



# Raymond Vineyards

*By: Josh Stein*

## **Lots and Lots of Tasting Options, Including the New Theatre of Nature**

Holy cow, has Raymond Vineyards (under new owners Boisset Family Estates) turned a winery visit into a wine country experience! Raymond has been well known for great wines, but they have not always been known for their presentation of those wines. When the Boisset family bought the property, they did so precisely because of their respect for the people, effort and time that have been evident in the stewardship of the land and the resulting wines. This philosophy of preserving what works while adding what can make it work better goes to the heart of the current Raymond Vineyards hospitality transformation, and it's this explosion of consumer-centric tasting experiences, including the new Theatre of Nature, which makes them our Tasting Room of the Week.

Raymond Vineyards became part of the Boisset Family Estates collection of wineries in 2009 with the expressed goal of rejuvenating the estate and propelling it forward into its fifth decade and beyond. Boisset Family Estates is well known around the wine world for this kind of rejuvenation in Burgundy, Beaujolais, the Rhone Valley, and in the south of France, and they've channeled all that's been learned through multiple decades into the newly re-designed Raymond Vineyards hospitality experiences.

As regards the wines and as befits an estate as varied as this one, the Boissets have introduced a variety of tasting options and events to accommodate a range of lifestyles and experiences, or as they'll tell you when you visit, "There's something for everyone." If you're looking for the classic American tasting room experience, the Main Tasting Room presents Raymond favorites, stellar Cabernets and a number seasonal, winery-only releases. If you're looking to see how great Napa Cabernet ages, the Library Room's access to vertical flights is the place to be. If you're into the presentation of wine and wine service, of how aeration, particularly in Baccarat decanters, has an impact on what's in the glass, then the Crystal Room's Earth & Air sensory experience is something not to be missed.

The options don't end there, however. The Barrel Room, candlelit and intimate, is available to host small groups, allowing for barrel-sampling of wines prior to bottling – a very unique way of gaining some winemaker insight. The Rutherford Room shows off the current fifteen Napa Valley sub-appellations, and the Blending Room's focus is on creating wines greater than their parts. On the flip side, if the enjoyment of wine as part of your exclusive, excitement-filled life sounds more like you, the Red Room presents a distinctive Napa Valley winery experience: wine and entertainment, complete with music, video games and the exclusive Raymond Red Room wine, all reserved specifically for club members. Equally, the Grove presents plenty of family-friendly activities that showcase wine country life: croquet, badminton, basketball, bocce and pétanque. There is a firepit for grilling and an orchard with more than a dozen offerings. The view from the Generations Platform even gives an elevated, in-person perspective of the majesty of the valley views.

The newest and most exciting of these offerings, though, is the Theatre of Nature, and it's been designed with a wide range of visitors in mind, including those not old enough to partake of the winery's offerings. The one-and-a-half-acre Theatre of Nature uses plant and animal life to explain the natural winegrowing philosophy in action around you on the property; it foregrounds how all the "actors" in the system play a crucial part in crafting quality wine, from the soil to the vineyardist to larger forces such as the lunar cycle.

Designed by Jeff Cox and Jeff Dawson, whose previous wine country landscaping design was done for Fetzer and Copia, the educational exhibits and programs focus on grapegrowing and Biodynamics in five “acts.” There is a farming demonstration to show the impact of compost on growing conditions, discussion of different grape varieties, and lots of material on vineyard-adjacent herb, fruit and covercrop impact on wines. Equally, the role of animals, chicken, sheep and goats, and their place in an interconnected system is emphasized, as well as areas set aside for Biodynamic preparations. Whimsical, creative sculptures accompany all of this, making for a true theatre of possibilities.

If it hasn't been obvious from the above, Napa is most definitely changing, and it's impressive to see how Raymond Vineyards is handling such a transformation so smoothly. Boisset Family Estates has brought its hospitality knowledge, honed in wineries throughout the world, to good use, producing wines emblematic of the estate's past while most definitely heralding its bright future with innovative ways to share them. Come see for yourself what others will be talking about for decades to come!

Raymond Vineyards is located at 849 Zinfandel Lane, St. Helena, and is open daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For reservations or more information, call (707) 963-3141.