



Diamond Wine Club

CARTER CELLARS

Napa Valley

Carter Cellars' successful rise to a top level California winery is a simple story of two men whose friendship evolved into a remarkable business partnership. How they became friends is a tale worth repeating.

The two men, Mark Carter and Nils Venge, met several years ago, thanks to Carter's interest in fine wines. Carter actually began his career as a developer of restored Victorian homes in his hometown of Eureka, California. The homes overlooked Humboldt Bay, a fixture in far northern California. One success followed another and soon Carter had built a number of Victorians and created himself a successful business. A hotel property followed and then a truly thriving restaurant named 301 Restaurant was added to Carter's portfolio of businesses. It was at the restaurant that Mark Carter established a Wine Spectator Grand Award Wine List that has continued to secure awards to this day.

In Mark Carter's quest for wine authenticity, heralded Napa Valley winemaker Nils Venge was invited to appear at a winemaker event at Carter's restaurant. It was the same Nils Venge of the perfect 100 score by Robert Parker in 1985 while at Goth Vineyards. That initial appearance turned into many successful return events during which Carter and Venge became close friends. When Carter finally decided to develop Carter Cellars in 1994, it was Nils Venge who provided the professional help that assured Carter Cellars a successful beginning. Fruit was secured from a number of sources and the first Carter Cellars wines were released to high scores and good acceptance from the national wine media. The original 160 cases have evolved into about 1,600 cases, still minuscule by anyone's standards for the wine industry.

That was more than twenty years ago, and the awards and accolades have

continued unabated during that period. Carter Cellars has raised its presence steadily and is now recognized as one of the top wineries in Northern California.

"I have chosen to keep our production small," commented Carter. "It has a great deal to do with the blocks and vineyards we draw from. All are steep, hillside properties (at an elevation of around 1,100 feet) and only produce a limited amount of grapes per acre. However, the intensity and wonderful flavors the vines bestow on the grapes more than makes up for the lack of quantity. We usually make about thirty barrels of each wine, which really isn't all that much."

Asked about his stature among Napa Valley's elite wineries, Mark Carter answered thusly: "I am delighted to be where I am right now, among a wonderful collection of winemakers and winery owners. I feel I have approached the situation correctly and have always adhered to the axiom that being small is better."

Asked about advice he would give prospective winery owners in Napa Valley or elsewhere, Carter said that he would expect any new owner to really get to know the area they choose to work in. He would also expect those persons to drink a great deal of wine from that area and try and develop a particular style with which to emulate. Only when a new owner can say he truly knows his particular surroundings will the wines he makes or has made become successful and be accepted.

All of Carter Cellars' wines are crushed and made at Mark Carter's other Napa Valley winery, Envy Winery, located on Tubbs Lane in Calistoga. A new processing building has been added recently to facilitate production at the facility.

In 2009, Mark Carter added winemaker Mike Smith, whose expertise has had an

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MARK CARTER,
OWNER

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incredibly beneficial effect on the wines of Carter Cellars. Smith started his winemaking journey under the tutelage of Thomas Brown (Schrader Cellars and Outpost Wines) who has become a significant winemaker in the boutique winery world of California. He has had the opportunity to work with a vast array of wine labels and over the years has articulated his own philosophies on winemaking. To quote Smith, “My philosophy is simple: I like to create the most natural and expressive wines California can offer. I believe in allowing the fruit to fully reveal itself in the wines, encouraging the personality and terroir of the vineyards, while showcasing itself to the fullest extent. This allows the wines to be true to their nature and brings harmony in the bottle.”

It’s easy to see that all is good with Mark Carter and Carter Cellars. It’s a clear situation of someone knowing what he wanted and following through until reaching fruition. Chances are you will be hearing a great deal more about this amazing winery.

Carter 2017 ‘Carter’ Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley

176 CASES PRODUCED

95+ POINTS — *Antonio Galloni’s Vinous*

“The 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon ‘Carter’ is rich, sumptuous and luxuriously ripe, as all these wines are, and yet it has a ton of supporting structure that, as it softens, should reveal all of the potential the wine is presently holding back. In 2017, the Carter is a blend of the best barrels and includes fruit from Weitz, Las Piedras and To Kalon.”

95+ POINTS — *Jeb Dunnuck*

“The 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon ‘Carter’ puts in more oomph and offers rocking levels of crème de cassis and black raspberry fruit as well as notes of spice and graphite. Full-bodied, nicely concentrated, and flawlessly balanced, with ripe tannins, it has a terrific mix of elegance and richness.”



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**This month’s Diamond *Plus!*
Featured Wine:**

Mathew Bruno 2013
Cabernet Sauvignon,
Napa Valley

95 Points + Best of Class + Double Gold Medal
- West Coast Wine Competition

540 CASES PRODUCED

