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SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2011

The Theater of Nature at Raymond Vineyards: Growing Wine Tourism



Four months ago I visited Raymond Vineyards for an event I felt could never be matched for sheer over the top inventiveness. Well, I was wrong. I should have known better when I got an invitation to the debut of several new features at Raymond Vineyards and the opening of the Theater of Nature. A mere four months ago the Theater of Nature was just a notion, now it is a fully realized interactive educational experience about the process of organic and biodynamic farming.

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The Theater of Nature

At the gates of the theater you are met by one of the three animatronic sheep that gently takes your hand in its mouth and leads you through the exhibit explaining the 5 Acts. It's an extraordinary experience, like a Disney fantasy come to fruition.

Oh wait... I think I may have dreamt that part about the sheep, but honestly if you've ever been to Raymond you'd understand. It is like a waking fever dream of genius and madness and love for the pursuit of pleasure and understanding of wine in all it's aspects.

The Raymond estate has quietly undergone a transformation led by Jean-Charles Boisset and the Theater of Nature is just the beginning. Raymond is converting over to biodynamic practices and they are in the transition stages of gaining Demeter certification for organic growing as well.

The Theater of Nature is an educational walk in the Bio-dynamic park presented in 5 Acts starting with the Soil and continuing around to include the Plants, Animals, the Vineyardist who farms in harmony with the laws of nature and the final act, the act of Wholeness that explains to guests the process of biodynamics and the convergence of earthbound and celestial forces that directly effect the growth and quality of the plants.

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My favorite part of the Theater of Nature besides the sheep and the goats and the very cool cow, was the descriptor gardens planted with different herbs and fruit trees to illustrate the aromas and flavors associated with Cabernet and Chardonnay. You are invited to wander about with your wine in hand and taste the herbs, smell the fruit and determine what's in your glass accordingly.



The Corridor of the Senses

This new experience looks much like something out of the Roman Polanski movie "Repulsion" wherein Catherine Deneuve was grabbed by disembodied hands as she went down a hallway. In the movie it was very creepy, but at Raymond it's sort of Stephen King meets Lady Gaga. Large hands are mounted on the wall holding scent vials with

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TWITTER FEED

marcygordon: Mussels, truffles, olive oil, cheese, lamb, procuttio and oh yes...wine. #Croatia has everything I want to eat and drink. #WoCroatia about 10 hours ago via Twitter for iPhone

marcygordon: @nikorosi great to meet you! Thanks for the cappuccino! about 10 hours ago via Twitter for iPhone

marcygordon: Great hanging out

red tasseled puff atomizers allowing you to inhale the aromas found in wine. Breathe deep. But keep one eye open.



The Rutherford Room

The Rutherford Room is where everything you ever wanted to know about the soils and AVA's of Napa Valley can be learned in a program developed by Karen MacNeil. Large glass apothecary jars display the soil along with a maps of the area. Now you can actually see what various soil types, such as volcanic, really means and get a whiff of it too.



The Red Room

If you thought the JCB lounge was jaw dropping (I wrote about it here), wait till you see the Red Room. Or wait till you become a member, I should say. The Red Room is a members only tasting room that offers an exclusive red wine blend and classic games, such as cards or billiards, set in posh red surroundings. Oh did I mention all the surroundings are red? Yes, I believe I did.

Before you continue reading might I suggest you pour yourself a glass

with @funkyzagreb in #Zagreb last night. See you again soon Mladen! #Croatia http://t.co/fbFnIQoq http://t.co/zpeOE9Vf about 12 hours ago via Twitter for iPhone

marcygordon: Wonder if I can squeeze a jar of this in my bag? Have become quite addicted to it. #Croatia #WoCroatia http://t.co/8OivTfor about 12 hours ago via Twitter for iPhone

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of something. Perhaps the Raymond Generations Cabernet, but anything will do really, you just need to get in the proper frame of mind as I introduce you to Napa Valley's very first Oompa Loompa. I am not kidding. Now go get that glass of wine. I'll wait here. Seriously, go get it you are going to need it.

Okay you're back...ready now... follow me to the Blending Room a.k.a Willy Wonka's Wine Factory.



Blending Room

Welcome to the black lit, disco balled, and ultra futuristic Blending Room with your host Tyson Madden. Mr. Madden is the blending master and resident Oompa Loompas in Raymond's version of Willy Wonka's Wine Factory. Under the direction of Mr. Madden guests will be able craft their own personal blends and then make a customized label on the spot using their own images or logo. You even get to wear a fetching silver robe while blending. I give it high marks for sartorial reasons alone!



The Grove and Outdoor Living Room

This area on the opposite side of the winery is set up for guests to enjoy their wine in an open and relaxing setting and also play some bocce, pétanque or croquet. The Grove with it's linden trees, cafe tables and little white lights twinkling in the leaves feels very much like a little bit of Paris. The whimsical outdoor furniture alone makes this an irresistible spot in which to enjoy the day.

Growing Wine Tourism

Wine tourism is a concept that encompasses many things, and what "wine tourism" means exactly is open for discussion. But for now, I think Raymond has all the bases covered and then some. If you think wine tourism means Education, check, they have it; Entertainment, it's there; Hands on Experience, got that too. Raymond gives the visitor an array of choices and environments in which to experience wine, be it from a quiet corner of an outdoor garden, or in the full on glitz and decadence of the Crystal Cellar and Red Room. It's all happening at Raymond Vineyards and you don't even need an E ticket to get in.

POSTED BY MARCY GORDON AT 1:36 PM

+1 1 person +1'd this

LABELS: BIODYNAMIC, JEAN-CHARLES BOISSET, ORGANIC, RAYMOND GENERATIONS CABERNET SAUVIGNON, RAYMOND VINEYARDS, THEATER OF NATURE, WINE TOURISM

3 COMMENTS:

Rich Reader said...

I've written a post about this article on Facebook, in the Wine Aficionados private discussion group. https://www.facebook.com/groups/wineadvocates/?id=274336372588884

OCTOBER 10, 2011 10:38 AM

Rich Reader said...

for those not members of Wine Aficionados, my remarks are as follows:Jean-Charles Boisset has embraced nature amid an object-oriented decor with sofas and picture frames in his homage to the surrealist Salvador Dali. While the immediate tangible goal of his many projects is to drive attendance and revenue at the visitor center, on a more fundamental level, he has built his content around core values http://vinebuzz.biz/node/115 . Thus, Raymond Vineyards creates its' wine industry footprint as a social business, at a time when most other large wine enterprises are afraid to voyage out beyond business-as-usual. I'd love to hear from those few other wineries who are even nearly so bold.

OCTOBER 10, 2011 10:40 AM

Harold D Partain said...

Marsha, you had me at animatronic sheep! I had a pet lamb as a small child and she followed me wherever I went.. even into the house! No kid-ing. But, that is another story.

Congrats to Raymond Vineyards. This actually sounds like they did a great job. I cannot say the same for the Wine Museum at Castello di Barolo in Piemonte. Great idea but not executed well at all. The first half... got much better as you descend each floor but the wine you taste at the end was worth it all. I will check this out next time I am in the Valley.

OCTOBER 10, 2011 3:02 PM

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