

Contact: Doug Rollins  
Email: drollins@chateauelan.com

## **HISTORY OF CHÂTEAU ÉLAN 1981-2009 FROM VINEYARDS TO LEISURE & CONFERENCE DESTINATION**

**BRASELTON, GA JANUARY 5, 2009** -- Château Élan began 28 years ago as a result of an impromptu visit to a roadside fruit stand just north of Atlanta in Braselton, Georgia by entrepreneurs and wine lovers, Dr. Donald and Nancy Panoz.

The Panoz,' then owners of a large pharmaceutical company that pioneered development of the nicotine patch were looking for a distribution site in the area. On their way to a reception hosted by a friend, they stopped at a roadside stand to pick up a fruit basket which included plump Muscadine's, a grape indigenous to Georgia. When they presented the basket they asked their host if the Vitis Vinifera grape, which produces premium wines such as Chardonnay's, Cabernets, Merlots and Viognier were grown in the north Georgia foothills, the friend responded "Don, are you daft? This is cotton country, red clay soil, and humidity! None of the farmers believe the conditions in this area could sustain Vinifera grape growth."

But Don and Nancy who had traveled extensively in Europe enjoying the wines from the various regions loved challenges and they subsequently brought in two viticulturalists from California. After extensive soil testing and climate analysis the winemakers indicated the soil and humidity was not unlike some areas of California and France. They devised an ingenious method of planting techniques and distinctive trellising and pruning of the vines leaving plenty of space for circulation and growth.

Some 3,500 acres were acquired for Château Élan of which approximately 200 acres were planted in Vinifera grapes. The first wines were released in 1985 (1984 vintage) and the Château Élan Winery was opened to the public in July. As visitors began flocking to Château Élan to see the vineyards it soon became apparent that amenities were needed to accommodate requests for a restaurant and overnight accommodations.

Château Élan was on its way toward becoming a top-tier destination and conference center.

-more-

Château Élan/page 2

In 1988 a 42,000 square foot Château designed in the style of a 16<sup>th</sup> century French royal retreat was completed. Inside the Château were two restaurants, Le Clos and Café Élan, winery tours and tastings, a wine market, art gallery, meeting rooms, a full-production winery, aging cellars, and a temperature controlled warehouse.

Then 63 holes of championship golf on four courses were developed over the next seven years beginning with the Château course in 1989, The Legends in 1993, The Par 3 Executive Walking Course in 1994 and The Woodlands in 1996. From 1994-1998 The Sarazen World Open Golf Championship was held on the Legends Course. Winners included Ernie Els, Mark Calcavecchia, Dudley Hart and Frank Nobilo who won it twice.

In 1992, a 33,000 sq. ft European style Spa mansion featuring 14 themed guest suites and 35 treatment rooms opened. The Stan Smith Tennis Center was added in 1994, as was the Equestrian Center. 1988 was the beginning of what is now a Four Diamond, 276 room Inn, and 10 two and three bedroom Golf Villas plus a 25,000 square foot conference center, two ballrooms and 19 meeting rooms. Henk Evers who has been with Château Élan as General Manager for 15 years is also President, CEO and Managing Partner of Château Élan.

Paddy's Irish Pub originally commissioned in Dublin was shipped, reassembled and opened here in 1997. Road Atlanta a 2.54 mile Gran Prix motor raceway located 10 minutes from Château Élan was acquired in 1977 and became the home of the Skip Barber Driving and Racing School, and Petit Le Mans, a 10 hour or 1000 mile endurance race of the American Le Mans Series.

In August 2007 a new purpose built 1,600 sq. ft. Culinary Studio and Cooking School which features top tier kitchen appliances furnished by the Viking Range Corporation, opened. Recreational and corporate interactive cooking classes are scheduled year-round with Château Élan's Executive Chef Marc Suennemann and his team of eight chefs conducting classes on a variety of international cuisines.

Château Élan is the largest producer of wines in Georgia. Peter Kasprzak, Château Élan's very gifted Aussie winemaker, creates premium reds and whites, blush and port wines plus a collection of Georgia Muscadine wines.

-more-

Along the way wine connoisseurs have honored Château Élan wines with more than 300 national and international awards. *Wine Spectator* magazine named Château Élan's Essence de Cabernet 2000, Nouveau Chambourcin 2001, Merlot Founders Reserve and Viognier Founders Reserve 2000 as best buys under \$40.

Château Élan's annual Vineyard Fest now in its 13<sup>th</sup> year is celebrated during the grape harvest, generally the last weekend of August. Wineries from the United States and around world participate, pouring their best wines for guests' wine tasting. Prominent chefs from the region also participate pairing food and wine in cooking demonstrations. It is a "sold out" event with advance ticket purchases limited to 2000 only to prevent crowding and provide comfortable and enjoyable setting for guests and invited wineries. The Inn is generally sold out also with special weekend Vineyard Fest packages.

The prestigious Zagat Survey selected Château Élan in the "Top Ten Wine Country Inns in America" for their 2008-2009 survey.

Château Élan spends substantial funds annually on maintaining, upgrading and refreshing all aspects of the physical plant, furnishings, fixtures, and amenities. In 2007-2009 more than \$13 million has been spent on new carpeting, furniture and fixtures for the ballrooms and conference center, bathrooms, bedrooms and restaurants including L'Auberge, the popular sports lounge located on the Atrium balcony.

For more information on Château Élan log on to [www.chateauelan.com](http://www.chateauelan.com)