

Valley *of the* Moon

July/August 2018

Sonoma Valley

MYSTICAL WINEMAKER

JEAN CHARLES BOISSET



CAVIAR
FARMING

KEVIN JORGESON
AFTER DAWN

NEW SCHOOL
CHIEF



JCB *AND THE* MAGIC *OF* MYSTICAL WINEMAKING

DYNAMIZATION, ENERGY GRIDS AND
THE MYSTERY OF GEOMANCY.

We are seated in something vaguely reminiscent of the Peacock Throne, that fabled seat of the Mughal emperors, although we are nowhere near Delhi and there are no diamonds or gold leaf in the lush wall covering that surrounds us.

We are, in fact, in Healdsburg, in the JCB tasting salon, seated in a peacock-green, crushed velvet booth, two for-real stuffed peacocks overlooking our table, peacock-feather tapestry behind us, while Jean-Charles Boisset dangles a pendulum in an effort to dynamize my glass of sparkling wine.

He is wearing honeybee cufflinks, red socks and Louboutin shoes he has designed himself.

Outside, directly in front of the tasting salon, his black Maserati is neatly wedged into the only parking space left on the entire Healdsburg Plaza. That comes as no surprise to the rest of us who have fruitlessly circled two, three, four blocks for the past half-hour. Because Jean-Charles Boisset—JCB in almost universal shorthand—occupies a unique dimension in the world of wine, a dimension in which parking spaces can appear as if by magic.

STORY
DAVID BOLLING
PHOTOS
STEVEN KRAUSE



There have always been flamboyant winemakers—wine has celebrity allure like no other consumable product (how many actors, athletes or rock stars grow artichokes?). And there are numerous winery-owner entrepreneurs who have aggregated vineyards and labels into veritable billion-dollar empires (locally, Jess Jackson comes to mind).

But it's hard to think of anyone else who has so seamlessly blended the qualities of celebrity winemaker, flamboyant media personality, brilliant business entrepreneur and industry-disrupting innovator into such a compelling presence while—to many people's surprise—remaining a genuinely likable, accessible and relatively transparent human being.

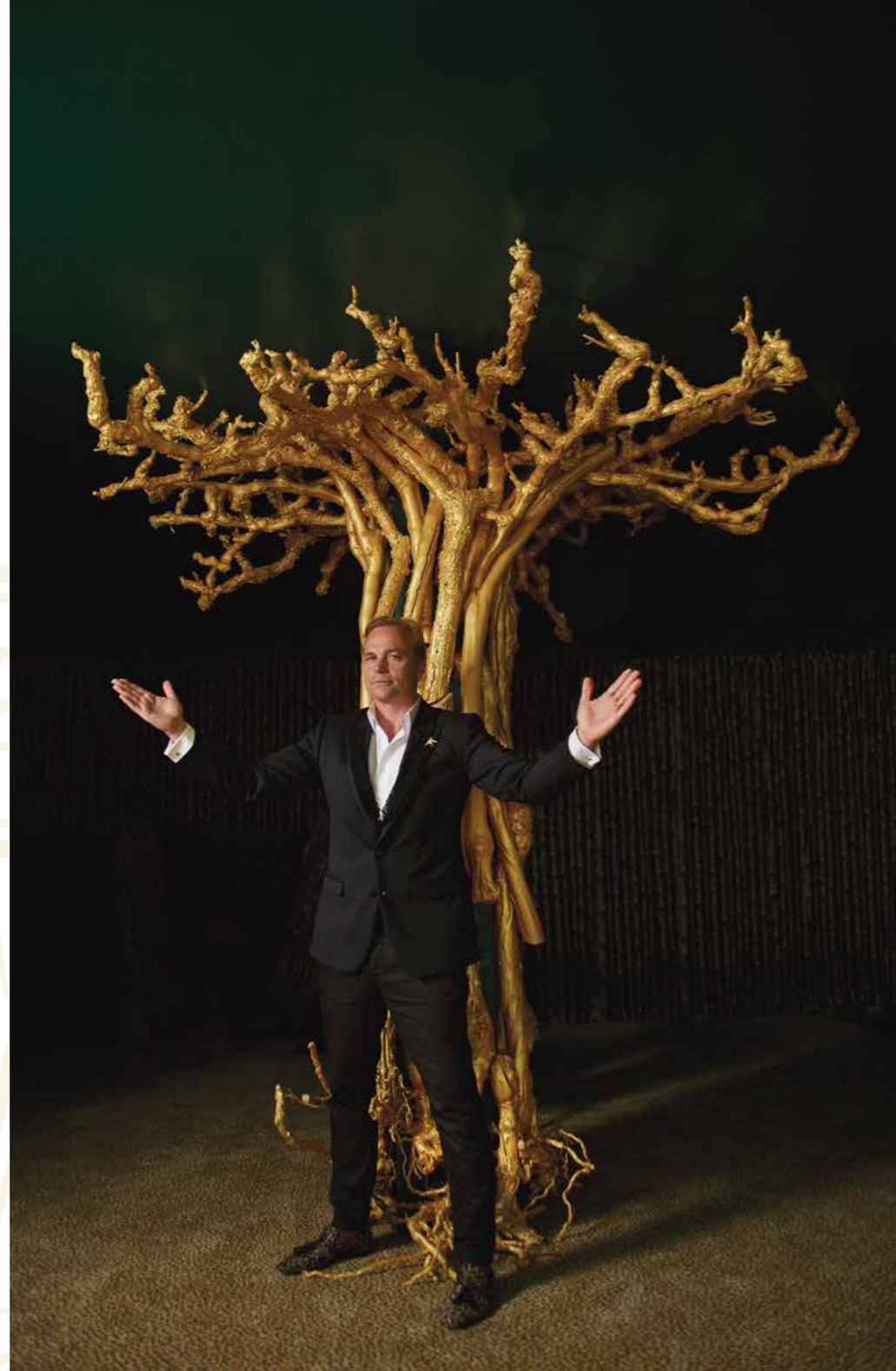
These thoughts will emerge in a conversation we are having in that velvet peacock enclosure, but right now the subject is energy, and Jean-Charles is in the process of demonstrating that by simple manipulation of the energy field in my glass of DeLoach Vineyards' new Le Royale sparkling wine, he can enhance its flavor. It all sounds like mystical magic, requiring a suspension of disbelief. I'm waiting to be convinced.

Jean-Charles, who owns DeLoach, Raymond and Sonoma's Buena Vista Winery, swings the pendulum to send more energy into my glass. He is confident it will make a difference in the taste.

"How do you dynamize wine? You bring energy to it," he says. "You help the wine become softer, become the intention of what you want to create. So I'm going to bring a certain level of energy to this wine ... You could say that it's sacrilege, that it's bullshit. We'll see, right?"

Sacrilege or bullshit—or maybe the ubiquitous placebo effect—for whatever reason, my sparkling wine tasted even better than before dynamization. Jean-Charles doesn't disagree. "Your wine smells like a wine. My wine has CO2 on the nose. Smell it. See how powerful? That's mind-boggling. I didn't know the effect was going to be so strong."

Of course, none of this is scientific, and the scientific method requires empirical evidence, not the subjective impressions of my relatively untrained palate. But the principle behind the pendulum practice is the same that wa-



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ter dowzers use when they successfully search for the best place to drill a well. And this is what one of the world's most eminent scientists—Albert Einstein—had to say about dowsing. “I know very well that many scientists consider dowsing as a type of superstition. According to my conviction this is, however, unjustified. The dowsing rod is a simple instrument which shows the reaction of the human nervous system to certain factors which are unknown to us at this time.”

The JCB pendulum, responding to certain factors which are unknown, is in play because Jean-Charles and I have been trying for at least two years to have a conversation about the subtle, invisible, perhaps primordial and—dare we say it?—mystical elements of making wine. It is not a conversation you would normally expect to have with a guy with gold cufflinks, red-soled shoes, a Maserati and a portfolio of (at last count) 26 wineries.

But JCB, it turns out, is no New Age dilettante practicing asanas between the

vines. His family heritage is anchored in Burgundy vineyards with centuries of age and a tradition of both organic and biodynamic farming. And he credits his grandmother with that tradition.

“I was very fortunate, at a young age, to witness my grandmother being phe-



nomenally aware of a greater world around us. One, the world that we live in, because she was taking my hand and walking me through bees, beehives, compost piles, gardening, rose pruning and all the activities in the garden, really enlightening me as to why things are happening around us.

“But she was also extremely deep into an understanding of the world at large, meaning she was already very much into geobiology or, more importantly, geomancy. Geomancy is the understanding of what is really happening beyond us, what are the energy forces that are leading to where we are, from a site, from a place, from a town, from an area, and how we feel.”

In simpler terms, geomancy involves the study and understanding of the earth's energies, a practice that, no matter how esoteric, mysterious or simply full of voodoo silliness, has guided entire civilizations in the placement of buildings and cities and doorways and beds and, oh yes, vineyards, for millennia.

What science does know from empirical evidence is that the earth has a powerful magnetic field, emanating from its poles and extending out into space with enough force to deflect the sun's solar winds that would otherwise blast us with much stronger doses of dangerous ultraviolet radiation.

“YOU DISCOVER THAT NATURE IS HERE TO GUIDE YOU, TO TEACH YOU, TO EDUCATE YOU, AND NATURE IS THE EXAMPLE OF THE FORMATION OF THE WORLD.”

So the earth has energy we can't see. Once you accept that premise, then all kinds of things become hypothetically possible. And through time, people have carried that hypothesis to far and complex lengths that lead to energy grids and vortexes. Aficionados of these systems will tell you that iconic human constructions—Stonehenge, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, the Pyramids of Giza, the Pantheon in Rome—are all said to be placed within deliberate, interconnecting grids, on or near a vortex of power. And an even older tradition, a system of Vedic architecture still in use today, teaches the correct orientation of buildings for maximum human health and awareness.

Of course, once you enter the realm of the invisible some believers run the energy premise off a metaphysical cliff and into the realm of alien beings and galactic conspiracies. So you have to be careful how far you carry this.

But for Jean-Charles, it all comes down to nature. “Born and raised in Burgundy, in the vineyards, my best friend was Mother Nature. I was in the ground all the time outside. I think, as a child, I lived more outside than inside. Even though Burgundy has harsh weather, like New York or Boston, by being outside you discover the world that is Mother Nature, and the colors, the sequence, the growth, the decline, recycling, conversions to everything else. From insects to animals to the river that separates my parents' property from my grandparents' property, and the whole essence of the world around us.”

In this environment, he says, “You discovered that nature is here to guide you, to teach you, to educate you, and nature is the example of the formation of the world, so she knows it all. So let's be very respectful of Mother Nature and

let's really work with her and, more importantly, evolve with her.”

Steeped in nature, the young Boisset early on learned “the concept of organic farming, because my grandmother was forcefully against synthetic products. It was in the '70s and synthetic products were booming. Genetically modified ingredients were starting. It was really (an expression of) human creation, humans (thinking they) are better than nature.”

So, from his grandmother, Jean-Charles learned, “We had to go and get the horse manure, cow manure, and all those combinations in order to put that on the roses. I said, ‘Why? What the hell are we doing here?’ And my grandmother would explain that the horses and the cows have been here before us, what they generate from Mother Nature, what they eat, is greater than anything else. High levels of potassium, high levels of magnesium, high levels of energy, this is what your soil needs, and the nutrients naturally need to be what they are. At that stage I started to really understand the idea that bees, insects, insectaries, birds, cow manure or horse manure are great for the soil, and the soil needed natural ingredients.”

Scion of a winemaking family in a region defined by wine, Jean-Charles says, “I realized very early on that, when you're granted land, you have a huge responsibility for that land. The immensity of that responsibility to others that breathe the oxygen of that land taught me I had to cultivate it, I had to understand the cycle, the rhythm, of nature. And that led, naturally, to biodynamic farming.”

Mention that term, championed by Austrian philosopher, teacher and “spiritual scientist” Rudolph Steiner, and what usually pops into people's minds is cow horns, which, in Steiner

JEAN-CHARLES BOISSET dangles a pendulum over a custom-made pendulum card to assess levels of energy present. Above, a cow's horn (occupied by a wasp nest) used in biodynamic farming.

Esoteric GLOSSARY

BIODYNAMIC
Fathered by Rudolph Steiner. Teaches that soil health, plant health, earth energy and livestock care are interrelated parts of a whole system.

GEOMANCY
A complex and esoteric method of divining information by interpreting the configuration of soil, rocks or sand.

TELLURIC CURRENT
Actual, low-frequency electrical currents that flow at or near the earth's surface in a complex pattern. This is real stuff, not airy-fairy joo-joo.

DYNAMIZATION
In computer science, a process of converting a static data structure into a dynamic one. Is said to work with wine. Also a vitamin supplement and a karaoke sound track.

DOWSER
A form of divination using wooden or metal rods to locate underground water, metals, gems, gravesites, car keys, etc.

DEMETER
Greek goddess of grain, harvest, growth, nourishment. Also biodynamic certification body.

QUARTZ CRYSTALS
A cottage industry in Sedona, Arizona.

AGENT 69
Said to be a vinological secret agent, never seen in the same room at the same time as Jean-Charles Boisset.



people and I get a lot of energy from people.”

Which naturally leads Jean-Charles to the question of his personal style. “I want to comment on the red socks and flamboyancy and theater. I believe life is a theater. I don’t believe you can succeed without having fun. We’re here for a short period of time. It’s a theatrical expression. We’re on the stage, whatever stage you choose to play on, but we’re all actors in this world. I’m a Bon Vivant, I enjoy life and I genuinely love others. I’m true to who I am. I’ve never been interested in trying to be someone else. It’s fun to live life to the fullest and bring people into a dream.”

Jean-Charles is well aware that who he is and how he plays will not resonate with everyone. “You could say, ‘I don’t like his look, I don’t like his red socks, I don’t like his scarf.’ OK, fine. But you can never challenge me on this.” And he raises his hand with a glass of JCB Number 7, a 2014 pinot noir with 95 points and a gold medal from the American Fine Wine Competition.

And the conversation is over. ☾

He has a salon and epicurean boutique in Yountville, another in the San Francisco Ritz Carlton hotel and another in his native Burgundy.

He has also partnered with various international celebrities to make and promote wine, recently including singer John Legend who says of JCB, “I couldn’t have chosen a better partner in the wine business than the great Jean-Charles Boisset.”

And consider this: On the Boisset Collection website there are 209 pages of wine available—each page represent-

ing 10 wines—most of them gold medal winners or wines rated by major reviewers at between 90 and 98 points. And now he has launched a joint venture in India, producing the first premium wines on the subcontinent made with locally grown French clones. The label is “J’Noon,” which is Urdu for “Passion.”

Where is all this taking JCB?

“I’ve always been in search of knowing more, because I’m literally thirsty for knowledge. I want to learn, and I learn through people. That’s why I love to do parties and events, because I love

