 2015, 2016 and 2017, as well as a 2018 Beverage Information Group Rising Star.

The name—with its roll-off-the-tongue ease—is no doubt part of that success. But Carmenet also established a reputation for its California style, brimming with ripe fruit and framed with judicious oak.

Varietal Spectrum

Two of Bronco's top winemakers, John Allbaugh and Bob Stashak, are in charge of table wines and sparkling, respectively. They make seven distinct varietals, including a newly released 2017 Sauvignon Blanc and a Méthode Champenoise Brut made from 100% Chardonnay. Carmenet wines are not shy on flavor—which translates to delivering surprising value in the red-hot \$12-\$15 price segment. “Carmenet Reserve Chardonnay vs Rombauer Chardonnay—consumer gets three times the value!” as Bronco Wine Co.'s Joey Franzia puts it.

Winemaker John Allbaugh echoes the commitment to flavor: “I love oak, when it's working with the fruit. For Carmenet Vintner's Collection Reserve, Bronco sources from the finest family-owned vineyards in California. I get the pick of Chardonnay grapes. They are fully ripe and take well to barrel-fermenting.”

His latest release for the label, a Sauvignon Blanc, shows Allbaugh's deft hand at blending. The grape's natural zing is rounded out with dollops of Muscat (6%) and Riesling (1%). The result has the fruit-forward chops to work as an aperitif, but retains the balanced acidity to hold its own the table with grilled chicken, fish, even oysters.

Market Presence

Surprisingly, but Carmenet's formula—California character, great value, rewarding reliability—has been resonating off-premise at independent retailers, notes Franzia—not chains.



To enhance the brand's momentum, Bronco Wine Co. will be offering coupon programs nationally (where allowed), and plans promotional tie-ins for Carmenet around Mother's Day, Fourth of July and Halloween.

Reds, Whites & Bubbly

While Carmenet's flagship is the Barrel Fermented Chardonnay, which features an opulent balance of tropical fruit, vanilla and butterscotch notes. John Allbaugh's red table wines deliver comparable flavor intensity and quality-price ratio.

Carmenet Cabernet Sauvignon presents a complex bouquet of berries with hints of chocolate; the palate rounds out with spice and vanilla into a smooth finish.

Carmenet Pinot Noir shows impressive depth and charm. Aromas include strawberries and spice while the palate offers raspberry fruit and cedar notes.

Carmenet Red Blend showcases ripe cherry and plum, coupled with strawberry jam and nuances of smoked vanilla spice.

Carmenet Sparkling Chardonnay—fermented in the bottle—showcases tiny bubbles, crispness and the apple and pear side of the grape's natural character. A pleasant pastry nuance lingers on the palate as creamy and crisp textures impart a refreshing finish. ■



John Allbaugh's latest release is a 2017 Sauvignon Blanc.

