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A man for all senses

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Cary Shott | Posted: Thursday, February 16, 2012 12:00 am | **(1)** Comments

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In 2009, Raymond Vineyards became a part of the Boisset Family Estates collection of wineries and Jean Charles Boisset began the process of transforming the estate into a destination, "where our guests discover our commitment to fine wines while enjoying a succession of transformative experiences." Cary Shott photos



The delight that radiates from Jean Charles Boisset face is positively contagious.

It can be seen in the broad smile of the Raymond Vineyards tasting room host, the laughter of the cellar workers, the flair with which Chef Michel Cornu presents his platter of delicate morsels and even in the spritely trot of Frenchie, the pet bulldog.

"We're very excited to be around people who love wine, who love history, who love emotion," Boisset said. "We're just passionate about all of it."

As Boisset described the recent transformation of Raymond Vineyards, his excitement and enthusiasm were palpable.

"What is exciting with Raymond, beyond the playfulness and whimsicality we brought here, and the surrealistic approach of how we did things, is that it's genuinely a thorough education program," Boisset said.

"Ultimately, what we want is for people to feel welcome. We want people to have an unbelievable experience and enjoy and stay. We want them to spend the whole day."

He envisions guests attending an educational session; touring the Theater of Nature, a two-acre classroom of sustainable, organic and biodynamic

farming; having a picnic in the grove or relaxing in the outdoor living room; blending a custom wine; sampling new vintages straight from the barrels; or simply enjoying the Red Room with its many games, books and music.

"They are our guests, this is their experience," Boisset said. He wants his guests to "be part of what we do — be part of our life.

"You feel welcome any time you come, whatever you want to do and hopefully, you learn something along the way," he said.

Boisset, who was born and raised in the heart of Burgundy, France, has always been fascinated by America.

"I was very, very fortunate to be raised in a family who has always been very pro-American," Boisset said.

Both sets of his grandparents told stories of American heroism and generosity in World War II that impressed the young Boisset.



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"I was very [privileged], early on, to be raised around a very strong value of history and thankfulness to the U.S. and admiration to the U.S. with a very strong aspiration to the American lifestyle," he said.

"I was born in '69 and in the '70s the American way of life was very trendy in Europe," Boisset said. "It's still very trendy today but the concepts of the '60s and the '70s — America was so hot as a country."

Visitors can see the influences of the '60s and '70s in the estate's guest house, in which one could easily imagine James Bond sipping a martini at the mirrored bar or Austin Powers lounging on the white leather sofa.

Gold lame drapes, Plexiglas chairs, period Baccarat chandeliers and shelves of glittery memorabilia (including a bound set of Playboys), embellish the main room — a room that belongs in Graceland.

"It's a love story with the U.S. lifestyle, with the people, with their energy," Boisset said.

Attention to sensory detail

Perhaps the most compelling thing about Boisset is his innate sensuality — his pervasive attention to the tiniest sensory detail of each experience.

The Red Room is an excellent example. "The goal of this room was for you, as a guest, to feel very comfortable in the world of velvet and red wine," Boisset said.

He points out the six different shades of red in the room, chosen to reflect the various tones of red in the Raymond Vineyard wines.

Boisset chose a specific rose, the Ingrid Bergman, to adorn the Red Room because of its velvety touch, its distinct aroma and its precise shade of red. No sensory detail — that of sight, sound, touch, smell or taste — escapes his notice.

He designed two hallways to appeal to the senses: the Corridor of Red Wine, where 16 different colors of red wine are displayed and explained; and the Corridor of Scents, which allows visitors to sample a large selection of aromas that are often found in wine.

The Crystal Cellar is another room inspired by Boisset's imagination and his philosophy of wine.

"Crystal is a product of the earth. Crystal you see through, but you also see yourself. It's one of the purest things," he said. "It's all about illumination and reflection."

That's why all the mirrors are in the Crystal Room. Boisset said, "Wine is a reflection of you ... Wine helps you to get to know yourself better."

Boisset wishes to teach people how to reflect on wine. "I love the idea of tasting wine and reflecting on you, on what you drink, on what you are and how you evolve as an individual," he said.

Lifting his glass of wine, he said, "Having this as a sociological and introspective tool to make you think about yourself and get to know yourself better."

"I believe in this 21st century ... we will have an awakening, an enlightenment on wine and on our own selves."

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