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WINEMAKER JEAN-CHARLES BOISSET ON HIS PASSION FOR PINOT NOIR

Text by Simone Louis

On a visit to India to impart his expertise, he engages in a tête-à-tête with us about heritage, terroir and all things Pinot



"What flows in my veins is not blood, it's wine!" The debonair gentleman sitting in front of me has a way with words that is almost as slick as his effervescent personality. Born to the founders of the largest wine empire in Burgundy, France, he is now proprietor of the Boisset Collection and president of Boisset Family Estates. After moving to California in the early '90s and purchasing his first winery — Lyeth Estates — he co-founded Domaine de la Vougeraie with his sister. Now, excitingly, the wine scion has partnered with Fratelli Vineyards to bring some of his brand JCB's best labels to India. Witty and knowledgeable, chatting with Jean-Charles Boisset is a treat.

Rich Roots

"I was very fortunate to be born in Vougeot, a tiny village of about 176 people, in a region which is known to produce the top wines in the pinot noir category. I was in a room below which lay the cellars of the winery that my parents had started in 1961. The vineyards were my playground. I grew up fostering a sense of respect for and understanding of the ecosystem, organic and biodynamic farming. I became acquainted with the United States early on and fell in love with the country, so when I joined the family business, I expanded it to many other wine regions with my sister. It's wonderful that our brand now has a foot in two continents."

Impassioned Acumen

"I know it's common in India to have a great bond with your grandparents; you live together and learn so much from them, which isn't a usual practice in the West. Luckily, mine lived nearby — there was just a river separating us — so I had a good connection with them; they were schoolteachers. My grandmother, in fact, is still alive. They were very close to nature and taught me about observation, an understanding of energy flow, and a respect for the earth. It has greatly influenced my relationship with winemaking and my work ethic."

First Crush

"My first encounter with wine was in my mother's stomach! Even when she was breastfeeding, she never stopped sipping on wine. I tasted everything from a young age and my parents always put a tiny bit of wine in my water — just like I've done with my daughters. When they were born, the first thing they tasted, even before their mother's milk, was a drop of wine that I gave to each of them. I did it in the delivery room! Since then, they've been very good at a number of winemaking skills. At the age of five, they could tell wines apart by taste, and that makes me very proud. We recently named one of our wines Number 7, because that's the age at which I had an epiphany and fell head over heels in love with pinot noir."



Creative Stimulus

"I get my energy and education from people. I believe you shouldn't be still in life — it's both a gift and a necessity to travel as much as possible. It's also extremely inspiring for me to experience and be immersed in the powerful French heritage, craft, culture and art of luxury on one hand, and the entrepreneurship, innovation and dynamism of the United States on the other."

Indispensable Attributes

"The most important quality a winemaker should have is passion. You have to really love the vineyards. You've got to know the plant like the back of your hand. The next is a great sensibility from a vibrational standpoint, meaning the understanding of texture. Not just the smell or the taste, but the 'mouth feel'. Thirdly, listening. Listening to yourself when you're making the wine and being audacious enough to do what your heart tells you to. Finally, discipline and humility. You can never make the perfect wine, there's no such thing, but you work hard to come as close to it as you possibly can."

Ecological Influence

"Global warming is happening — it's a fact, a product of evolution — and it is affecting vineyards, without a doubt. It has an impact not only on the constitution of the soil and the nutrients it provides, but also on the timing of when you pick your grapes and how you age your wine. Now more than ever I think it's important to embrace biodynamic and organic farming, and to practice sustainability."

India Impression

"What I see here is a young market with great potential. I've been to the wine country and it's a good sign that a lot of attention and care has been given to the vineyards. There are a lot of great products; what I've tasted has been very encouraging. What needs to happen now is obviously more people being introduced to and being made aware of wine — more venues should promote it. And, I'm saying this for the government, less tax. Wine is a food; it's not an enemy, it's not a drug. It's nutritious and it's healthy and that's something more people should know. I see a country thirsty for good wine, serving amazing food — I mean come on, India and quality food just go together — so I just cannot fathom that a place so cultured in gastronomy isn't cultured in wine."

