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SPECIAL HARVEST FAIR ISSUE

Wine

INSIDE: FOOD & WINE EVENTS • HARD CIDERS
IRON HORSE VINEYARDS • **BOXED** WINES
VINEYARD VIGNETTES • GREAT TASTES
2013 HARVEST FAIR GUIDE (PG. 53)



Raymond Vineyards

By Julie Fadda Powers

At Raymond Vineyards, there's something for everyone—even your dog. “[Proprietor] Jean-Charles Boisset doesn't want anyone to feel left out,” says Communications Specialist Anna Miranda. “He once saw a car in the lot with the engine running, dogs inside and the air conditioner on. So he brought the dogs in and told the owners he'd have a winery for the pups the next time they returned.” Today, “Frenchie's Winery,” which sits just outside the tasting room and is named after Boisset's own French bulldog, has four places for canine chillin', complete with custom beds made of wine barrels. You can even view your dog from the tasting room indoors via the “Frenchie Cam.”

Raymond is a place where you can learn as much as you want, from the beginning to the end of the winemaking process. Without an appointment, you can visit the tasting room near the front entrance for a more traditional experience. It features historical photos, showing the Raymond family's Napa Valley roots, which began in 1933, when Roy Raymond worked at Beringer, through 1970, when he founded Raymond Vineyards. The estate now includes vineyard acreage in St. Helena, Rutherford and Jameson Canyon. It became part of the Boisset Family Estates collection in 2009. When we arrived, we were greeted with a glass of Sauvignon Blanc (round with stone fruit elements) and next a Chardonnay (silky with apricot and citrus flavors; long finish).

Another complimentary experience is a self-guided Theater of Nature tour, a 1.5-acre display that educates visitors about sustainable, organic and biodynamic farming, and includes five “acts:” soil, plants, animals (there are sheep, peacocks, chickens, goats and a cat “for mouse abatement”), vineyardist (humans) and wholeness (where it all comes together). There's a bountiful garden planted with all sorts of fruits and vegetables (it all goes to the chef, Director of Cuisine and Hospitality Michel Cornu, for events and pairings, and what isn't used goes to the animals), flowers and a herbarium to make the “tea” mixture for biodynamic planting.

Inside the tasting room, there's an adjacent hallway called “Corridor of the Senses,” featuring a texture station where guests can

At a Glance

RAYMOND VINEYARDS
84 ZINFANDEL LANE
ST. HELENA, CA 94574
(707) 963-0869
WWW.RAYMONDVINEYARDS.COM

Hours: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily

Tasting Fees: \$20-\$100

Wines currently offered: Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Meritage, Syrah, Petite Sirah, Red Blend

Appointment necessary: For tours and special tastings only

Picnics: No

Pets: Dogs welcome in “Frenchie's Winery”



Clockwise from top-left: Corridor of the Senses, barrel room, the Red Room's billiard area, Winemaker for a Day; Winemaker Stephanie Putnam; near the Theater of Nature area, the Crystal Cellar

touch things that are silky, leathery and even furry; a wall of color shades for each varietal; and a really fun line-up of scents along the opposite wall, where you can experience common (and some not so common) wine aromas. In the nearby Rutherford Room, you can learn about terroir (all soil types in the area) by viewing a three-dimensional map of Napa Valley as well as jarred soils.

But Boisset wanted to create even more memorable experiences for visitors, so, with an appointment, there are many other things you can do. Walking outside to the rear, you'll first see an immense fig tree and, beyond that, two outdoor living rooms where guests can bring their purchases and relax in Brocade inspired furniture set among mature trees, and/or play bocce, pétanque, badminton, basketball or croquet.

Inside the winemaking facility is the Crystal Cellar, created in homage to working cellars in France. Visitors can learn about decanting, enjoy many Baccarat crystal (including chandeliers) and Bernardaud porcelain items, experience a library tasting and even head to the room's tasting bar for a sampling of Generations and District Cabernets.

We sampled the 2010 Napa Valley Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon (Winemaker Stephanie Putnam's first vintage from start to finish; assistant winemaker is Kathy George and Eric Pooler is director of winegrowing), which is a very approachable blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Malbec. Next was the 2005 St. Helena Cabernet Sauvignon (the vineyard is right across the street from the winery, on the St. Helena side of Zinfandel Lane), which is only poured at the winery and is 100 percent Cabernet Sauvignon. I loved the nose—it made me want to *eat* the wine—while its softer, fruit-forward characteristics featured strong tannins, red fruit and great acidity. The 2009 Rutherford Cabernet Sauvignon is a more masculine choice, again a 100 percent Cabernet Sauvignon from the property surrounding the winery, with dark berries, leather and classic Rutherford dust characteristics. The 2009 Generations (the Raymonds made it in homage to family) features the very best lots of the Cabernet Sauvignon vineyards and results in a full, rounded wine with elements of cocoa and baking spice.

In the nearby Barrel Cellar, you can gather with friends and taste from the barrels to compare unfinished wines with the current release counterparts.



The JCB Lounge, near the pool, is where you can have a private tasting of an exclusive line of rare, numbered-edition wines crafted by Boisset, each of which has three emotions attached (and each of the numbers has a significant meaning in his life). The lavish room is decorated in gold because Boisset is from France's Cote d'Or (Gold Coast). It has gold curtains and couches, a collection of decanters and stemware, a Baccarat "Mille Nuits" chandelier (the only one of its particular design in the United States—and there are only three in the world) a large, flat-screen TV (when we were there it had music videos playing on it), and all sorts of items to look at or even purchase. Just think luxury, fashion and an amazing wine tasting experience, and you'll get the picture.

I've saved the Red Room for last because we found it the most amazing. It's like stepping inside a 1920s speakeasy. The multiple types of seating (and even walls) are plush and deep red, lit by chandeliers, with classic games throughout (even a pool room with arcade games), a large, dark wood table and bar, a piano, leopard print carpeting and, again, all sorts of artwork, jewelry and other items to look at or even purchase. It's accessible to guests by appointment and with a minimum \$50 wine purchase.

In addition to various educational experiences (some of which I've already covered), you can do a wine-and-food component tasting that examines multiple food flavors with different wines, or a blind tasting, where you can guess the blend. Probably the ultimate is "Winemaker for a Day," where you can blend Bordeaux varietals from various Napa Valley appellations to create something completely unique. Then bottle and cork your own wine, create a label and take home the finished product. Raymond will even keep your recipe so you can order more to share with friends and family.

Wine club members (there are several levels and configurations) receive discounts on experiences and wines both here and at the other Boisset Family properties, Buena Vista and De Loach (both in Sonoma County), perks with limousine companies and hotels, and invitations to wine club parties. Bottom line: What's not to enjoy? This place truly has something for everyone. ■



DID YOU KNOW?

There are festively dressed mannequins hanging from the rafters near the Crystal Cellar—Jean-Charles loves to throw parties.

