

Organic Wines Uncorked

The Delicious Revolution Will Be Vinified: News and Views on Organically Grown Wine

By Pam Strayer

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Napa Valley Wine Library: Winemaking in Two Worlds - France and Napa

The Napa Valley Wine Library presented its 25th wine seminar Saturday, May 9, with a rich assortment of wines and winemakers, all in attendance to embody the theme, "Winemaking in Two Worlds: Napa Valley and France-Burgundy and Bordeaux."

Once upon a time Napa was a young punk, trying to make it with the "in crowd." The seminar covered the complex, interweaving of Napa-California connections, including a reminder of the time when California was also the French frontier, with the big French houses running for pieces of the New World land grab.

The tony morning event (tickets were \$160-175, including lunch afterwards at Raymond Vineyards) took place at the CIA in St. Helena, moderated by Master Sommelier Gilles de Chambure, who contributed intelligent insights delivered with a charming, continental accent.

Introducing himself, wine proprietor Jean-Charles Boisset joked that he was born in a wine barrel, tasting wine at the age of 3 and making wine by the age of 11. It was at that age that he made a fateful journey with his grandparents to visit the historic Sonoma winery he now owns - Buena Vista, originally built in the 1860's. He has restored the winery over the last few years to its original pristine condition and, on May 30, will open a new wine tool museum on the site.



Jean-Charles Boisset of DeLoach, Raymond and Buena Vista wineries

Jean-Charles' grandparents, who traveled with him to Sonoma, were schoolteachers, not wine scions. Jean-Charles' father, Jean-Claude Boisset, achieved tremendous success in the wine industry in just one generation.

Since he married Gina Gallo in 2009 and moved to Napa, Boisset has taken a dynamic role in positioning his Raymond and DeLoach winery brands as organic and biodynamic, certifying 90 acres in Napa and 17 (of his 400) acres in Sonoma surrounding the Russian River Valley tasting room. (About 500+ cases of estate wines are currently produced from the Biodynamic vines at DeLoach.)

Boisset constructed an impressive, educational "Theater of Nature" display in Napa where visitors can learn about conventional, organic and biodynamic farming side by side. At the wine seminar, Boisset announced that he has hundreds more acres in Napa's Jamieson Canyon that are in transition to organic certification. (More details were not available.)

At the tasting, Boisset focused on his family's most treasured Burgundian vineyards and his recent experiments in making Pinot Noir blended from Burgundy and Sonoma.



The Boisset wines from Burgundy's Chambolle-Musigny vineyard in France (on the left) with the Russian River Valley DeLoach Estate Pinot Noir (on the right) clearly displaying their characteristic contrast of Old and New World.



All three wines - on the left, the delicate 2011 Chambolle-Musigny Pinot Noir from France; in the center, the darker, fruitier 2011 DeLoach Estate Vineyard Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley in Sonoma. On the right is a blend of those two wines blended with two other Sonoma vineyards.



The winemaker and consultant Philippe Melka was originally included in the program, but had to cancel to attend a friend's wedding.

Following the seminar lunch was served in the Grove at Raymond Vineyards. Boisset's chef is Michael Cornu, who was the chef at Auberge du Soleil for nearly 20 years. Today he's happy to make meals sourced mostly from Napa. The lunch featured a perfectly prepared organic chicken, followed by a beautiful assortment of cheeses as the last course.



Jean-Charles Boisset of Raymond displaying his joie de vivre as Michael Silacci and a Chinese student (studying at U.C. Davis) look on

The luncheon guests seated at my table included four students from U.C. Davis, part of a larger group of students the organizers invited to attend. Two were from China, one from Connecticut and the fourth, who was avidly studying organic and biodynamic viticulture, was from Sebastopol.

Silacci joined our table and talked with students about their summer internship plans. One woman from Hong Kong was headed to work in Gallo's Fresno lab while the other, from Chengdu, in the west of China, had plans to intern at a small Pinot Noir winery in Healdsburg. The Connecticut student was going to work at Cade (on Howell Mountain in Napa).

One can imagine, in 30 years time, that these Chinese students might one day host a wine seminar in China, inviting their Napa counterparts to join them in reminiscing about their time abroad - where they learned so much about winemaking in Napa Valley.



Chef Cornu selected a variety of French and California cheeses.
L to R: a Tete de Moine (a Swiss cow's milk cheese), Cantelet (French),
Manchego (Spanish), and a Laura Chenel goat cheese from Sonoma