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Winery Review - Raymond Vineyards

St. Helena, California

By [Betsy Malloy](#), About.com Guide

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Wine Quality: Wine Enthusiast named Raymond Vineyards its 2012 American Winery of the Year

Tourist Experience: If you like something different and fun and with a dash of the unexpected, Raymond is just the place for you. It's one of the most unusual, fun tasting experiences in Napa Valley.

Raymond Vineyards Review

The name won't give it away: Raymond Vineyards sounds like any of hundreds of other Napa Valley wineries, named for their founders. The tasting room won't reveal much, either. It's a pleasant, sunlit space with a tasting bar and small gift shop.



Crystal Cellar at Raymond Vineyards

Courtesy of Raymond Vineyards

Your first hint that something different is going on may have been the oversized, white chair you saw on the front lawn on the way in, the cowhide panels on the tasting room bar or a glimpse of [neon light](#) at the end of a hallway. Keep looking and you'll find Raymond Vineyards' true 21st century personality: playful, chic, surprising and - most of all - a refreshingly different style among Napa wineries.

At Raymond, every tasting room is different, and they have several. The Library Room is intimate, its walls lined not with books but with wine bottles. The candlelit Barrel Room's walls are formed by barrels of the latest vintage.

In the Crystal Cellar, Baccarat [crystal chandeliers](#) hang among neon-lit fermentation tanks and a mannequin-turned-angel peers down from a catwalk. She came for a party and forgot to go home, or so they'll tell you. It's no wonder the Crystal Cellar is the Raymond's most popular tasting area. Not only is it the place to enjoy their premium wines, but it brims with visual surprises, too. Look for the little wine casks dressed up like animals, spot the roller skate behind the bar, then keep looking to see what else they've tucked away.

Besides all that, you can get a wine education at Raymond. In the Corridor of the Senses, the white ceramic hands holding clear glass containers of red glass marbles could easily be mistaken for an avante-garde artist's exhibit, but it's more than that: It's set up so your nose can experience the complex aromas found in Raymond's wines.

Raymond is also a fully biodynamic winery, practicing a style of agriculture that respects and works with nature. On their grounds, you can learn more about how it works by touring the Theater of Nature, the largest biodynamic farming exhibit in the Napa Valley. To top that all off, you can also take a class to learn more about wines and wine-making or don stylish-looking silvery lab coats in the Blending Room, where you'll become a winemaker for a day, creating your own wine blend to take home.

What about the wines, you might be thinking by now. Is this place all style and no substance? It would be difficult to find a Napa winery that's making bad wines, so we evaluate wineries first for their visitor experience. Having said that, we've visited scores of wineries while compiling our top picks and Raymond is one of a select few Napa wineries where we enjoyed every single wine they poured.

If you're visiting Napa Valley with a canine traveling companion, it doesn't get any better for the four-legged set: Leave your dog at Frenchie Winery, a chateau-style salon with a water-tasting counter, individual "suites" furnished with dog beds made from wine barrels and a doggie-cam so you can keep an eye on your furry little pal while you're inside.

Our only complaints about Raymond aren't about the winery experience, but about the website. Unfortunately, it sometimes sacrifices usability to style, making it hard to figure out where to find the information you want. To avoid a lot of aimless clicking around trying to figure out how to make a reservation, just look for the link labeled "Visit" near the top of the home page. It will lead you to a concise summary of your options. Scroll to the bottom and click Reserve Your Experience, which will then show you everything available on the date you chose.

Just the Facts About Raymond Vineyards

After many years in the Napa wine industry, Roy Raymond founded Raymond Vineyards in the early 1970s. In 2009, it became part of the Boisset Family Estates, a family-owned wine producer and importer with roots in Burgundy, France. Under the leadership of the company's president Jean-Charles Boisset, this well-respected winery has been transformed into something truly different, cutting-edge in design and fun to visit. Meanwhile, winemaker Stephanie Putnam has continued and improved on Raymond's tradition of fine wine-making.

Types of Wines: Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc

Charge for Tasting: Yes

Winery Tours: Yes

Wine Price: Ranges from \$20 to over \$100, depending on the varietal and year

Make a reservation on their website - at least 30 minutes before you show up. They're not being pretentious, it's just part of the restrictions of their tasting room permit. We recommend that you reserve your tastings, tours or other activities as far ahead of time as you can manage. If you wait until the last minute, you could end up disappointed.

Raymond is a work in progress, with some interesting changes in the works and we wouldn't be surprised to find it different the next time we visit. Before you go, take a walk through their website to see what's available.

Getting to Raymond Vineyards

849 Zinfandel Lane

St. Helena CA

707-963-3141

[Raymond Vineyards Website](#)

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As is common in the travel industry, the writer was provided with a complimentary tour for the purpose of reviewing Raymond Vineyards. While it has not influenced this review, About.com believes in full disclosure of all potential conflicts of interest. For more information, see our [ethics policy](#).
