

# Frenchie Winery

*The pooch's own hooch*

BY JAMES KNIGHT

**E**very winery has a story, and is pleased to tell it. On the website, look for the tab labeled "Our Story." You'll find that the people who get into this business are most often accomplished, well traveled and passionate about wine. You'll also find that, after while, all of these wonderfully unique stories begin to run together, sounding a bit like "blah blah blah." So this week, we're taking a look at a different sort of story. This one goes "bow wow wow."



One warm afternoon, as Jean-Charles Boisset strolled through the parking lot of Raymond Vineyards, he found that a car had been left running, air conditioning on. The vehicle's only occupants were two hapless pooches, left waiting while their masters lapped up Chardonnay. Being the owner of the winery, and possessing no deficit of people-whispering charm, Boisset took the liberty of shutting off the car and bringing the dogs into the tasting room and to their surprised owners. It was on that day that Boisset, native son of Burgundy who voyaged west in search of new opportunity, declared: There shall be a winery just for the dogs.

Frenchie is named for a French bulldog, a gift from Boisset to his wife to keep her company while he's away on business—leaving her, Gina Gallo, with naught to do but run her own international wine empire. The "winery" is really just a Frenchie-themed shed set amid Raymond's biodynamic gardens, which are best appreciated in spring and summer. Winter highlights include newborn lambs, and clucking chickens and peafowl year-round. While dogs snooze inside their own private wine barrels furnished with pillows, or cavort with others in the gated kennel, their human guardians can keep an eye on them via live video link in the tasting room. In June, there's a "Bark-b-que."

There's only water on tap out here; Frenchie sports his own line of wines at the tasting bar inside, where one dollar from the sale of each bottle is donated to the SPCA. The spoof labels are solid cute; the wines, seriously appealing. A 60/40 Sonoma and Napa blend, the 2009 Napoleon Red (\$30) starts with young aromas of plum, licorice and graphite, finishing all sweet plum jam and puckery tannins. In the way that a freshly washed dog smells like a dog, only less so, the 2009 Louis XIV Cabernet Sauvignon (\$30) smells shyly of fresh brambleberries and cedar, but licks the tongue with assertive tannin, and plush, sweet, ripe blackberry fruit. So who's drooling and yapping now?

Frenchie Winery at Raymond Vineyards, 849 Zinfandel Lane, St. Helena. Daily, 10am-4pm. Tasting fees vary. 707.963.3141.