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*Inside the
WONDERFUL
WORLD of
JEAN-CHARLES
BOISSET*

CELEBRATING
THE ANNUAL
AUCTION
NAPA VALLEY

LEGACY OF
THE VINE

*Interview with
John and Doug Shafer*

DEDICATED TO
THEIR CRAFT

*Spotlight on
Women Winemakers*

MAY 2018

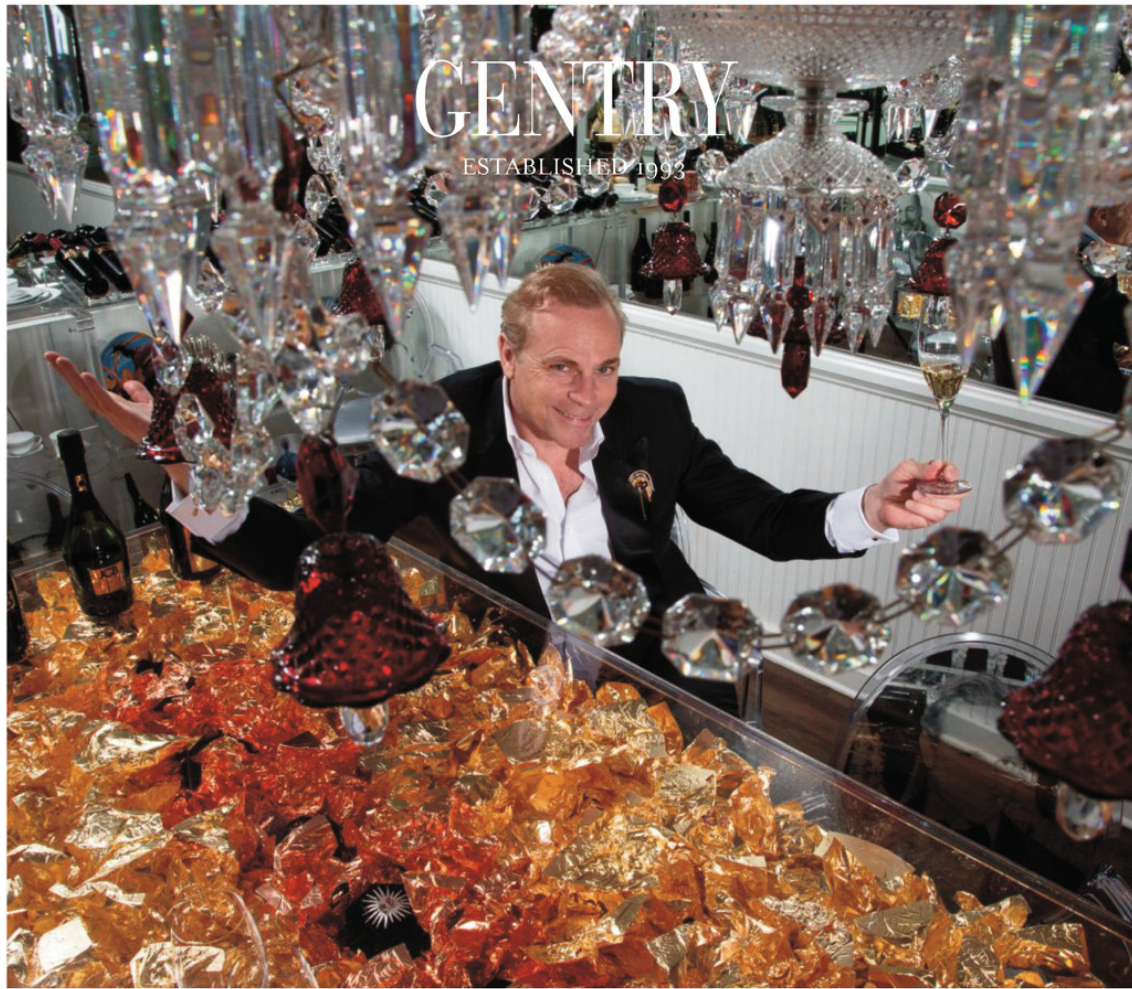
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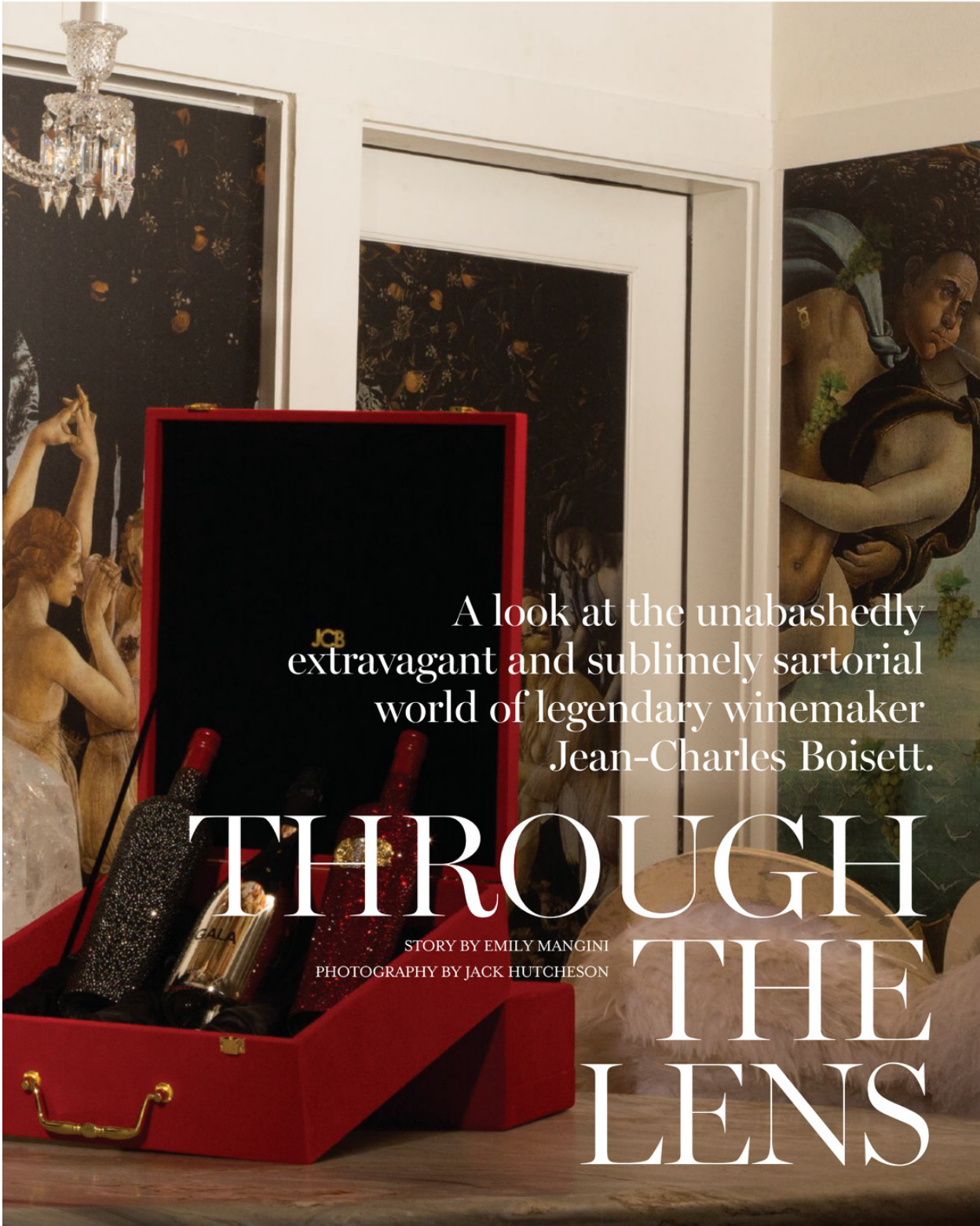
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ON THE COVER: Jean-Charles Boisset photographed at JCB Village in Yountville. Photography by Jack Hutcheson.





A look at the unabashedly
extravagant and sublimely sartorial
world of legendary winemaker
Jean-Charles Boisset.

THROUGH THE LENS

STORY BY EMILY MANGINI
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACK HUTCHESON



Jean-Charles Boisset—or JCB, as he is also known—is standing on a table. Shoulders back, chin up. There’s an air of French military hero to him. Instead of government-issued formal dress, his suit is crisp, black, and Tom Ford. A shock of his signature red socks peeks from his ankles. His shoulders and lapels are affixed with a glittering assortment of accoutrement: ruby-red lips and a bumble bee, both designed by JCB himself. A small, sparkling skull dangles casually from a draping chain.

Down on earth he’s surrounded by the hallmarks of a photo-shoot—towering lights and a small army of photographers, employees, and stylists. Boisset’s not unaccustomed to being the focus of the lens, but the uniqueness of this first impression is not lost on him. He gives a light laugh. “Bonjour! Welcome!”

A Burgundian ex-pat from a winemaking family, Boisset is the proprietor of Boisset Collection, an impressive international portfolio of 24 wineries, including California’s oldest, Buena Vista, and the Napa Valley stalwart, Raymond Vineyards. He’s married to Gina Gallo, Senior Winemaking Director at E. & J. Gallo and the granddaughter of the “E.,” Ernest Gallo. Theirs was a chance meeting in France, “*une grève d’éclaircissement*”—a strike of lightning—and love at first sight. To the industry the wedding was not just the celebration of a marriage; it was the joining of two industry giants and received with the same excitement typically reserved for royal weddings.

On paper, it’s easy to conclude that Boisset is a knowledgeable and formidable wine industry businessman. And he is—the proof is in Boisset Collection’s success. In person, though, he blows boardroom stereotypes out of the water.

“I want to create,” he says. “I don’t want to be the middleman. I want to innovate the discussion beyond wine. We inspire because we have fun. I wouldn’t want to be a leader, an inspiration, just because I own a big, successful business.”

For all of his brand-building and dynastic power, Boisset is a dreamer, a creator, a Surrealist. He’s a lover of nature, and a connoisseur of luxury—a business school graduate who wishes he had gone to art school. He loves the energy and openness of the United States, but also the allure and romance of France. To JCB, wine is not just wine; it’s a sensual, emotional elixir, a gift from Mother Nature. Success to him means allowing people to dream, to escape, to discover a new part of themselves. Wine is his primary vessel of achieving this goal.

Like Surrealism, Boisset’s own journey of self-discovery is an embodiment of juxtapositions. He spent his childhood in the renowned Vougeot vineyards, where, he recalls, “nature was my best friend.” In the afternoons he hunted for mushrooms, and family dinners were long and winding. “It was a lifestyle of true conversation. We were very anchored, and very centered,” he says.

As an adult, Boisset’s focus shifted to building his family’s legacy in the luxury, fine wine industry. By the early 1990s, Boisset Collection was born. JCB’s eyes were not only set on acquisition, though. The company is also a space for him to explore his



“There are two sides of me, one is of the countryside, the other consists of the finer things, the sophisticated . . . I don’t own all of this just for myself,” he says, giving a light wave around the room. “I own it for people to discover. To discover the world. After all,” Boisset adds, “luxury and romance can be found just as much by sitting outside with a fresh garden tomato, some cheese, and a beautiful wine.”

creative side. One example is a partnership with Baccarat, through which he has designed an upcoming line of wine and beer glasses. There’s also a recently released trio of wine-based vodkas, a classic version and two infused—one with truffle, the other with Beluga caviar. The fresh-off-the-presses book, *Passion for Wine*, is not his first, nor, undoubtedly, his last.

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To truly experience the world through his lens, a trip to JCB Village is a must. The Yountville compound is all things Boisset: the pleasure of beautiful wines and artisanal foods housed in, what looks like from the outside, a collection of quaint, white buildings. Step inside, though, and one is transported into a baroque world swathed in rich hues of red and black, where chandeliers drip from the sky and crystal-encrusted handcuffs drape unceremoniously around a vase of roses. And that’s just the main tasting room.

On the other hand, Privé, another tasting space in the Village, is an all white, romantic affair. Red roses hang from the ceiling and chairs flocked with ostrich, goose, and rooster feathers capture JCB’s love affair with escaping, flying away on a journey of self-discovery. Splashes of red decor symbolize “fire, energy, waking up.” In the Last Supper Room, a long plexiglass table is filled with crumpled fistfuls of gold-leaf. Surrounding it are chairs printed with faces of people JCB would invite to his last meal: Dali, Mother Teresa, Dr. Martin Luther King, and Lady Gaga.

Not unlike the Mad Hatter, Boisset has carved out a world of boundaryless exploration and creativity in a valley not known for flair. He recognizes that some people might label him as not being serious. To do so would be their own folly, but still, he’s not bothered by it.

“I truly believe that I’ve been given a mission, to bring Mother Nature together with a sense of art de vivre, the lifestyle of wine,” he says. One example of this put into practice is Boisset’s commitment to biodynamic and sustainable farming and winemaking. All of the California and Burgundy family estate wineries practice organic and biodynamic farming.

Interestingly, the root of this passion comes from the least avant-garde of all places: his grandmother. An energy sourcer, she instilled in Boisset a respect for the earth’s natural rhythms. “Drinking is a gift from Mother Nature, we need to be respectful . . . she guides us,” he says.

As members of the French Resistance, his grandparents were acutely appreciative of American troops, and also passed this love on to Boisset. For JCB it started there, but with time and visits to the States, it grew to be more personal. “In America, you’re welcomed to be yourself,” he explains. “It’s dynamic, open-minded, energizing, entrepreneurial, non-judgemental.”

That lack of judgement frees Boisset to live in and be inspired by the moment. For many this would be purely aspirational, but he seems to have mastered the art of it. Enjoying sips of his sparkling gamay, French Kiss, he’s struck by an idea: would his new caviar vodka mix well with the raspberry-red bubbles? “Let’s try it. I’ll use mine in case it doesn’t work.”

A moment of pouring, swirling, and sipping and the verdict is in: it works! Has a new aperitif just been born? Perhaps, he smiles, a single eyebrow raised. ♦