

# Wine Spectator

## Ties That Bind

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He's French. She's an American of Italian descent. Some consider them an odd couple, and even they don't disagree. He's charismatic, energetic and self-promotional, prone to posh Christian Louboutin shoes. She's charming and confident, yet reserved, more at home in the country.

The strength of the bond between Jean-Charles Boisset, 46, and Gina Gallo, 48, transcends their differences. These heirs to two of the world's most prominent winemaking families have been married for seven years, creating a transnational family of their own, with twin 5-year-old daughters.

Boisset's family is anchored in Burgundy's Côte de Nuits, while Gallo's is tethered to Modesto, in California's Central Valley. Both are Sonomans at heart, having met and lived there for years. Today they reside in Napa Valley, living in Robert Mondavi's former residence atop Wappo Hill, which they bought in 2012. At 10,000 square feet, with a swimming pool in the living room, this is no ordinary home.

But that makes perfect sense, since this is no ordinary marriage. Gallo and Boisset are like wine royalty, and their spirited union marks the intersection of two powerful global empires, making their story as high profile as it gets. This doesn't mean their romance, which began a decade ago, has always been a fairy tale. Only a year into their relationship, Gallo revealed that she had breast cancer. Boisset rose to the challenge and supported her through her treatment and recovery. Their bond was sealed, and she has been in remission for eight years.

The name Gallo may be ubiquitous in the world of wine, yet Gina has never rested on her family's laurels. In an industry filled with inheritors, she has stood apart through her hard work and great success. Overseeing winemaking at the world's largest and most powerful winery would be a challenge under any circumstances, but she was chosen to succeed her late grandfather, Julio Gallo, a man of incomparable talents.

Gina was 26 when her grandfather died just as the winery he had built with his brother, Ernest, was moving into the upper echelon of quality. He was killed in a tragic jeep accident while he and Gina were touring a vineyard outside Modesto. She was riding in the backseat with her aunt, escaping with broken ribs.

A decade later, Gina became the winemaker and public face of the company, featured prominently in ads as an attractive symbol of the new Gallo. Sporty and relaxed in person, she never felt comfortable in that role.

Boisset's roots are in the vineyards and cellars of Burgundy. His parents started the family business in 1961, and his involvement began early, accompanying his grandfather to the vineyards, playing in barrel rooms and, as a teenager, working summers in the cellars. He has elevated his family wine profile in the Côte d'Or much as Gallo has hers in Sonoma. The crown jewel of the Boisset portfolio is Domaine de la Vougeraie, showcasing the best from the Côte de Nuits and Côte de Beaune.

Boisset oversees multiple holdings in Sonoma, including DeLoach and Buena Vista, which have both undergone sweeping changes and upgrades. Yet increasingly Boisset and Gallo have deepened their ties to Napa, where their daughters attend school. Boisset bought Napa pioneer Raymond Vineyards, while E.&J. Gallo owns Louis M. Martini and William Hill.

Both vintners have made important gains in quality across their portfolios. The sleek and elegant Pinots and Chardonnays from DeLoach, for instance, are vineyard-selected as in Burgundy. At Raymond, Cabernet is the star, with a handful of gutsy wines that highlight different areas of the valley. Under Boisset's JCB brand, the 2013 Surrealist (93 points) is a \$350 elixir decorated with a faux gold brooch and sealed with a Baccarat stopper.

Gallo offers her own 93-point Cabernet—the 2012 Northern Sonoma (\$95). Like the couple's personalities, these two wines couldn't be more different. Whereas the silky-textured Surrealist drips with creamy, vanilla-scented oak and rich dark fruit, the Northern Sonoma is tradition-bound, firm in structure with a dense core of earth- and anise-laced currant. In wine as in life, Gallo and Boisset prove that opposites attract.

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