

## Winery Adventure: Raymond Vineyards, St Helena

# A wine lover's surreal dream come true

To visit Raymond Vineyards on Zinfandel Lane is to plunge into some fluid, dreamlike universe caught between Willy Wonka & the Wine Factory and a Tim Burton goth film, shot in a rapper's lux crib.

Inspired by the vision of proprietor Jean-Charles Boisset, Raymond is all about elegance and whimsy; the tasting of their Napa Valley wines, including cabernet sauvignon and merlot, is presented in a series of interactive and creative experiences meant to enhance one's relationship with and discovery of wine. It's surreal — and captivating.

Take the Theater of Nature, the first of many spectacles. The 2-acre display outside the St. Helena estate is the largest educational exhibit on biodynamic farming in the Napa Valley. It showcases how all the "actors" in the "theater" play a crucial part in crafting Raymond's premium wines. Each of the five acts is devoted to a particular component of nature (Act I is the soil; Act III is the animals) and how it fits into biodynamics.

From there, it's off to the contemporary tasting room with soft beige walls and floor-to-ceiling windows (it's the tamest room in the winery) and then into the Corridor of Senses. There, fake white hands jutting from the wall (artfully creepy, like something out of "American Horror Story: Winery") cup beakers for you. Dip your nose, inhale and experience a range of aromas — just give the red-tassled, perfume spritzers a squeeze.

After that, you might buy a bottle and tuck into the plush, burgundy sofas of the

Red Room for table service (\$50 minimum purchase) underneath the Baccarat chandelier. Or try an aeration lesson in the Crystal Cellar (\$30) with its decanter collection, mirrored bar and stainless steel walls — if you dare.

**The details:** Open 10 a.m.-4 p.m. daily, 849 Zinfandel Lane, St. Helena. \$20 tasting fee for current releases. Fees for other tasting experiences may apply. [www.raymondvineyards.com](http://www.raymondvineyards.com).

**The sips:** The 2012 Reserve Selection Sauvignon Blanc (\$18) is bright and full of lemongrass; the 2011 Reserve Selection Cabernet Sauvignon (\$40) is all about opulence — think mocha-cloaked dark berries; and the 2010 Small Lot Napa Valley Syrah (\$45) opens with classic notes of bacon fat and black pepper.

**Nearby:** Flora Springs and Kelham are also on Zinfandel Lane.

— Jessica Yadegaran



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Head to Raymond Vineyards' Red Room for a \$50-minimum bottle service, where you can sip on plush sofas beneath the Baccarat chandelier.

