



Jean-Claude Boisset (left) with winemaker Brian Maloney and author Karen MacNeil at Buena Vista's Historic Wine Tool Museum.

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PHOTO: LANA BORTOLOTT

Heat-Seeking Missive

WE DITCH ICY MANHATTAN FOR THE WARMTH OF NAPA VALLEY

by Lana Bortolot

PHOTO: ANDY BERRY



Chef Sean O'Toole
of Napa's Torc.

We escaped the city's icy grip last month and headed to Napa Valley for some much needed thawing. In addition to the weather (70 degrees compared to the teens in Manhattan), we were warmed by the hospitality of winemakers and restaurateurs—always at the ready with a glass, a plate and a sympathetic look when we told them where we lived.

Jean-Charles Boisset and his red socks gave us a warm welcome at **Buena Vista Winery**, at the preview of the newly opened Historic Wine Tool Museum. *Wine Bible* author **Karen MacNeil** and winemaker **Brian Maloney** led a tasting under crystal chandeliers and far away from the more dangerous-looking tools hanging on the walls. The space was artfully arranged with items purchased from a lifetime collector who sourced the curiosities across Europe. Now, in case you're thinking "ho-hum, corkscrews," JCB created a very French *son et lumière* (sound and light) tour around the gallery highlighting the history of winemaking and some of those fierce-looking picks, hoes and cleavers.

At **Hourglass** and **Blueline** wineries, we had a considerably more subdued, but no less breathtaking tour of the two wineries owned by **Jeff Smith**, in St. Helena and Calistoga respectively. Our first stop was the newly designed **Blueline**, a winery carved out of volcanic bedrock between two creeks. We passed the stunning tasting room for a barrel tasting of equally stunning wines made from 100% Bordeaux varieties. Jeff told us he had a mind to make a Zinfandel from a small plot leftover from his father's original 1976 purchase. As a tribute, Jeff said he'd make it the way his dad liked it: "old-school: white peppery and powerful."

We ended our day at downtown Napa's **Torc**, a smart-looking restaurant that we wished we had in New York—if not for the inventive, unpretentious food, for the cool logo featuring a boar. We wondered about that, and learned from **Chef Sean O'Toole** (who once worked in New York), that "torc"—an ancient Gaelic word for boar—also symbolizes feasting with friends. As the torc also appears on the O'Toole family coat of arms, it seemed destined The seasonal menu is driven by a mosaic of ingredients: Dungeness crab with yuzu kosho, "Fairytale Pumpkin Soup" with hedgehog mushrooms, and steelhead trout with fresh garbanzo beans. We left convinced that Napa's gain was NYC's loss. ■■