

# RAYMOND VINEYARDS:

Everyone looks for that truly romantic holiday experience, and here it is. In all the years that we have been regularly recommending wineries to friends and readers, only rarely have we suggested a visit with more fervor than we now do for the new Raymond Vineyards. The experience here has become spectacular at every level since the venerable property was purchased by the Boisset Family Estate. Headed in the United States by the dynamic, visionary, and charismatic Jean Charles Boisset, this story would not be complete without referring to him as well, as his personality shines through every crevice of Raymond.

We first saw Jean Charles for a fleeting, but ultimately memorable, moment at a noted wine event a few years ago. In a room full of winemakers, vintners, writers, and

literally been transformed into a place to see, be seen, be taught, taste wine, and be enthralled.

As the winery offers so many experiences, individually highlighting each in alphabetical order is probably the best way to realize the flavor of what awaits.

**Barrel Room:** In an atmosphere enhanced by candlelight, you can sample wines directly from the surrounding barrels before the wines are bottled into the District Cabernets and *Generations* proprietary wine.

**Blending Room:** You do come to Napa for wine after all, and here you don lab coats and, advised by Raymond's staff, actually blend your personal bottle of Bordeaux style red wine. When finished you select a name and receive a

# A STUDY IN INNOVATION

Raymond invites you to relax here amid the vines. You can sip wine, or be more active and play croquet, badminton, bocce, or pétanque.

**The Library:** Nowhere else do we know of a winery that surprisingly has its up-to-30-year-old library wines available for you to actually see (and purchase). The bottles surround you in this impressively lovely circular enclave, so perusing them is easy.

**Red Room:** Upon entering, we were immediately captured by the soft red lights that bathed the entire room—for a moment it reminded us of our psychedelic era college days. But no young adult ever had the ability to provide the magnificent décor on display in this luxurious, membership only private club. Red velvet ensconced walls, black chairs

phone audio is available) will help you better appreciate how nature affects the ultimate quality of wine as you learn about soils, viticulture, lunar cycles, etc. Like a performance, the Theater of Nature is divided into five acts, with each act devoted to a particular component of nature.

**Tasting Room/Wine:** The Raymond family, with Beringer roots, always made a good product. In fact, it was the first Chardonnay we fell in love with almost 20 years ago. Building on this in some ways, and making vast improvements with modern techniques and newly planted vineyards, Raymond is now producing some spectacular wines. Winemaker Stephanie Putnam, late of Far Niente, is one of the best, and her tenure is long enough that we are now seeing brilliant Raymond wines crafted entirely by her.



enophiles who at the time did not know him, Jean Charles took the microphone and charmed the crowd with a short talk, and by leading a sort of Burgundian sing-along that has become a trademark for him. It was a remarkable performance, quite frankly, and one about which those in attendance still speak.

We chatted with Jean Charles for a few moments ourselves, and made plans to visit him to learn what the future of Raymond (which he had just purchased from the Raymond family) would be. We decided that lunch would be a good idea, so we brought some of the world's best Indian food with us, Jean Charles supplied the wine, and we ultimately spent a couple of hours hearing what was in store for the property. To be candid, and since we did not yet know him so well either, we were a bit skeptical at what we heard. It is an error we would never make again, as Raymond has

custom label. Even better, you will have the opportunity to purchase a case in the future, which will include 9 of your bottles and 3 Raymond Reserve Cabs. \$100 (\$80 for wine club) buys this experience and the first bottle.

**Crystal Cellar:** One of the most beautiful and eclectic rooms you will ever see, the walls are stainless steel, life size mannequins "stare" at you from strategic places, backlit exhibits of fine crystal are mesmerizing, a Baccarat chandelier is all encompassing, and the mirrored bar holds library wines and future releases for tasting. Also available is Earth & Air, an educational class that illustrates the important effect that aerating wine in a Baccarat decanter has on Raymond's powerful Napa Valley Cabernets.

**The Grove:** Billed as an outdoor living room (the furniture is of course custom designed, beautiful and utilitarian),

and tables with red seats and tops, and even the red bottles of wine created purely for this room all serve to make this a special place. You will also have the opportunity to play pool, pinball, and of course taste the wine. Applications for membership are available on line.

**Rutherford Room:** A place for education, the room is surrounded by soil samples from Napa's 15 sub appellations. Just outside the room is a whimsical display of aromas and flavors that might be identified in a wine. Available classes include an overview of the Napa Valley; a guess the blend challenge; and a component tasting illustrating the essentials of food and wine pairing.

**Theater of Nature:** These two outside acres "house" Napa's largest educational exhibit on biodynamic farming. Spending time on this self guided tour (signage and smart

Of course, you need a place to taste them, and, along with all the other locations mentioned above, Raymond's main tasting room is comfortable and inviting, with a staff that is welcoming and knowledgeable.

Special events, as stylish as the winery, are periodically offered through the year, and Rutherford Club members are granted what are arguably the best wine club amenities and opportunities in Napa. Be sure to look at the giftroom, and ask if there is more on display elsewhere. It is easy to see why Raymond would be a special place for the holidays, but it is nice to know that all of this (and even more) is available throughout the year. And who knows what you might find on arrival. Jean Charles is quite literally likely to add something at any time—and there is no doubt it would be exciting.