

the drunken cyclist

The Many Faces of Ferrari-Carano—Part Two

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by the drunken cyclist

After emerging from the Enoteca at Ferrari-Carano, the plan was for Cheryl McMillan (the Director of Hospitality) to drive me up to Ferrari-Carano's other winery, Lazy Creek Vineyards in Philo, about an hour north. Even though I appreciated the offer, I opted to make the drive myself, since, well, I can't think of anyone that should have to suffer through an entire day with me.

It just isn't humane.

The drive up to Philo was fun but also intense and a bit frustrating: fun because I love twisty roads—I think it is the cyclist in me; intense since it was *pouring* down rain; and frustrating since I had to repress my inner Philly that wanted to lay on the horn when trapped behind the octogenarian who refused to exceed 25 mph or use one of the many turnouts.

Talk about inhumane.

From the moment I pulled off route 128 and on to the bucolic dirt drive up to Lazy Creek, traversing bridges through the woods, there was not one element of pastoral Lazy Creek and its 3.5k case production that would induce a connection to the palatial Ferrari-Carano or its 200k output.



Lazy Creek Tasting Winery and Tasting Room.

After giving my Nikon a brief workout, I pulled the door handle and within seconds I was chatting with Christy Ackerman, Lazy Creek's winemaker, a position she took shortly after Don and Rhonda Carano purchased the winery in 2008.



Christy took me on a tour of the property and within minutes, it was clear that Christy and Lazy Creek were a fantastic match. Dressed in dungarees and work boots, with her hair tied loosely in a ponytail, she seemed to be a natural extension of the winery's rustic charm. Although clearly very bright and talented, Christy, like Lazy Creek, is the antithesis of ostentatious, while still exuding a confidence in her work that certainly comes through in the glass.

2014 Lazy Creek Vineyards Gewürztraminer: Retail \$22. With just 0.22% residual sugar, this wine is essentially completely dry, but Christy says the tad of sugar helps hold the floral note onto the palate. A six-hour cold soak on the skins after crush and before press helps to develop the classic Gewürz flavors. Fantastic on the palate, the wine comes off as bone dry. Really Nice. **Outstanding. 90-92 Points.**

2013 Lazy Creek Vineyards 'Lazy Day' Pinot Noir: \$29. A blend from the weaker performing lots and younger vines, a wine the previous owners called a "Red Table Wine." Christy usually hates the individual components of Lazy Day but the blend always surprises her as it invariably comes out much better than the separate parts. Really fruit forward as only 8-15% new oak is used. Quite fruity and fun, this is a wine that is good for now and has proven to be a really popular seller for the winery. **Very Good. 88-90 Points.**



2013 Lazy Creek Vineyards Middelridge Ranch Pinot Noir: Retail \$48. Middle ridge Ranch is located in Boonville, which is usually 10 degrees warmer than the other vineyards in the program. The vineyard was originally planted by Jim Ball under the consultation of the legendary Merry Edwards and was purchased by the Caranos on 2012. “All things cherry” according to Christy. Dusty cherry nose with a hint of cinnamon. Great weight, balance, and fruit, the wine is fantastic now, but could easily last another 5-8 years.
Outstanding. 91-93 Points.

2013 Ferrari-Carano Sky High Pinot Noir: Retail \$48. The vineyard is planted on the grounds of an old hippie outpost, the “Rainbow Commune.” The original farmer, Jack Hayward, planted the vineyard but could not pay his debts, so he sold it to the Caranos in 2007. At 1600 feet, the vines are above the fog, creating “islands in the sky.” There is also not as big a diurnal shift (wide range of temperature) in the vineyard, resulting in a bit fruitier wine. Rhonda Carano named it “Sky High” not due to its hippie background but rather since she could not call it “Islands in the Sky” (which was already trademarked). Plenty of cherry on this wine, but also pine and earth. Perhaps fruitier than Middle Ranch, but also maybe more complex.
Outstanding. 92-94 Points.



2013 Lazy Creek Vineyards Estate Pinot Noir: Retail \$58. A blend of mostly new plantings since the Caranos bought the ranch with Pommard and 667 the predominant clones. Believed to be one of the older vineyards in Anderson Valley, the Estate has a completely different nose than the other Lazy Creek Pinots. Pronounced darker red fruits dominate the nose and palate, this is a powerful wine. Really powerful. Concentrated and dense, this is a California Pinot lover's dream. **Outstanding. 93-95 Points.**

As I was pulling out of Lazy Creek, heading south for the hour drive back to Healdsburg it hit me: even though the two properties could not be any more different, there was an element that certainly linked Lazy Creek and Ferrari-Carano. I had met many of the people that were employed by the Caranos and in all of those encounters, completely unprovoked, the staff all spoke very highly of the owners. In an industry where turnover is common, it seems as though as the result of fine leadership, employees at Ferrari-Carano are in for the long haul.

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