

WineTales Magazine

Around the Grape Vine: Justin Winery in Paso Robles. Great wine: great food



A Multi-Media On-Line Magazine

BUENA VISTA AN 1850s GOLD RUSH ERA WINERY STORY

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Count Agoston Haraszthy, Founder

Photographer: Daise Parcell Copyright 2008



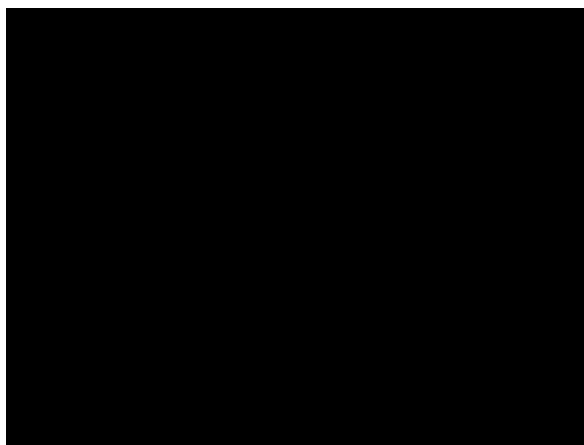
The Buena Vista Winery building. Beneath the corner runs an earth-quake fault that destroyed the site in the terrible 1906 San Francisco Quake!



by Payne Johnson

You can comfortably date the birth of California winemaking as early as 1773,

three years after Father Junipero Serra had established California's original mission in San Diego (1769), planted his initial crop of what were known as *Mission grapes* and enjoyed his first harvest in San Diego. He and other Spanish priests had been growing grapes and



Jean-Charles Boisset, interviewed by Payne Johnson about his plans for the historic winery.

producing wine in Mexico's Lower Peninsula since 1697, thanks to an early decree by Governor Hernando Cortes mandating that all ships from Spain must carry grape cuttings to the New World. Father Serra continued his work in northern California, erecting new missions with vineyards until his death in 1784.

This all changed with the arrival of a farsighted immigrant who was destined to bring exceptional grapes and winemaking to California. He was a Hungarian nobleman and entrepreneur, named **Agoston Haraszthy**. Born in 1812 in Futtak, Hungary, he had been raised working in his family vineyards and proudly carried with him a love of fine wine and the title of "**Count**." In 1840, surrounded by intrigue and political exile, Count Haraszthy set sail for America and settled in Wisconsin, founding a town, building a sawmill and planting the first Hops for beer making. But the fierce Wisconsin winters made him quickly realize he required a warmer climate to make wine.

Haraszthy traveled to *San Diego, California in 1849* and became their first Sheriff, then their first Marshall, and while there, he planted vineyards in San Diego's Mission Valley. But he was still searching for the ideal land and climate for growing grapes. Haraszthy was next elected to the California State Assembly and he migrated to northern regions of the state. His first sight of the Sonoma Valley with its rich soil and warm summers made him realize that his long search may have ended and he had found the grape region he had been looking for. The Count understood that great wine comes from great grapes, but also from great Terroir, and he felt that he had found the perfect balance for making fine wine in Sonoma.

In 1856 he acquired 800 acres just outside of the town of *Sonoma*, which included an old dry-farmed vineyard on a site that was known as the Buena Vista ranch, and he renamed the site the **Buena Vista Winery** and produced its first vintage. By the end of 1857 he had more than tripled the total grape acreage of Sonoma Valley. In that single year he had planted 80,000 vines on about 118 acres. He had planted more than 250 acres of grapes and had constructed a beautiful stone winery building next to a small stream in a lovely wooded area and added an elaborate home and horticultural garden with fruit trees and shrubs from the east. Buena Vista was now successfully selling its wines and had become California's earliest commercial winery, which was a dream come true for the Count.

In 1861 he bought a shipment of six choice rooted vines and 160 cuttings from Hungary. That shipment included two small bundles—one was **Muscat of Alexandria** and the other was said to be a **Zinfandel grape**, which was actually a very old Croatian variety, named **Crljenak Kaštelanski**, and was also essentially the same variety as the **Primitivo grape**, traditionally grown in Puglia (the "*heel*" of Italy). With the grapes growing and his wine gaining popularity in California, it became better known by the name Zinfandel and since that time has been closely associated with the Buena Vista Winery. Haraszthy also ordered and received a large shipment of the massive oversize oak barrels



in which to age his wine, just as it was done in Eastern Europe. In 1864, an article in Harper's Magazine proclaimed that Buena Vista was "the largest establishment of the kind in the world." In 1864 the winery's cellars, Sonoma's first wine caves were completed.

In 2011 the Boisset Family Estate, a renowned family owned business that had been involved in wine making in Burgundy for centuries, purchased Buena Vista Winery. The family business in the United States is now under the leadership of **Jean-Charles Boisset**, who, in his 40's, is constructing a state-of-the-art modern winery and tasting rooms on the site where Agoston Haraszthy built the original stone winery. On his earliest visit to California and having found themselves in the Sonoma town plaza by accident, he personally had the opportunity to visit the original winery in the 1960's, and Jean-Charles Boisset firmly believes in his destiny.

Buena Vista's wine varieties today include: a Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon and of course, a bottle of Zinfandel Reserve, sporting Count Haraszthy's historic 1857 wine label.

We suggest that on your next Northern California tasting trip, you might consider adding a slice of history by enjoying some Zinfandel, while sitting beside the stream that once helped captivate the imagination of a Hungarian who changed the course of California wine history.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

While Kelly Muters and her colleague Tracey were taking us on a tour of **Raymond Winery** we saw a play area for dogs (*some folks take them!*). It's called **Frenchie's Winery!** No kidding! Jean-Charles Boisset has dedicated a place for man's best friend to stay comfortably while seeing his amazing winery, including bottling some of Frenchie's good wine. Check out the photos below

Note the **Lalique chandelier** in Frenchie's Winery!



Pooch Heaven



Our smart, and lovely guides Kelly and Tracey



Frenchie Himself!