

George Starke

Up and Down
the Wine Roads



Ready, set, open the bottles

All the barrels and bottles are lined up for 2013 Auction Napa Valley, which is already sold out. This year, the auction's honorary chair is the Staglin Family (Staglin Family Vineyards also sponsor the Staglin Music Festival, one of the valley's major charity events).

The four-day bacchanalia, May 30-June 2, is one of the Napa Valley wine industry's signature events.

Restaurateurs, wholesalers, retailers, collectors and press from North America, Europe and Asia will gather to schmooze with fellow oenophiles and winemakers, gastronomy on an array of exquisite foods, sip one-of-a-kind elixirs, created especially for the event, and bid at the live auction on some 46 lots of wines and vacation packages.

New this year: If you suspect your neighbors' tongues are beginning to wag over the fact that you are still driving an old Rolls Royce, Maserati or Lamborghini, there is an opportunity to obtain a 2013 Audi R8 Spyder (retail price, upwards of \$120,000) at 2013 Auction Napa Valley.

All you have to do is pony up \$1,000 to purchase one of the 500 raffle tickets. You can view the car and kick the tires at the Raymond Winery's May 31 Barrel Auction. (It would be gauche to kick them with anything less than custom-made, alligator skin shoes). If you are the winner, be sure to have a few extra coins in your pocket because the IRS will certainly want to have a friendly tête-à-tête with you.

Cameo Cinema in St Helena celebrated its 100th anniversary on Wednesday, May 15. The theater closed in April for a major renovation that now includes new seats, a new screen and a new sound system.

The successful, sold-out gala opening began at 6 p.m. with a Hollywood-style reception at the Caldwell Snyder art gallery next door with libations and hors d'oeuvres. Then at 8 p.m., the celebrants red-carpeted through the theater lobby to view a reincarnation of the first film screened in the theater in 1913, "Kings of the Forest." That was before "talkies" when the film's scenes were accompanied by piano music to set the mood



Jean Charles Boisset, standing in the Red Room of Raymond Vineyards in St. Helena, will host 2,000 guests at Auction Napa Valley's Barrel Auction on Friday, May 31. *J.L. Sousa/Register*

Family tradition highlights Auction Napa Valley 2013

Raymond will showcase environmental commitment — and coddle 2,000 guests as E-Auction begins Sunday

SASHA PAULSEN
spaulsen@napanews.com

It's not really a surprise that the Staglin family, which is chairing Auction Napa Valley 2013, turned to Jean Charles Boisset and Raymond Vineyards to host a grand party for some 2,000 guests.

The Staglins, after all, chose "Marvels to Miracles" as their theme for this year's auction — marvels being all the valley can muster to dazzle visitors whose largesse will be transformed into miracles in the form of the county's neediest residents.

And if ever there was a vintner who can add a dusting of magic to an event, it is Boisset, scion of a French wine-making family, who has brought a distinctly Gallic flair — and engaging enthusiasm — to the valley since his arrival in 2009.

The Napa Valley Vintners' 33rd auction starts next week, beginning Thursday evening with small and generally swanky dinners, hosted by vintners for bidders who will be attending Saturday's live auction at Meadowood.

But it's the Friday event — this year dubbed the Napa Valley Barrel Auction — that is the largest and liveliest element in the four-days of activities. Created in 2005, the gathering is the event for those fast enough to get tickets online can attend without buying the entire, four-day

auction package.

This year, the wine auction package tickets sold out in record time — the Vintners have reported that 1,000 people will be at Meadowood to bid in the Saturday's live auction — but 2,000 will be at Raymond Vineyards on Friday to stroll, sip and sample the fare from 44 local restaurants. They will be able to taste and bid on barrel samples unavailable anywhere else, and to view the opulent live auction lots that will go on the block on Saturday.

"Supporting the community is both a privilege and a responsibility," said Boisset, who is the head of Boisset Family Estates, which owns wineries in France, California and Canada.

Born in Vougeot in France's famed Burgundy wine region, Boisset worked with his sister, Nathalie, to expand the company founded by his parents to include holdings in Burgundy, Beaujolais, the Rhone Valley and the south of France, as well as international properties. Boisset Family Estates today "shares more than 18 centuries of combined winemaking heritage and traditions," according to its website.

Boisset, while working and studying in San Francisco, recognized the similarities between Sonoma's Russian River Valley and his native Burgundy, which led to his 2003 purchase of DeLoach



Vintner Karen Cakebread and chef Richard Haake are joining forces to offer one of 170 E-Auction lots as part of the wine auction. Online bidding on the E-Auction begins on Sunday, May 26 at AuctionNapaValley.org. *Submitted photo*

Vineyards that had pioneered production of pinot noir, chardonnay and zinfandel. His fascination with California's winemaking history, also resulted in his purchase and restoration of the state's first premium winery, Buena Vista Winery in Sonoma.

In 2009, Boisset acquired St. Helena's Raymond Vineyards, which has its own deep historical roots, that began with the founding of Beringer Winery in St. Helena in 1875. Roy Raymond, who arrived in the Napa Valley in 1933, married Martha Jane Beringer, and after working more than 35 years at Beringer, started his own winery, Raymond, in a joint venture with his two sons, Walter and Roy, Jr. The Japanese brewer Kirin bought Raymond winery in 1989. With Boisset's purchase, Raymond became a family-owned winery again.

Boisset's respect for history and tradition is enlivened with a sense of innovation, if not humor and daring, and a deep commitment to environmental preservation. He is, for example, the creator of the "French Rabbit," which packages wines in light-weight, fluorescent-colored Tetra-Prisma containers. While the bright pink and purple containers might outrage a purist, the idea behind the packaging is the "drive to produce premium quality wines in environmentally friendly ways." The company website, FrenchRabbit.com, also promises to plant a tree for every four "rabbits" sold.

His renovations at Raymond reflect Boisset's distinctive approach to winemaking. An ornate, velvet Red Room, most often compared

Auction

From Page C1

to a Barbary Coast bordello, offers an unusual tasting environment, while a space-age blending room invites guests to be winemaker for a day. Baccarat chandeliers and feathered mannequins share the space with stainless steel fermenting tanks. Barrels, strung in the air and illuminated through holes drilled in their sides, mark the space where visitors can have another tasting experience.

The sensual and educational also combine in the winery's Corridor of the Senses, as well as a two-acre theater of nature that provides an in-depth introduction to the principals of biodynamic farming, which Boisset has adapted for his vineyards in California and Europe.

As much as Friday's party promises to be fun in Boisset's unmatchable style, he noted that the event, "is also the first time the auction has showcased a winery that is committed to organic, sustainable and biodynamic principals." Certified organic and biodynamic, by this summer both Raymond and

DeLoach will be powered 100 percent by solar energy.

Boisset and his wife, Gina Gallo, purchased the home built on Wappo Hill by Margrit and the late Robert Mondavi. Coincidentally, he has been singled out by some wine pundits like journalist Dan Berger as a natural leader who might be the one who can carry on the Robert Mondavi's leadership in the wine industry.

Since reopening Raymond, Boisset has made it available for a range of events that range from fundraisers for the Land Trust of Napa County and Napa Humane to dinners for the valley's summertime arts and music extravaganza, the Festival del Sole. He as has also launched a highly popular Mardi Gras celebration that attracts hundreds of guests to a flavorful, flamboyant celebration.

E-Auction opens

Bidding on 100-barrel lots begins on Friday and continues through Saturday until one hour after the live auction ends. This, explained the Napa Valley Vintners' communication director Patsy McGaughy, is so that guests who might have been outbid on a live auction lot still have an

"Supporting the community is both a privilege and a responsibility."

Jean Charles Boisset

owner Raymond Vineyards

opportunity to spend that cash before departing. Barrel auction bidding is also available online at the auction website, Auction-NapaValley.org.

This website is also the place to peruse and bid on 170 E-Auction lots, available to those who may not be able to attend the auction but want to share the spirit of the charity event and perhaps pick up a few bottles of wine.

Among those contributing an E-Auction lot are Karen Cakebread, owner of Ziata Wines, and Richard Haake, owner of Winery Chefs. The duo is marking a five-year anniversary of their respective businesses "by pairing up on a decidedly delicious and fun auction lot for Auction Napa Valley 2013," Cakebread said.

"According to the Small Business Administration, only 49 percent of small businesses survive five years, but things are good and looking up at the five-year mark," Cakebread said.

After working for

25 years in the wine industry representing Napa Valley wines around the world, in 2008 Cakebread decided to launch her own brand, which she named in honor of her mother. Rather than starting with Napa Valley's most-recognized varieties, cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay, Cakebread decided to make sauvignon blanc and pinot noir, wanting to focus, she said, on "wines that were the food-friendly.

"If I imagine a table surrounded with family and friends with lots of great food to share, these are the first varietals I'd pick to put on that table," she said.

She has since added cabernet franc to her lineup, "again, food-friendly but a nice complement for richer foods," she said.

"I like being hands-on with the wine, picking, crushing, tasting, bottling," Cakebread said,

"but I also really like, and think it's important, to

know and work with everyone else who's involved with my wine. So I'm the one interacting with growers in the vineyard throughout the year; I work with winemaker Anne Vawter, tasting lots as they age and working on the blends; and once the wine is ready, I like being out there meeting the buyers and consumers. Since it's my mother's name on that front label and mine on the back label, it's got to be a true representation of me."

As Cakebread was getting Ziata underway, Richard Haake, was conceiving his own business plan. After cooking at different wineries in the valley, he founded Winery Chefs to fill the need for culinary services at wineries without a full-time cooking staff.

"I've worked for corporate and family-owned wineries," he said. "I understand the dynamics of how wineries work, how food and wine work together, and how food, if used correctly, can be an incredibly valuable wine sales tool. So I look at the wine first to create a menu that'll make the wine wow guests, and ultimately, build sales for the winery."

Winery Chefs now has 18 clients, and Haake has

added more chefs to help him to provide everything from formal dinners to Southern-style barbecues.

Haake has developed recipes to go with each wine Ziata released, and the two decided to join forces to donate an e-auction lot.

"It offers the best of both businesses — and an evening that won't soon be forgotten," Cakebread said.

For the winning bidder, Cakebread will host a dinner party at her home in Calistoga. Haake will prepare the meal, pairing courses with Ziata wines. In addition, the winning bidder will receive 18 bottles, in 750ml and magnum formats, of Ziata Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc from the 2008, 2009 and 2010 vintages.

"We both liked the idea of offering a lot for the E-Auction because anybody in the world could bid on it, whether they attended the Auction or not — so our special guest could come from around the corner or across the world," Cakebread said. "And what better way to celebrate our milestone than to give back to the community where our businesses are based?"