In search for a great Pinot

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A trip to California as an 11-year-old inspired French winemaker Jean-Charles Boisset to return to the U.S. in his quest for great Pinot. From left to right: DeLoach Cabernet Sauvignon, Louis M. Martini Cabernet Sauvignon and DeLoach Pinot Noir. (Handout image/QMI Agency)

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Jean-Charles Boisset has vivid memories of his first trip to California. He remembers the thrill of being an 11-year-old from rural France in the United States, driving across the Golden Gate Bridge for the first time and sampling the local wines with his parents and grandparents back at the hotel.

The Boisset family has deep roots as winemakers in Burgundy, so it was only natural for him and his teenage sister to have wine with a meal.

“I remember saying to my sister Nathalie, ‘Wouldn’t it be great to come back and make wine here,’” Boisset recalled last week during a tasting in Toronto.

He got his wish in 2003 when he orchestrated the purchase of DeLoach Vineyards in the Russian River Valley region of Sonoma County. Boisset moved quickly to implement some of the time-honoured Burgundian methods into the winemaking regime, including going to the considerable expense of moving 30 specialized tanks from the family’s cellars in Burgundy to California.

He credits those tanks with making wines that are more reflective of the fruit



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flavours they get from the vineyard.

Boisset's pursuit to find other places to grow Pinot Noir and Chardonnay has raised eyebrows among his neighbours in Burgundy. The dynamic president of Boisset Family Estates has played a role in establishing the Le Clos Jordanne project in Jordan, Ont. and has gone on to acquire other notable California wineries, notably Raymond Vineyards and Buena Vista Winery.

"Burgundians live in that microcosm and that's all there is," he explains. "They tend to think there's only Burgundy.

"But there's other places around the globe — like the Russian River Valley — where it possible to create and sculpt great Pinot and Chardonnay. Elegant wines that are very silky (in texture), with refined personality and incredible identity."

DeLoach Vineyards has just launched its California appellation Pinot Noir in Ontario. Some of its other single-vineyard and regional specific wines, such as its Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, are expected to be released in the coming months.

Wines of the Week:

DeLoach Vineyards 2009 Heritage Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon

California

ON $14.95 (089250)

3 out of 5

Cabernet Sauvignon isn't a major focus for DeLoach, which prides itself on Pinot, Chardonnay and Zinfandel. But you wouldn't know it based on the consistency of this approachable red. Its rich, ripe core of jammy fruit makes it a crowd-pleasing wine that's a great barbecue option. (LCBO)

DeLoach Vineyards 2009 Heritage Reserve Pinot Noir

California

ON $15.95 (220434)

3 out of 5

DeLoach buys fruit from growers in California's Central Valley region to produce this inexpensive Pinot Noir. Its mix of bright red fruit and smoky oak notes make a good first impression. Affordable bottles of Pinot don't often have this much appeal. (LCBO)

Louis M. Martini Winery 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon

Napa Valley, California

ON $29.95 (232731)

4 out of 5

This splurge-worthy red is a great ambassador for the Napa Valley and its winning way with Cabernet Sauvignon. Look for fresh, ripe fruit and an engagingly spicy character on this seriously structured wine. It's a great steak wine. (LCBO Vintages)

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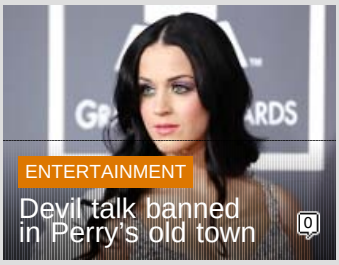
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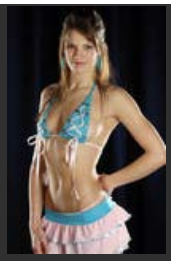








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