

The Press Democrat

Hey wine geeks, looking for some weekend fun?

By Peg Melnik

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Check out the Historic Tool Museum at Buena Vista Winery in Sonoma. It's open this Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Here's a Q&A with vintner Jean-Charles Boisset for a deeper look at this unusual museum.



Q: What's the most significant aspect of this tool museum?

A: The inspiration for this museum developed at Louis Bouillot, in Burgundy, where we have over 3-4,000 historical winemaking tools that have been collected by our family and also purchased from a gentleman named Philippe Berard, who acquired the tools over a lifetime. Much of the collection is now on display at The Imaginarium at Louis Bouillot, but our collection in France has a very different feel, catering to a different audience than what will be offered at Buena Vista Winery. The presentation is not very dramatic and features more factual elements, which appeals to the emotional connection that the French have to wine and winemaking. Here at Buena Vista, more than 300 of the most interesting tools from the collection in France have made their way to the U.S. and will be on display in a 5,000 sq. ft. museum space that has an exciting narrative speaking to the formation of the California wine world and Buena Vista's significant role in making California the leader of the American wine world.

Q: What motivated you to create it?

A: Since purchasing the property in 2011, I have been passionately committed to continuing the unrivaled legacy first created 150 years ago when the Count founded the winery and began to pioneer premium winemaking in California. We have been focused on the rebirth of Buena Vista – so that present and future generations have the opportunity to learn the brilliant history of the winery, taste the spectacular wines, and visit the historical property to see first-hand one of the most iconic locations of California winemaking.

After the first phase of Buena Vista Winery's renovations were completed in 2012, which encompassed the restoration of the historical cellars, an earthquake retrofit, and the reopening of the cellars to winemaking, the second phase of the project was completed in 2014 with the opening of several new guest experiences. This now includes the unveiling of the new first-of-its-kind in the US, Historic Wine Tool Museum, which we could not be more excited about. It has been a lengthy journey and we're finally at the culminating point of the re-birth process.

Our hope is that the Buena Vista Winery Historic Wine Tool Museum will become the destination for the region, uniting the history of Buena Vista Winery and the legacy of winemaking throughout the ages in California into a unique museum experience that will allow visitors to learn and share in the rich heritage of California's first premium winery.

Q: What do you hope people will walk away with after seeing it?

A: I like to think of wine as the ultimate "Elixir of God"! Wine is a gift! There is nothing else like wine on Earth. As The Count described it, it is "purple gold" or "liquid gold". Wine centers us to who we are and our place in the universe! Every year we have one opportunity to perfect ourselves through the harvest and wine is the only product that allows us to express ourselves in this way. It is the paramount gesture of every individual and the tools in our collection are an extension of us in the pursuit of wanting to achieve greatness in the glass. Like a literal extension of our hand, these tools, like a pen to a writer or a barrique to a winemaker, they are an extension of us as individuals and how we use that tool in the creative process determines the end product.

There is true beauty in all the tools – like a ballet dancer, the tool is the extension of the arm and with movement and action, it creates something beautiful! The tools are also an extension of our human visualizations and dreams and imagination. The expression of what we create is only done through our tools and is based on what we desire to create. In order for the tools to have purpose – the tools have to be activated to come alive. It is only through our human interaction that gives the tools life. We are ultimately then all directors asking our specific tools to perform the action of our creative mind...what a gift this is! And what a gift this is for me to present this experience to our guests who visit Buena Vista Winery!

All of this is the inspiration behind the museum and this represents the meaning and significance behind why we have chosen Buena Vista Winery to showcase this historical collection.

Q: What is your favorite tool and why?

A: The pomace cutters are probably my favorite tool amongst the collection because they are displayed on the back wall of the museum in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, looking similarly shaped to shovels or axes. These are dramatically displayed and "come alive" during the museum show with slow deliberate movement across the back wall in choreographed synchronicity while foreboding music is played, exhibiting how these tools cut the pomace cake that remains after pressing the grapes. This moment during the show is always the most dramatic and creates the most energy in the room! There is an anticipation that is created amongst the guests that at any moment, anything can happen! This is the power behind these tools.

We feel and understand their presence and power simply through the visual presentation. For the audience, these tools are never as great as when they are in the hand of the creative director using them and bringing them to life with creative action. The result of what is created in this world demonstrates our own unique individual personality – it's all in the gesture! It's all in how each individual uses the tools they are given!

Q: Why are these historic tools important for people to know about?

A: When visitors enter the museum space, they are transported into a theatrical type of experience. For us at Buena Vista, the museum is like a performance – a visual dance of the tools, with lighting, special effects and movement.

The museum experience is for guests who want to enjoy the property with or without wine and for those with or without wine knowledge. We are creating an attraction to the culture of wine! The focus of the museum is to communicate the historical significance that resulted from the civilization and agriculture of wine. Like true anthropology, wine is part of who we are as a civilization – it is an agricultural product that is part of us...truly an extension of us...and we must not forget this! These agricultural products ultimately tell the story of who we are as a society.

Q: Your wineries are filled with interesting experiences. What is the benefit of having people “experience” wine-related elements, in addition to tasting?

A: Every Boisset property is an extension of our personalities, a reflection of their history and sense of place, and each boasts its unique identity that vibrates with personality, enrichment, education and experiential discovery of wine. The properties and the experiences offered at each of our wineries are all expressions of how we feel, what we enjoy, what we like... and what we hope our guests can learn and discover about themselves and our wines through their time with us. We instill our wineries, our guests, and our team with the sense that wine is a medium of self-discovery, and experiencing that at each winery inspires learning, memory, and moments & emotions that transcend the everyday. Wine transports us... we simply wish to facilitate the journey!

All of our wineries have a sense of place. We have created places where people can come to enjoy themselves, gather, experience, dream and learn – these are the key elements that make our properties like Buena Vista Winery, Raymond Vineyards and DeLoach Vineyards memorable and keep people coming back.

Education is a key element of this. Teaching and having fun at the same time – this is what wine should be. America is very good at this: creating opportunities for interactive learning while having fun at the same time. This has been a longstanding approach to learning here in the U.S. and we have embraced this approach enthusiastically. Wine can and should be lots of fun in the same way! But it can also be serious if that is what you want it to be. It's your individual wish and desire to dream, and we allow each individual to do that when they visit a Boisset Collection winery.

We believe that we make among the finest wines in the world, and have years of winemaking history and generations of expertise among our team thanks to historical wineries and deeply experienced experts within our team. Wine is our essential DNA; it is as prevalent in us as our blood. It is simply part of our essence and is the substance that underlies everything we do. We wish always to have the opportunity to truly interact with our guests through genuine, unique and captivating experiences.

Our guests want to share in these experiences, they want to experience life! You will notice when you visit a Boisset winery that we are always inclusive. We strive to always welcome everyone! Wine should be experienced and shared, and it should be alluring, seductive and attractive to those first exploring the possibilities of wine. We want our guests to vibrate around the culture of wine! They should feel comfortable just being themselves, expressing themselves, reflecting, enjoying and discovering. They are encouraged to discover themselves, by just talking, or delving into specific subject matter, like art, or culture, or themselves, or their likes/dislikes, what inspires them, makes them laugh, etc.

We at Boisset Collection have all done all of this together! It is a collaborative, creative experience that continues to evolve as we evolve and everything experienced at a Boisset property or through a Boisset wine is an extension of all of us. We want our guests to spend hours of time with us at each of our properties. We're not interested in the standard, expected guest treatment of "quickly spend your money and leave". We want our guests to become ambassadors for Boisset and become extensions of us. This is a goal realized not in minutes but with dedicated practice over time. Our hope is to develop a legacy and a name that resonates for many years to come. This starts at our properties by creating environments and experiences that we enjoy ourselves and then want to share with our guests.

Tickets for the Buena Vista Winery Historic Wine Tool Museum: \$25 per person for a four to five selection wine tasting and guided tour of the museum and can be purchased in advance either through the Buena Vista Winery website or in person at the Buena Vista Winery Tasting Room.

Open daily: Monday through Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with shows running throughout the day for groups of up to 16 and the last show of the day at 4 pm. For more information, visit www.buonavistawinery.com.