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November 26, 2014



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Wine Camp

Let them drink Chardonnay: the JCB revolution comes to DeLoach

BY JAMES KNIGHT



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When you see cow horns and Baccarat chandeliers in the same place, you know what's happened to this winery. See those mannequin party animals, hear the thump of that dance track? JCB is in the house.

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Last time we dropped in at DeLoach Vineyards, in 2007, not much had changed since Boisset Family Estates purchased the respected producer of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir and Zinfandel. While flamboyant new owner Jean-Charles Boisset swept across wine country, transforming staid Raymond Vineyards into a surreal, biodynamic dog park and James Bond fantasy pad—or something like that—and upgrading Buena Vista Winery's historic bona fides, DeLoach got bluebird boxes and a set of oak tanks.

This year, we were invited to sample a debut of the winery's remodel and new visitor "experiences," a something-for-everyone slate that starts with traditional walk-up tasting at the bar. In the "Appellation Room," vineyard-designate winetasting (\$30) features lots of maps and stemware; in a room stylized with Louis-the-something-or-other flair, the "M.F.S. Blending Experience" (\$100) includes a bottle of your custom blend to take home after an educational session that's not too serious—beakers and pipettes are matched with silly costuming, floppy berets and team competition. Fun for groups.

In a remodeled guest house with the feel of a high-end conference center, the seminar is "Taste of Terror," (\$50–\$100) comparative flights of wine from Boisset properties in both Russian River Valley and Burgundy. There's wine and cheese pairing, pizza and wine pairing, "Les Libertines Cellar Tasting."

Boisset took over a portion of winemaker Brian Maloney's barrel room for "JCB Winery," a funky hangout where you'd be right to expect lots of Baccarat crystal, a James Bond flick on widescreen video and mannequins dressed in leather club garb. Add to that a wall of atomizers for aroma education and a selection of multicolored wigs for getting wacky.

Plenty of wineries are now offering gourmet pairings and other enticements to enthrall visitors with their brand. Boisset's efforts may be among the more unusual, but do they also reflect an unusually personal concern that people have fun with wine? After liberally wining and dining members of the press at an event that wrapped up with a wig-swapping dance party in the JCB Winery, any good host might single out a particularly phlegmatic attendee to ask, "Did you have a good time?"

DeLoach Vineyards, 1791 Olivet Road, Santa Rosa. Open daily, 10am–5pm. Tasting fee, \$15. 707.755.3309.

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