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SUNDAY, MAY 22, 2011

Opulence? JCB Hez It! -- A Visit to Raymond Vineyards in Napa Valley

The wine revolution will not be televised—it will be shown live at Raymond Vineyards. And it's going to be quite a show. Things are different here. Owner Jean-Charles Boisset has taken the venerable Raymond vineyards and sprinkled pixie dust all over. Boisset is the mastermind and ringmaster for some evolutionary new ideas in the experience of wine. But don't let the wow factor fool you. There is some serious good wine here along with all the glamour and glitz.



On Saturday May 14th I visited the Raymond Vineyards with a group of bloggers and wine writers and it was unlike any winery visit I've ever experienced before. It was a three-ring circus of wine, creativity, and decadence.

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Ring 1 –Tank Room and Crystal Cellar: The Baccarat chandelier in the Crystal Cellar steals the show, but once your eyes adjust to the low lighting there's plenty more to see; stainless steel walls, a mirrored bar and a display of crystal decanters. The philosophy is kind of Forest Gump like in it's approach—Beauty is what beauty does. Surround yourself with beautiful things and beauty becomes you. It seems to work. Who knew stainless steel could be so sexy? From the looks of it, Studio 54 is alive and well in Napa at Raymond. I half expected Dr. Frank-N-Furter from Rocky Horror Picture Show to pop out from behind a tank and purr in my ear "Give your self over to absolute pleasure!" But instead Boisset arrived and the wattage of the room amped up considerably. Boisset is a bundle of energy, ideas and most of all showmanship. Take one part P.T. Barnum and one part marketing genius, (shaken, not stirred) and you have Jean-Charles Boisset.

In the warm glow of the candle lit Crystal Cellar winemaker Stephanie Putnam poured the current releases:
2009 Napa Valley Reserve Sauvignon Blanc
2006 Appellation Collection Oakville Cabernet Sauvignon
2006 Appellation Collection St. Helena Cabernet Sauvignon
2006 Appellation Collection Rutherford Cabernet Sauvignon
2006 Generations Cabernet Sauvignon
All of the Cabernets were exceptional examples of what Napa Valley is known for, but I liked the Rutherford best--Hearty, meaty, and balanced with sweet notes of blueberries. Very drinkable now and well into the future too.

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Ring 2—Barrel to Barrel: Next it was time for the arts and crafts portion of the tour. We split into teams to decorate individual barrels that are part of Barrel to Barrel a new program for delivering a wine by the glass experience in restaurants and homes. The materials provided for the decorating were anything but traditional. Liberace would have approved. Hello! Leather, glitter, leopard prints, sequins, peacock feathers and marabou galore. I think a tasteful decoupage of wine labels might be a better approach. But hey...C'est la vie!

While sipping the 2009 Barrel to Barrel Cabernet Sauvignon we set upon decorating the mini barrels. The end result included a sexy kitty, an ode to "Eyes Wide Shut" and an over the top Mardi Gras creation that took first place. If you want to try your hand at barrel decorating too, you will soon be able to visit the Raymond website to decorate one online and be eligible to win an actual barrel in real life.

Ring 3—The JCB Lounge: As we entered the JCB lounge I had the feeling of Déjà vu. Where had I seen this place before? Was it in a scene from a movie? Boogie Nights perhaps? Gianni Versace's home in Miami Beach? Possibly. Then it hit me...I'd seen it all before here in this commercial.

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marcygordon: I try not to drive much. walk or bike instead. Upside: healthier for me & environs. Downside: after month with no use car battery goes dead. 11 minutes ago via Twitter for iPhone

marcygordon: I'll be there! "@writing_away: Come hear Best Women's Travel Writing '11 authors read at Berkeley Books, Inc Friday 6/3 http://t.co/dfB9rmJ about 22 hours ago via Twitter for iPhone

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2.5 Generic License.

Opulence? JCB hez it! The JCB lounge had the same vibe going on-- Mirrors and gold statues? Check! Stack of gold bricks? Yup! A charming and charismatic leader with foreign accent and beautiful female staff? Check! Check! Check! Check! The mini giraffe was about only thing missing. Actually the JCB lounge is beyond opulent. It's a sensory extravaganza of gold and marble and crystal and candles and glitz all grooving to a steady beat of Michael Jackson videos playing on the big screen. Honestly, you really must see it to believe it.



This is where we tasted the JCB label wines, which are numbered and labeled with evocative terms.
JCB No.81 Chardonnay—Alluring*Ephemeral*Insatiable
JCB No.7 Pinot Noir—Debonnaire*Charismatic*Seductive
JCB No. 1 Cabernet Sauvignon—Voluptuous*Opulent*Incorrigible

The Pinot from Sonoma coast fruit tasted true to it's terrior with a light scent of lavender and mint and rich flavors of clove, blackberries and a bit of bacon fat too.



I have to say, I first found Boisset's eccentric approach to the "wine of the mind" disconcerting. It seems nothing is too far-out or off limits. But then half-way through the tasting I found the energy of it all to be wildly creative and inspiring. I came up with several ideas on the spot, that I'm sorry to say, his attentive staff my now be charged with bringing to fruition. Sorry! (By the way--I think it would be great to spend a day brainstorming with Boisset and his team if they are interested.)



So, you might be thinking why all the theatrics? Are they trying to distract my attention from the wine? No, I don't think so. I think it's merely an attempt to deepen the experience and increase the enjoyment of wines that are already very good. But you can decide

that on your own. Note: If you go to Raymond Vineyards be warned; the experience can be overwhelming. One of our group stabbed themselves during the barrel decorating session drawing much blood, and another got so carried away by the Michael Jackson videos, she lit her hair on fire in tribute to him. Proceed at your own risk. But do by all means proceed. Let go, loosen up and have some fun.

POSTED BY MARCY GORDON AT 7:03 PM

LABELS: BARREL TO BARREL, CABERNET SAUVIGNON, CHARDONNAY, JCB WINES, JEAN-CHARLES BOISSET, OPULENCE, PINOT NOIR, RAYMOND GENERATIONS CABERNET SAUVIGNON, RAYMOND VINEYARDS, RUTHERFORD CABERNET

3 COMMENTS:

Wine Pleasures said...

How disappointing - don't you have anything on Portugal?

MAY 23, 2011 11:01 AM

Marcy Gordon said...



@WinePleasures-- Ha! Well did you see my Yeatman post just before this one? I actually have 2 more Portugal posts coming up but are from after the WP tour. Trying to spread them out a bit! --ciao

MAY 23, 2011 11:44 AM

Wine Pleasures said...

So nothing on Hollywood?

MAY 25, 2011 1:53 AM

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