

# Vintner Jean-Charles Boisset visits Cuffs to share his passion

By SUE REID

A typical day for vintner Jean-Charles Boisset includes wine and an exploration of the senses. The proprietor of the vast Boisset Collection, with wineries in California, France and Canada, sees wine as a conduit, channeling energy between human beings, and providing an avenue to both enlighten and inspire them.

To that end, Mr. Boisset travels the world promoting his world-renowned collection of wines, and communicating his passion for being alive.

"It's not just about the wine itself," said Mr. Boisset, who splits time between his residences in California and France, "it's about the ethereal emotion, the senses."

"Wine is a catalyst of every conversation," he said. "It helps to bring people together. There is nothing more exciting."

Mr. Boisset brought that excitement and boundless energy for the first time to Cuffs in Chagrin Falls, where a group of about 30 enjoyed dinner in the historic Carriage House with guest Chef du Cuisine Zack Bruell.

Mr. Boisset's wines, which have propelled him to the "Power List" of the 50 most important people in the wine world each year since 2007 by "Decanter" magazine, were paired with Mr. Bruell's creations. The menu featured Fanny Bay oyster shooters topped with JCB Rosé No. 69; a salad course of yellow and red beets and walnuts; followed by grilled Verlasso salmon with red burgundy reduction over mushroom risotto.

The meal was completed with a beautiful and flavorful selection of Spanish, Italian and French cheeses and Portuguese almonds, all flown in for the dinner from JCB Collection Fromagery in Yountville, Calif.

"He was so in sync with the food," Mr. Boisset said of Mr. Bruell. "He combined the earth (beets), animals (goat cheese), and the sea (salmon)."

And Cuffs presented the perfect combination of style, elegance and "an incredible sense of aesthetics" with which to present his wines that evening, Mr. Boisset noted.

"Not only is it a special place," he said of the one-of-a-kind custom clothier founded in 1981, "but it has a great soul."

That soul is embodied in owners Rodger and Patty Kowall, Mr. Boisset said, whose two sons Zach and Cameron continue to bring forth style and elegance along with a staff that carries the vision forward.

"There is a sense of home here," Mr. Boisset said, "and family. There is just an extraordinary feel here." Mr. Boisset said that presenting his wines at Cuffs was simply natural. They get it to the highest level of details," he said.

Although this was his first time in Chagrin Falls, Mr. Boisset is no stranger to the United States, making his first visit at the age of 11.

"I've always wanted to come here," Mr. Boisset said of the United States, specifically to Ohio, which he traveled through by car on a cross-country trip with a group of friends at the age of 20.

"My grandparents on both sides were school teachers and loved the United States and what it represented," he said. "I was raised with a sense of love for the United States and have discovered it through art, lifestyle and fun."

He shared his connection to Ohio through a poignant story of his grandmother, who was left an orphan after World War I and eventually met a "wonderful man from Ohio," a reverend who helped her and guided her to an education.



Photographs by Alana Clark

**Acclaimed vintner Jean-Charles Boisset of JCB Wines and the Boisset Collection relaxes on an Hermès couch during a recent visit to Cuffs in Chagrin Falls.**



"My grandmother talked about Ohio," Mr. Boisset recalled. "It is a great state with an incredible history and a great French connection in that sense."

In his travels, Mr. Boisset visited Columbus, reveling in its historic significance, then Cincinnati and Akron, be-

fore finally arriving in Cleveland. Mr. Boisset has visited 46 of the 50 United States. "I love the American lifestyle and way of life. It is a way of living positively, and has a sense of entrepreneurship and the idea that 'nothing is impossible,'" he said. "Americans ask questions and discover. I love the dynamism here."

Mr. Boisset revels in the "wonderful advantages" his dual residency brings forth. "I consistently can bounce between two cultures and be enhanced by both," he said. "I'm in love with two places."

In his California home on the highest point of the Napa Valley, a property known as Wappo Hill built by Robert Mondavi, Mr. Boisset and wife Gina Gallo, of the American wine dynasty E&J Gallo, and their twin five-year-old daughters enjoy carrying on the legacy, Mr. Boisset said. "It's a very unique place," he said. "The Indians used to live there and I felt that energy."

Like his home in Burgundy, France, Wappo Hill has a very "strategic location" in the middle of the Grand Cru. "We have a 360-degree view of the whole Napa Valley," he said. "It gives a sense of reflection and a sense of place." There, his family makes their home alongside llamas, goats, horses, ducks, sheep, snakes, chickens and three dogs. "My girls ride the goats around the property," he said with a smile.

In Burgundy, Mr. Boisset's roots run deep. He lives in the same village where he was born, transforming his grandparents' home in Vougeot to make it his own.

Mr. Boisset was born in the house that eventually became the family's winery, founded in 1961. He proudly explained that his grandmother was a pioneer in organic farming, embracing such practices as composting and biodynamic farming, which are staples of the Boisset wineries today.

"My parents taught us the values of land and the ethic of wine and hard work very early on," Mr. Boisset, 49, explained.

At the age of six, he was gardening, working with bees, learning about photosynthesis and the needs of organics in the soil.

"I was fortunate to learn this very young," he said. "It was natural to evolve our vineyards into organic farming."

In fact, the Boisset Collection is the leading company in both the United States and France when it comes to organic and biodynamic farming. The Boisset Collection is Burgundy's largest wine producer and one of the top 25 wine producers in the United States.

"We are proud to tell you that the farming technique we use is based on the lunar calendar," which is rooted in respect for Mother Nature, he noted. "I love Mother Nature and respect her highly and in return, she gives us the best grapes to work with," he said. "We work with her rhythm."

Mr. Boisset began his own love of wine very early on. In fact, he had his first taste while in his mother Claudine's womb, he said with a laugh. "My mother never stopped enjoying wine," he said. Her favorite was Cabolle-Musigny, a Pinot Noir.

Mr. Boisset took his first sip at the age of five, and by age seven, he was tasting and having his "epiphany moment," where he fell in love with the elegance and finesse of a fine Pinot Noir, he said.

Fast forward and as president of the Boisset Collection, Mr. Boisset oversees the operation of 24 wineries in Burgundy, Beaujolais, the Rhone Valley, the South of France, Napa, Sonoma and Monterey California and Quebec.

His accolades run the gamut, including being recipient of the Meiningen's International Wine Entrepreneur of the Year, being named Innovator of the Year by "Wine Enthusiast" magazine and in recent years in being named one of the "20 Most Admired people in the North American wine industry" by Vineyard & Winery Management.

In addition to his wine, Mr. Boisset designs custom jewelry under the JCB Jewelry Collection, embracing the natural beauty of a variety of stones and finding symbolism and passion in each and every piece.

"I'm very inspired by everything I see," Mr. Boisset said. "I love creating and building. I'm constantly engaged by things I see," he added.

He is responsible for the interior design of all of the vineyards and his homes, and in his spare time, he enjoys kickboxing, tennis and riding horses.

Looking ahead, there is so much more to do, he said with his signature excitement.

"In my opinion, America is just starting to drink wine," he said. As a result, Mr. Boisset finds great joy in enlightening others to the beauty and passion of it.

"We are never telling people what they are supposed to feel," he said. "Everyone is different. But it is fun to taste and to discover," Mr. Boisset added.

His every day goal – to help people experience wine in a different way and to awaken their senses.

"I've never worked a day in my life," Mr. Boisset concluded matter-of-factly. "To be able to evolve with life with something like wine is a true gift."

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