

HAUTE LIVING

Behind The Scenes At Buena Vista Winery's Patron Dinner In Sonoma

BY KELLY A. CARTER | HAUTE SCENE, NEWS | JULY 23, 2013



Michael Polenske and Jean-Charles Boisset

It's a good thing no one ever said the [Napa Valley Festival del Sole](#) has to be confined to the Valley. Otherwise, benefactors and patrons of the festival, in the midst of its 10th landmark season, never would have experienced the educational and entertaining Patron Dinner [Jean-Charles Boisset](#) hosted on July 21 at his historical Buena Vista Winery in Sonoma. *Haute Living* takes you inside the festivities that took place at California's oldest commercial winery.

The evening began at 9 p.m. when guests were presented flutes of La Victoire Brut Rosé Champagne upon arrival to the courtyard. The flamboyant Boisset, who loves an audience, guided his guests, many who were Buena Vista Winery virgins, through the winery's two main buildings. The raconteur told fascinating stories about the history of California winemaking and brought others into the spotlight by unexpectedly calling on them, like a professor does to an unsuspecting student, to share news about something they're involved in. **Marc Lhormer**, co-founder of the Napa Valley Film Festival, talked about this fall's festival and gave the cognoscenti the scoop on which film just may be shown opening night; **Michael Polenske**, Board Treasurer of Napa Valley Festival del Sole and chairman and founder of Blackbird Vineyards and the Bespoke Collection, told of the early days of traveling to Moscow with festival co-founder **Rick Walker** to drum up interest in the yet-to-be-unveiled festival.

Then it was showtime. **George Webber**, a mustachioed and bearded chap who plays The Count for Buena Vista Winery—he brings to life **Count Agoston Haraszthy**, the Hungarian who founded the winery in 1857, for guests visiting the property—stood on the interior steps of the building constructed in 1862 and played his character well. Afterward, Boisset shepherded the patrons next door—to a building completed in 1864—to show off the renovations he made since purchasing Buena Vista Winery in 2011.

Guests oohed and aahed as they went through the Bubble Lounge, where a player piano did its thing and the venue for an after-party later that evening, the Cave of Curiosity, where all sorts of interesting objects are on display and wine enthusiasts can blend their own wine; a well-appointed room reserved for private tastings—think leather couches and animal-print pillows. An elevator was available, but it was more fun to take the stairs in order to see the massive display of crystal decanters in glass cases arranged between each floor. At last, we reached the top floor, home to the Buena Vista Historic Wine Tool Museum, which opened recently and contains 3,000 objects.

A long table with mannequins resembling historical figures, such as **Mariano Vallejo** and Haraszthy, known as the Father of California viticulture, amused visitors. In one corner, Style of Five, a unique Russian folk ensemble, provided entertainment. The musical group had just arrived the previous day from St. Petersburg to take part in the "Moscow Nights" concert at Castello di Amorosa on July 22. Style of Five's exotic instruments, with names such as domra, gusli and double bass balalaika, were as eye-catching as the historical mannequins.

Before dinner was served, Boisset, who was raised in Burgundy, shared with his guests a story about visiting Sonoma and Buena Vista Winery as a youth.

"I came here when I was 11," he said to the diners. "It took me 34 years to buy (Buena Vista Winery), but we finally succeeded. The only thing I regret in my life is my grandparents are no longer here to witness it. But hopefully they're watching and they remember that they were the ones who were the inspiration."

His grandparents, resisters to World War II, had brought him here for a purpose. "They wanted us to really feel the dynamism, the entrepreneurship and the sense of what America was all about," Boisset said. "They were schoolteachers—nothing to do with wine. After 10 days of touring the amazing California coastline and the historical buildings and the Mission, we came a mile away from here to see where the independence to Mexico was declared and signed... in Sonoma Square. General Vallejo is right there (he points to a mannequin)."

In addition to Vallejo, Boisset took time to time to recognize some of the well-heeled guests in attendance, including **Maria Manetti Shrem** and **Jan Shrem**, **Tatiana Copeland** and **Gerret Copeland** and **Joan Weill** and **Sandy Weill**. The Frenchman couldn't help from leading the patrons through "Le Ban Bourguigon," who clapped, turned their hands in unison and chanted "la la la" as the French drinking song demands.

It was the kind of memorable evening that called for special Buena Vista wines to be poured and paired with exquisite fare whipped up by **Michou Cornu**, the Director of Cuisine & Hospitality for Boisset Family Estates. For the first course, a 2013 Private Reserve Chardonnay went with a smoked salmon millefeuille with fingerling potato salad, smoked bay scallops and herb dressing. The second course was a spectacular bresse organic corn chicken confit and garden vegetable lasagna with chanterelle jus that went very well with the 2013 Private Reserve Pinot Noir. For dessert, the 2013 Private Reserve Zinfandel was brought out to go with the opera cake with kahlua mousse and orange zest.

After dinner, everyone retreated to the Bubble Lounge for more bubbly and history lessons.



