

WINE COUNTRY *This Week*



RAYMOND VINEYARDS

By: Richard Paul Hinkle

Evolution Under New Ownership

The five generation story of the Raymonds took a new twist last August when the winery was purchased by another family with a well-layered vinous history. The Raymond reputation – built through dedication and discipline – is now in the equally-proven vinous hands of the French family Boisset.

"We are pleased that the Raymonds have given their blessing to our purchase of the winery they created back in 1974," says new proprietor Jean-Charles Boisset. "The Raymonds have been an integral part of crafting the phenomenal reputation of the Napa Valley. As we embark on this exciting evolution for the winery we will seek to always honor their legacy and ensure they will remain proud of the winery that bears their name."

The likelihood of that happening has to be counted good in that Boisset has shown that he means what he says with his management of Sonoma County's DeLoach Winery, which the Boisset family acquired several years ago. At Raymond Boisset



brought the highly regarded winemaking consultant Philippe Melka on board with the 2009 harvest to lend his vast experience in making Cabernet Sauvignon-based wines. Just months ago Stephanie Putnam – previously with Far Niente and Hess Collection, also good places for Cabernet Sauvignon – joined the team as director of winemaking. She is assisted in the cellar by Kathy George, the Oregon State grad who has been with Raymond for two decades. On the vineyard side, Eric Pooler is now charged with moving the Raymond Vineyards – at the estate in Rutherford, in St. Helena and in Jamison Canyon – up to sustainable and organic standards.

Take a good look at the following wines, and you'll see that what's on the horizon is well in line with what has proceeded.

Sauvignon Blanc 2009 Napa Valley Reserve (\$16): Fresh grass and lime in the nose, with a razor like briskness in the mouth. The finish is stone-hard and crisp, just what you want for the oyster course.

Chardonnay 2008 Napa Valley Reserve (\$20): Light peach up front, with French bread- and-vanillin oak notes; creamy in the middle, with lemon pie hints – both the fruit and the buttery crust. Chicken in a cream sauce.

Merlot 2006 Napa Valley Reserve (\$24): Cassis and menthol and green olive; wonderfully fluid texture, and just enough oak toastiness to frame all that fruit. Flank steak.

Merlot 2005 Napa Valley, Rutherford (\$35): Narrow cassis and green olive, with firm, tightly-drawn blackberry in the middle palate and finish. Graham oak is subtle and alluring.

Field Blend Red 2007 California (\$15): This is a fun wine, made with several varieties, including the most obvious raspberry (Zinfandel) and blackberry (Cabernet Sauvignon). Lively and brisk, put this in your picnic basket with the potato salad and ham sandwich.

Cabernet Sauvignon 2007 Napa-Sonoma-Lake, Family Classic (\$20): Easy black currant fruit and black pepper spice. Think Salisbury steak or the like.

Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 St. Helena (\$60): This is a solidly built wine that shows off the St. Helena appellation. The black currant and cassis are there in full force, with a delightful hit of blackberry from the middle through the finish. "This was a cool vintage," says George. "The longer ripening period allowed for even fruit development and contributed to high quality wines. We like this wine with roasted duck breast or braised rabbit." The ducks are easier to catch than the rabbits, though.

Raymond Vineyard is located at 849 Zinfandel Lane (on the south side of town, visible from Highway 29), St. Helena. Phone 1-800-525.2659 or check the web at RaymondVineyards.com for further information. The tasting room, replete with colorful and tasteful gift items, is open daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

[Hinkle is the author of nine wine books. Visit his website at www.RichardPaulHinkle.com.]

