

# Sonoma



Clear  
79°/54°



- Home
- News
- Events
- Photos
- Sports
- More Towns
- PressDemocrat
- Contact Us

Search

Like Confirm

You like this. · [Admin Page](#) · [Insights](#) · [Error](#)  
Charles Rivas likes this Be the first of your friends to like

Tweet 0

## Jean-Charles Boisset taking Buena Vista back to its roots

Friday, August 12th, 2011 | Posted by [Suzie Rodriguez](#) | [no responses](#)



Jean-Charles Boisset at Buena Vista. Photo: Crista Jeremiason/PD.

By SUZIE RODRIGUEZ/SONOMA VALLEY CORRESPONDENT

### WRITER SPOTLIGHT



Suzie Rodriguez is our Sonoma correspondent.

[contact me](#) [rss](#)



Shannon McClain, events correspondent

[contact me](#) [rss](#)

### Recent Activity

- [Wine trolley tours arrive in Sonoma Valley this September](#)  
18 people recommend this.
- [Vaughn getting national baseball exposure](#)  
44 people recommend this.
- ['Bachelorette' rejection doesn't slow down Sonoma winemaker Ben Flajnik](#)  
40 people recommend this.
- [What to do with exuberant zucchinis? Race them](#)  
3 people recommend this.

Facebook social plugin

In 1981, 11-year-old Jean-Charles Boisset left the Burgundy region of France to motor through California and Nevada with his parents, grandparents and sister Nathalie.

The family of winemakers and exporters were also serious history lovers enchanted by the idea of exploring Sonoma's historic Buena Vista Winery.

"It was my first visit to California and the first winery in the state I ever visited," Boisset said. "I've always remembered everything about that day: walking from the car toward the beautiful old stone building, the thick trees, the profound sense of history.

"It stayed with me. I never forgot Buena Vista in the years that followed. Never, never, never."

Three decades later, in April 2011, Boisset purchased the brand and the old stone winery for Boisset Family Estates, an international wine producer-importer. Boisset, the company's president, also negotiated a long-term lease on Buena Vista's Carneros vineyards.

In California, Boisset Family Estates also owns Amberhill Wines, California Rabbit, DeLoach Vineyards, Fog Mountain, Lyeth Estate, Raymond Vineyards, Sonoma Cuvee and JCB by Jean-Charles Boisset.

Just months after the purchase, Boisset is busy tossing around ideas, gathering data and talking to a bevy of experts about how to bring change to Buena Vista while honoring its heritage.

"This winery is a gateway to the past," he said. "We must respect and pay tribute to that past."

Boisset is fascinated by Count Agoston Haraszthy, the colorful Hungarian noble who came to Sonoma Valley in 1856 to found California's first commercial winery and named it for the beautiful view from its hills.

"I relate to him on a lot of fronts," Boisset said, "his willingness to innovate, to risk, to test new varieties and plantings. I feel I'm his partner today, taking what he did into the 21st century."

The Count planted what may have been the state's first European vines and within a year was growing 100 grape varieties. Although it's a matter of academic debate, he may have planted California's first zinfandel vines.

He built the state's first stone winery, dug out the first wine caves, produced the first Methode Champenoise sparkling wine and was first to use redwood barrels with the resins removed

And a century before the famed 1976 "Judgment of Paris," Buena Vista wines were winning gold medals in major European competitions.

"Haraszthy brought California into the world of great wine," Boisset said, "and I want the winery to display that great history. We need younger generations to know about that history."

He pointed to an ugly metal swing gate, one of a trio dotting the asphalt parking lot.

"These gates are appalling to the eyes," he said. "They have to go. Definitely we will keep all these wonderful trees. The asphalt will go, and the parking lot will disappear from in front of the winery.

"What do I see instead? Good gates, beautiful gates, gates that tell people they have arrived somewhere special. Gates they can walk through and see the winery ahead and feel the energy of the past.

"On their arrival, I want them to be dazzled by beauty, to know they are taking a special journey. They will ask themselves, 'What's nature about? What is wine? Why did pioneers come to Sonoma?'"

Under Boisset's direction, **Buena Vista** will continue to produce pinot noir, chardonnay, syrah and merlot from grapes grown in the Ramal Vineyard. He also plans to bring back zinfandel, add cabernet sauvignon and introduce new and unusual varieties from other Sonoma County vineyards.

David Ramey has been hired as consulting winemaker, overseeing the 2011 production of 41,500 cases of wine that will retail for \$15-\$20 and above. Also watch for Buena Vista to "introduce some very unique, very high-end wines soon," said Marketing Manager Patrick Egan.

The winery also will create a sparkling wine named after Haraszthy's Methode Champenoise wine, *Eclipse*, which took a gold medal in the 1867 Paris Exhibition.

Little change will be made to the 1857 winery. On the National Register of Historic Places, it will continue to serve as Buena Vista's tasting room. The 1862 stone Press House, damaged in the 1906 earthquake, will be repaired and may be used for tastings of a new second label, the Buena Vista Vinicultural Society (originally incorporated in 1863 by Haraszthy).

Beyond this, Boisset sees the new Buena Vista as a destination for celebration. The Avalon Players, which performed Shakespeare around the winery's fountain each August for 23 years, will return next summer. The picnic tables will remain.

“I want to educate people on an emotional and cultural level,” Boisset said. “This will be a place to learn, to have fun, with music, fabulous food, artists. We will celebrate Sonoma, wine and abundance. We will celebrate life.”

#### Related Posts

1. [Open House at 8th Street wineries](#)
2. [Mulas legacy continues at Schell-Vista fire department](#)
3. [George Webber, aka Mark Twain & General Vallejo](#)

#### Leave a Reply

Name (required)

Mail (will not be published) (required)

Website

**SUBMIT**

Copyright © 2011 [PressDemocrat.com](#) — All rights reserved. Restricted use only