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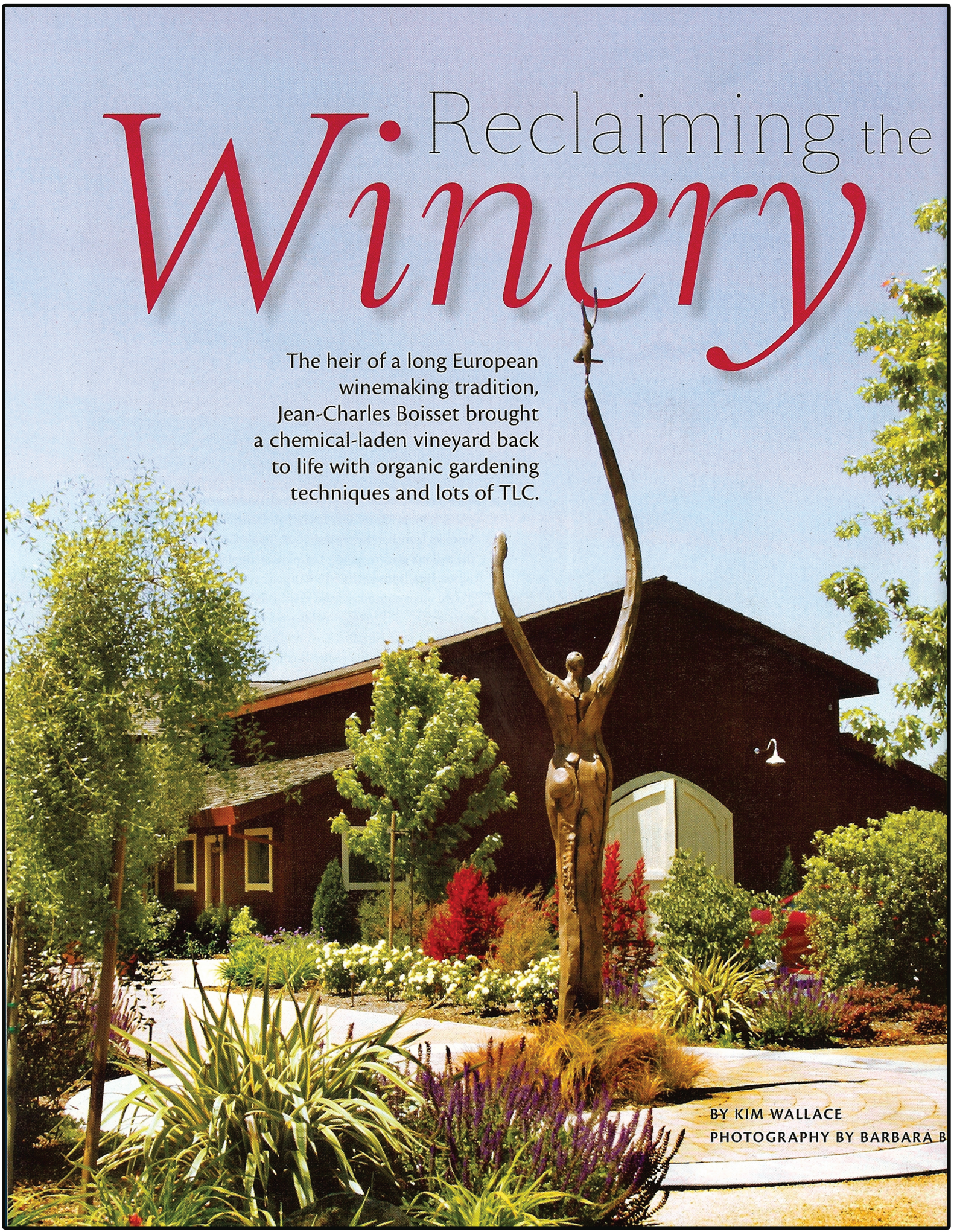
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Reclaiming the Winery

The heir of a long European winemaking tradition, Jean-Charles Boisset brought a chemical-laden vineyard back to life with organic gardening techniques and lots of TLC.



BY KIM WALLACE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BARBARA B





When winemaker Jean-Charles Boisset

first visited California's pristine Russian River Valley, he felt an immediate, intimate connection with the land. It reminded him of home. A native of the Burgundy region of France, Jean-Charles was drawn to the valley's flowing river, gorgeous mountains and sumptuous soil. He was so taken with the lush terrain—and its potential for producing world-class wines—that in 2003 he added DeLoach Vineyards, an 18-acre, family-owned estate, to his winemaking family's generations-old repertoire. Potential turned out to be a key word: The vineyards had been polluted by decades of chemical-intense farming practices that had left it lifeless. Jean-Charles called upon his family heritage to revive the tired soil.

The French term *terroir* denotes a particular, site-specific set of flavor qualities that derive from soil, weather and growing practices, and Jean-Charles knew his California land had the potential to create amazing flavors. "When I first visited Sonoma County, I was inspired by the incredible potential of Russian River Valley terroir to grow great pinot noir," Jean-Charles says. "But I knew that in order to make wine that fully expressed the great Russian River Valley, we would first need to restore health to the land."

DYNAMIC BIODYNAMICS

Jean-Charles' first initiative was to revitalize the chemical-laden soil by reconstructing its ecological harmony. To do this, he turned to biodynamic agriculture, a "beyond organic" farming method developed in the 1920s by Austrian scientist Rudolf Steiner, who also founded the Waldorf schools. Jean-Charles' faith in biodynamic agriculture stemmed from his upbringing in Burgundy. "My sister and I were taught by our grandparents at a very young age to be stewards of the land," he says. The Boisset family, one of the largest exporters and producers of fine French wine, continues a long tradition of eco-conscious farming in its estate vineyards.

Biodynamic farming's guiding principle is to treat the land as a self-contained, self-sustaining ecosystem that creates and maintains its health and vitality without external or unnatural additions. Soil, plants, farm animals and humans work together to create a holistic, living organism: the thriving biodynamic farm. "What is essential, I think, in biodynamics is the essence of what we call terroir," Jean-Charles says. "And terroir is the definition of the earth, the plant and the climate—in addition to the passion of the individual—really working together."

LEFT: "Earth and Sky," an 18-foot bronze statue, greets winery guests as they enter the DeLoach Vineyards tasting room and organic garden picnic area.
ABOVE: A crate of freshly picked pinot noir grapes awaits transformation into wine.



Writer Kim Wallace helps spray pinot noir grapes with a mix of powdered quartz and water, which acts as a desiccant, absorbing water and preventing fungal growth.

REBUILDING LIVING SOIL

To heal the land and allow the vineyard to recharge from the ground up, the DeLoach team annually planted cover crops, such as safflower, barley and vetch, that return vital nutrients to the dormant soil. As a result, the soil eventually became rich and lively—almost an entity in itself. "When we talk about respecting our soil, it is really like respecting the insides of our bodies," Jean-Charles says. "Because the birth, which is that lovely plant we see, is only coming out thanks to what has happened below."

Below ground, the safflower cover crop's roots penetrated the sticky clay soil to draw moisture from the nearby Russian River flood plain. Jean-Charles' team added a combination of natural soil amendments—rock phosphate, lime and biodynamic compost, and a mixture of organic barley straw and hormone-free, local cow manure. They also added herbal "teas" of yarrow, chamomile, nettle, oak, dandelion and valerian. "Several of those preparations can be used by humans as a homeopathic remedy," DeLoach Vineyards grower Eric Pooler says. "The change I saw in the vineyard from one year to the next after we began the process was just amazing."

DeLoach's formerly stagnant soil transformed into a rich ecosystem that's now home to eight clones of pinot noir and two clones of chardonnay. Nutritious soil, bountiful water and extra TLC from the team helped the vineyard come to embody the true essence of terroir. While Jean-Charles believes in the power of biodynamic agriculture, he puts even more faith in the collective power of the people who believe in biodynamics. "You cannot have a skeptic on the team," Jean-Charles says. "They've got to feel it. And I know it sounds very spiritually weird, but that osmosis between the human being, the plant, the soil and the terroir has to be an integral part of an overall transformation."

Beyond Organic

After a three-year transition, DeLoach Vineyards became one of only 64 vineyards worldwide to receive prestigious Biodynamic certification from Demeter Biodynamic, a third-party certifier. The DeLoach estate vineyards are also certified organic by California Certified Organic Farmers, which is accredited by the USDA National Organic Program. "We view certification not as the destination of our voyage, but as an affirmation that we are moving in the right direction," DeLoach grower Eric Pooler says. In 2010, organic and biodynamic pinot noir and chardonnay grapes yielded DeLoach's first estate-grown wines.

7 Commandments of Sustainability

DeLoach Vineyards created its own set of rules for sustainable winemaking, vineyard to vessel.

1 **Invest in renewable energy.** In partnership with Village Green Energy, DeLoach powers its operations with 100 percent renewable energy sources, keeping 314 metric tons of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere each year.

2 **Recycle cork.** DeLoach encourages customers to recycle all their corks through the ReCORK program by Amorim. The winery provides cork drop-off boxes and delivers corks to the organization, which recycles them into flooring, insulation and other items: recork.org.

3 **Conserve water.** DeLoach was one of the first wineries to implement an innovative membrane bioreactor that relies on microorganisms to purify the water used in winemaking so it can be reused for landscaping and vineyard irrigation. The system, called the Titan MBR, can save up to 2 million gallons of water per year.

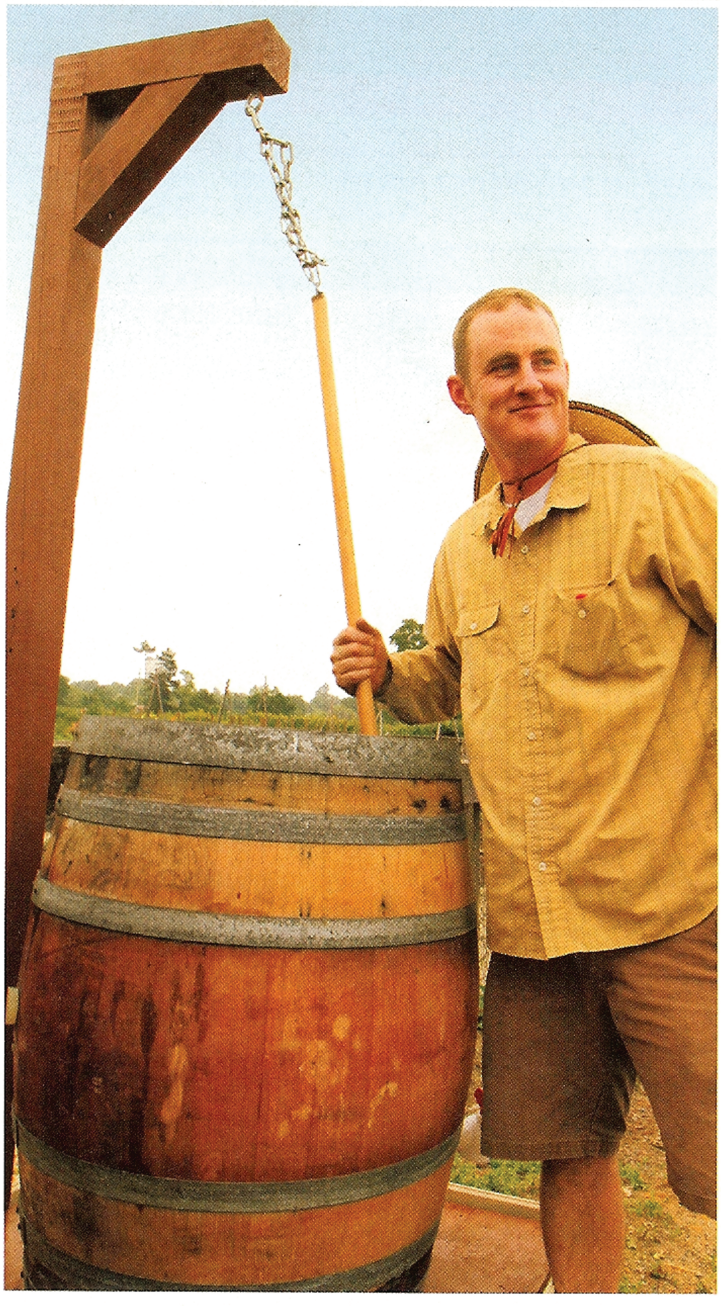
4 **Feed thy neighbor.** The winery's half-acre organic garden provides a bounty of fresh fruits, vegetables, flowers and herbs for the vineyard's biodynamic preparations, as well as for winery guests. In addition, DeLoach's organic garden surplus benefits nearby Santa Rosa's food banks and restaurants.

5 **Teach the willing.** DeLoach encourages other vineyards to adopt sustainable farming practices. It offers technical support as well as financial incentives to help partner vineyards eliminate synthetic chemicals and become certified by trusted third-party agencies.

6 **Share a barrel.** With its Barrel to Barrel program, DeLoach eliminates unnecessary packaging for large wine quantities by delivering big orders in plastic bags and small wooden barrels, reducing packaging by 99 percent compared with glass. The bags hold 67 five-ounce glasses of wine—about 13 bottles.

7 **Prioritize reuse.** When DeLoach remodeled its estate, old doors, windows and tiles found new homes, and reclaimed wood from old DeLoach wine vats was used to build new cabinets. DeLoach insulated the winery's walls with recycled denim jeans and created a welcome sign from wood recycled from the old Levi Strauss factory in nearby San Francisco.



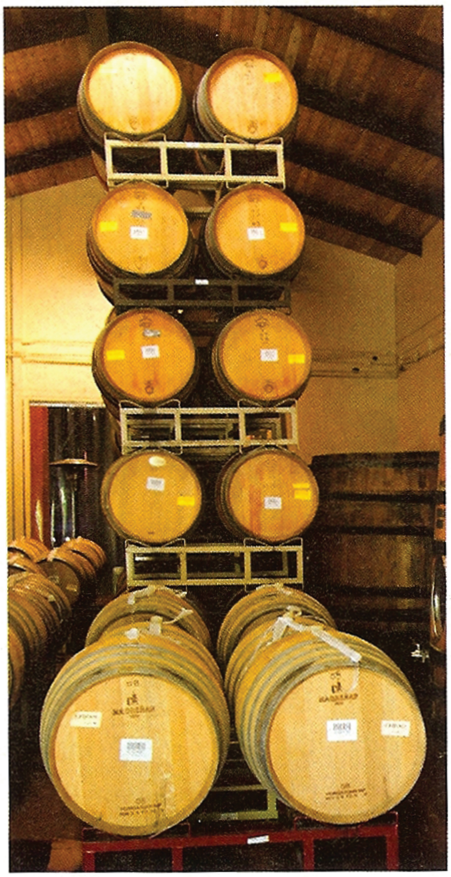


TOP: A vineyard visitor picks greens from a garden bed.

BOTTOM: Winegrower Eric Pooler demonstrates his method of mixing Biodynamic Prep 501, a mixture of crushed quartz and water.



DeLoach stores hundreds of bottles in its extensive wine cellar. Guests can enjoy them through group or private wine tastings, winery tours, picnics and group dinners.



ABOVE: DeLoach uses traditional, small French oak fermentors and Old World winemaking techniques.

OPPOSITE: In the DeLoach picnic area, guests enjoy chardonnay and fresh-picked garden greens.

Drinking DeLoach

A 10-time *Wine & Spirits* "Winery of the Year," DeLoach Vineyards produces a full range of affordable, delicious wines that express the terroir of Sonoma County's Russian River Valley. Known best for its pinot noir, chardonnay and zinfandel, DeLoach Vineyards offers three tiers of wines for enthusiasts and casual drinkers.

1 **Vineyard Designate Series:** These limited-production wines are crafted from some of the Russian River Valley's most acclaimed vineyards. Visit the DeLoach tasting room or join the wine club to experience some. Try the Zinfandel Nova Vineyard 2007, $32, for dark berry flavors coupled with notes of chocolate and spice.

2 **OFS Series:** "Our Finest Selection" is just that—DeLoach's most prized wines bottled in years when the winemaker believes grape quality is extraordinary. The Tawny Red Wine, $32, blends equal parts zinfandel, cabernet sauvignon and petite sirah to create intoxicating aromas of black cherry, plum and white chocolate with notes of cardamom spice. Linger with close friends over a bottle of this complex wine—as afternoon turns to evening, this wine opens up even more to reveal intricate hints of other delicious flavors.

3 **Russian River Valley:** DeLoach's flagship series of award-winning, affordable wines represents the winery's heart and soul. The red berry and anise aromas of Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2008, $24, will complement your next mushroom or red-meat meal. For dessert, grab a Chardonnay Russian River Valley 2007, $18, and savor this smooth, creamy chardonnay's scents of Asian pear and warm apple pie.

KIM WALLACE is a freelance writer and editor who believes in the power of an oversized glass of pinot noir.

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Learn more: deloachvineyards.com