



Wine Tool Noir

Rusty plows pack more interest than you'd imagine at Buena Vista

BY JAMES KNIGHT



Never get in a fight with an 18th-century French winemaker. That's one takeaway from a visit to the Wine Tools Museum at Buena Vista Winery, which opened for public tours last week.

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Inspired by a collection of antique winery and vineyard implements that a gentleman in Burgundy had amassed over the years, the Boisset family purchased the lot and divided it between the modernistic Imaginarium in Nuits-Saint-Georges and the historic Champagne Cellars at Buena Vista.

Leave it to wine impresario Jean-Charles Boisset to turn a heap of rusty old plows, clippers and adzes into a dynamic attraction. Located on the third floor of the expensively retrofitted 1864 stone building, illuminated by spindly, gothic chandeliers, the museum is no static display. A video kicks off the show with an unabashed nod to the visitor center film genre, booming voiceover courtesy of Sonoma actor George Webber as winery founder "Count" Agoston Haraszthy.

Weaving French wine history with Buena Vista's, the Count laments his vineyard's malady was erroneously linked to his viticultural techniques, when it was actually California's first brush with the vine-killing louse, phylloxera. Cue dramatic sound effects and spotlight on two outsized syringes that desperate French farmers once used to inject fumigants into their vineyards.

But it doesn't get medieval until the pomace cutters. These were used to break up the "cake" that forms when grapes are pressed, so that a second pressing yielded a little more juice. They look positively wicked, and the animated display uses them for maximum effect, as two sets of weapon-like cutters are set in motion to a dark synth soundtrack.

The wines had better keep up with the high style and entertainment. Thanks to winemaker Brian Maloney and consultant David Ramey, they do.

Nothing remains of the Count's original vineyard, but Buena Vista sources solid, boysenberry-scented Zinfandel from a neighbor's 30-year-old vines. Other notable reds include a juicy Calistoga Valdiguie (\$50), with arbor grape and berry Newton aromas (2012 tasted; 2013 currently available), and the 2012 Aristocrat (\$85), pricey for a blend of Valdiguie, Charbono and Petite Sirah, but enjoyably plush with boysenberry fruit and velour-textured tannins.

Buena Vista Winery, 18000 Old Winery Road, Sonoma. Daily, 10am–5pm. Tours at 11am, 1pm and 3pm. With tasting, \$25; museum only, \$10. 800.926.1266.