



Francis and Kathy Mahoney set out to realize a dream: to grow Pinot Noir that would stand up to the French Burgundies. Although centuries of experience in French vineyards and cellars has proven Pinot Noir to be a most difficult varietal to nurture, the Mahoneys decided to challenge the possibilities in Northern California's soil and climate.

Francis was captivated by the concept of terroir – the influence of soil, wind, fog, sun exposure, and rainfall on the style of wine they produced. Turning his focus towards the undiscovered “Los Carneros” region in the southern portion of Napa and Sonoma valleys, Francis felt that conditions in this wind-swept countryside were ideal for Pinot Noir to thrive. So it was here that the Mahoneys set their roots.

On a modest budget, a small, functional winery (Carneros Creek Winery) was built in 1972 and the Mahoneys' search for the ultimate Pinot Noir began in earnest. With Kathy in the office managing orders, compliance, staff, and finances, Francis took to the vineyards where his intuition led him to the realization that truly great wines are primarily the result of foresight in the vineyards. Francis used this premise as a framework around which his vineyards would be planted. Rather than choosing Pinot Noir clones because of their propensity for high yields (a factor that played a major role in their lackluster quality up until that time), Francis planted and studied clonal selections of Pinot Noir that had proven track records in European vineyards along with some selections from California that lacked only the right climate and proper vineyard management.

Using his Carneros vineyards as his laboratory, Francis, along with a team from U.C. Davis, began a tedious clonal research project to better understand the intricacies of the more successful clonal selections. Over the course of that twelve-year research project, it became evident that the best Pinot Noir was not to be found in a single clonal selection. Each of the clones had unique flavor, structure, and aromatic characteristics and each had its own preference for vineyard location, pruning techniques, watering regime, soil type, sun exposure, barrel and bottle aging.

Calling on his experience in the cellars of Burgundy, the profile of superb Pinot Noir ingrained in his memory, Francis began blending the clones together like the colors on an artist's palette, to create the distinctive styles of Pinot Noir now showcased at the Mahoney Family Vineyards. The Mahoneys continue to expand the possibilities of the Carneros region as they explore other exciting varieties with origins in the Old World.