

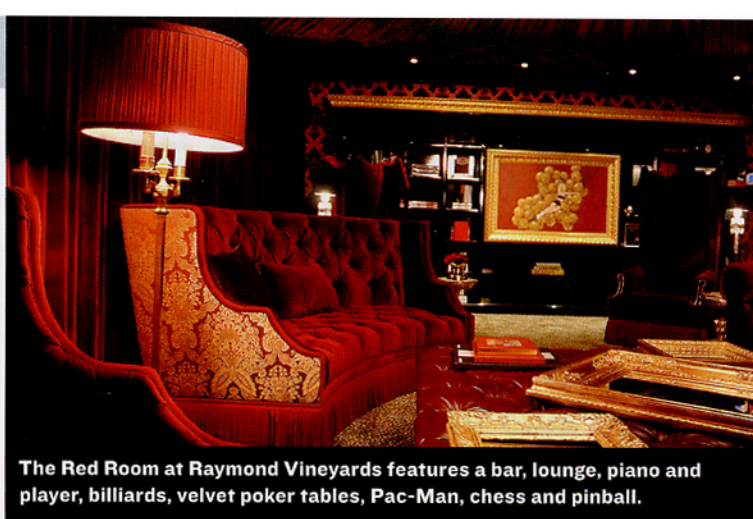
Rebirth for Napa's Raymond Vineyards

Boisset Family's hospitality center opens at formerly low-key winery

St. Helena, Calif.—Two years after Jean-Charles Boisset of Boisset Family Estates bought Raymond Vineyards, he unveiled additions and innovations at the venerable 275,000-case winery that Boisset hopes will transform it into one of Napa Valley's most popular destinations. Raymond held a grand opening Sept. 28 to introduce the changes to the community.

Boisset installed an elaborate "Theater of Nature," a farming demonstration showcasing the impact of compost on plants, configurations of different grape varieties, herbs and fruits that express aromas and flavors associated with various wines and the impact of different cover crops. The exhibit is expansive, using land that might have grown valuable Cabernet grapes.

Demonstrations attempt to explain the principles and practices of Biodynamic farming. Chickens, sheep and standoffish goats illustrate the role of animals in the farming system, rows of plants are used to produce Biodynamic teas—as is a pit containing the controversial manure-filled cow's horns—plus manual mixing machines for the teas.



The Red Room at Raymond Vineyards features a bar, lounge, piano and player, billiards, velvet poker tables, Pac-Man, chess and pinball.

The winery encourages visitors to have a glass of wine while perusing the exhibits. They also can hear an audio tour on their iPhones.

Innovative education and glitz

Inside the visitor center and winery lie a cornucopia of activities. The exhibits and programs were designed by Karen MacNeil, head of the wine center at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone. The Blending Room is set up as a classroom and laboratory where guests can blend their own Bordeaux-variety wine from four base wines—and, for \$100, take a bottle home.

The over-the-top crowning touch, however, is the private Red Room, which visitors called "reminiscent of Las Vegas"—or an 1890s New Orleans bordello. Red Room memberships are \$500 per year or free to any guest who spends more than \$2,000 with Raymond Vineyards in one year.



—Paul Franson

French-born wine executives organize

St. Helena, Calif.—The French Wine Executives, an association of French-born winemakers and wine industry suppliers working in the United States, met Sept. 30 at Raymond Vineyards to enjoy the new hospitality facilities with Raymond's owner, Jean-Charles Boisset, network with each other and enjoy the cooking of French-born Michel Cornu, Raymond's corporate chef.



The association has grown to 54 people since Jacques Brix, vice president and director of sales for *Wines & Vines*, organized the first gatherings in 2009, with help from Melanie Thomas and Stephane Janson of Janson Capsules. Twelve members are winemakers or winery principals.

To date the group's goals have remained low key, emphasizing the exchange of stories and professional experiences over food and BYOB wines from the members. "It's all geared to improve these people's services and business results in the North American wine industry," said Brix, himself a native of southwest France.

Brix said the next steps for the group are to approve a name, write a mission statement, solidify rules for membership and meetings, and to discuss further expansion.

—Jim Gordon