

Kid-friendly Raymond Vineyards

A family friendly winery in the Napa Valley?
 Let's face it: Many people go to Napa to get away from their kids, not to visit with them. At some point, though, wine lovers might want to educate their children about wine or introduce them to the beauty of the wine country. Most wineries are not geared toward young visitors, so with that in mind, I set out to find one that was — just in case you get the urge to blend wine with family time.



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The more I asked around, the more the name Raymond Vineyards came up, so I packed up my two daughters, 5-year-old Elleri and 4-year-old Charlotte, to test out the recommendations.

Sense appeal

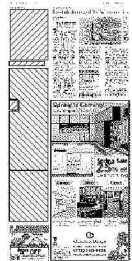
Raymond Vineyards was started in 1974 and became one of the iconic names in the valley. It was kind of an old-fashioned winery with an older following until it was purchased by vintner Jean-Charles Boisset in 2009. The changes that resulted were numerous and dramatic. J.C., as the people who work their call him, is one of the most significant innovators in the global wine business, something certainly evident by my visit to Raymond.

The kid friendliness starts with the staff. My tour guide was incredibly accommodating of both me and the girls. We started in the Theater of Nature, a 2-acre educational exhibit of biodynamic farming that includes animals, plants, a garden and all sorts of random chairs and statues, more than enough to keep my daughters engaged.

Off to the Red Room, a dramatic space covered in red velvet and velour that is used for events. It turned out to be Elleri's favorite part of the tour. Even with a plethora of breakable things in there and my 4-year-old's insistence on hiding under the big formal table, our guide remained friendly, understanding and easy-going in tone.

The Corridor of Senses consisted of various aromas, textures and colors to educate folks on wine tasting. The corridor was very appealing to my girls, who noticed all of the lip gloss aromas.

The Crystal Cellar, Blending Room and Barrel Room were less appealing for the girls, but our time



in those rooms was about an hour into the tour and way past their usual attention span. Still, the Crystal Room offers enough visual interest for children.

More inclusive

The winery has coloring books and crayons, too, though even after an hour and a half, my girls still wanted to take pictures on the big chairs and by all of the animals outside.

At Raymond Vineyards, the friendliness extends beyond children to include dogs. There is a separate area with shade and water, and in the tasting room, there's a live feed so owners can keep an eye on their pets while the owners taste.

Wine is a cultural drink. Biodynamic farming, like that practiced at Raymond, sees the vineyard and winery as part of a whole system that is connected to its surroundings. Children are both part of our culture and part of the surroundings for many of us.

As the wine industry evolves, I believe it must become more inclusive and less exclusive than it has been historically. Perhaps accommodating children at wineries is a small but significant step in that direction. If so, Raymond Vineyards is leading the way.

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Sisters Elleri Janes, 5, and Charlotte Janes, 4, take a moment in the farm area at Raymond Vineyards in the Napa Valley. MARK JANES/FOR THE RGJ