

■ THE SOMMELIER JOURNAL

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THE SOMM JOURNAL

THE *french* CONNECTION

At the Dominus Estate in Yountville, French proprietor Christian Moueix stands in the open-air area overlooking the historic Napanook Vineyard.

CELEBRATING 30 VINTAGES AT
DOMINUS ESTATE WITH
christian moueix

PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN



DeLoach:

Defining the Russian River Valley Style



The Theater of Nature on DeLoach Vineyards estate welcomed The Somm Journal troupe to three days immersed in harvest and history.



Virginia Philip, MS, Wine Director at The Breakers in Palm Beach, FL, participating in bâtonnage.

EXPLORING BOISSET COLLECTION, A LEADING PRODUCER IN TWO COUNTRIES

by Allyson Gorsuch / photos by John Curley

Positioned in the center of the charming Russian River Valley, DeLoach Vineyards produces Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Zinfandel in a manner that defines the area. "We want to produce a style of Pinot that speaks to this region," remarks Director of Winemaking Brian Maloney. DeLoach is part of the Boisset Collection, and in September *The Somm Journal* and Boisset hosted eight distinguished sommeliers for a welcome dinner at iconic Buena Vista Winery, owned by Boisset as well, followed by two days immersed in the energy and activity of harvest time at DeLoach Vineyards.

Stepping into History: Buena Vista Winery

Introduce the subject of the history of wine in California and a couple of significant names immediately come to mind: Agoston Haraszthy is certainly one of them. The Hungarian nobleman set out to America, landing first and planting vineyards in Wisconsin, then made his way to Southern California exploring vineyard sites before landing in Sonoma County to plant some of the most iconic vineyards in California wine history.

The original stone building on the Buena Vista Winery estate, built in 1862, immediately elicits a feeling of nostalgia. "I've been obsessed with this property since age eleven," smiles Jean-Charles Boisset. "We came to Sonoma with my grandparents when I was a child, and I always wanted to be a part of this special place. Now, we want history in America to resonate more," a feat encouraged by the tour host immersed in the character of Count Haraszthy, costume included, and the 19th-century décor.

During our extravagant dinner in the dimly lit cellar, the French culture and the American story began to meld together seamlessly—what would become the underlying motif of our visit. The efficacious aspirations of Jean-Charles Boisset seemingly know no limits, his passion and energetic nature inspiring projects and endeavors never before undertaken. As an almost overt demon-



Eric Pooler, Director of Winegrowing; Matt Dulle, Sommelier at Single Thread Farms, Healdsburg, CA; Christopher Coker, Sommelier at Aggio Restaurant, Baltimore, MD; Allyson Gorsuch, Deputy Editor of *The Somm Journal*; Lisa Brown, Brand Manager, Boisset Collection; Kelly Evans, General Manager of Lazy Bear, San Francisco, CA; Michael Trager, Purchasing Manager at University Club of New York, NY; Chuck Herrold, Wine Director at Ponsaty's, Rancho Santa Fe, CA; Vernard Floranda, Sommelier at BarMasa, Aria Resort & Casino, Las Vegas, NV; Joanne Maffei on her own vineyard; Virginia Philip, MS, Wine Director at The Breakers, Palm Beach, FL; Tamara Stanfill, Director of Communications, Boisset Collection; Mike Zygmonski, Sommelier at SoDel Concepts, coastal DE.

The wine line-up, with comments from the proud Boisset team:

Domaine de la Vougeraie 2013 Le Clos Blanc de Vougeot Tart orchard fruit with a squeeze of lemon perfectly rounded by toasty oak, a lasting minerality on the finish.

"When we acquired Clos de Vougeot Blanc, it was a dream," beams Jean-Charles Boisset.

Buena Vista 2012 Carneros Pinot Noir Red fruit-driven, with characteristic Carneros barnyard undertones.

"Working with them is as seamless as anyone can ask for as a buyer of fruit," compliments Eric Pooler, Vineyard Manager, of the growers of Sangiacomo Vineyards in Carneros.

DeLoach 2013 Forgotten Vines Zinfandel Blue and purple fruits, brambly but not over-ripe; a chocolate-covered raspberry finish.

Referring to a handful of vineyards just north of the DeLoach property, Brian Maloney, Director of Winemaking, states, "That Grand Cru area of Zinfandel really needs to be recognized."

Buena Vista 2013 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon Black currant with herbs, anise and bittersweet chocolate; allspice but not oak with seamless tannins.

"We want Buena Vista to be equally known for both its Sonoma and its Napa Cab. It's important to us; it's our history," lends Boisset.

Buena Vista Angelica A special treat—"America's Fortified Wine"—made from Mission grapes from one of the state's oldest producing vineyards, near Fairplay. Stewed plums, dates and figs with a warming alcohol finish.

"The Mission tannins really need the lift from the higher proof spirits," explains Maloney.

stration of this, we begin our evening with the first true Champagne to be produced under a Californian label, released just two months ago. The Buena Vista La Victoire Brut, a 5,000-case release made from Premier Cru fruit from the Montagne de Reims and Grand Cru fruit from Chouilly and Mesnil-sur-Oger, is a pioneer in its category—tart yellow pear with a slight biscuity roundness and a delicate mousse.

Boisset Collection's Director of Cuisine and Hospitality, Michel Cornu—born and raised in Paris before beginning an illustrious career in California that includes Far Niente Winery, Auberge du Soleil and a private catering company prior to his current position—prepared a French-inspired, California-influenced menu, extending the emerging theme. We were treated to some of the hallmarks of the Boisset Collection alongside a sumptuous sunchoke bisque, Iberico presa porcelet with pork shoulder confit, a baby green salad with Manchego toast and a plum and vanilla Vacherin.

Visiting the Vineyards: Study of Viticulture

The Russian River Valley, and Sonoma County in general, is special because the wine community is comprised of many family wine growers; prideful in their vineyards but happy to sell the meticulous fruit. With the expanse of an operation like the program at DeLoach, it takes a dedicated viticulturalist to oversee the many growers and vineyard practices to ensure the highest quality fruit for the highest quality wines. Eric Pooler, Director of Winegrowing exposed us to the DeLoach estate vineyards as well as three special and different vineyards in the Russian River Valley: the Ritchie Vineyard, the Maffei Vineyard and the Ferguson Vineyard.

Upon purchasing the DeLoach property in 2003, Boisset immediately pulled up the 20-acre estate vineyard and observed a fallow period in order to replenish the soil. Relying on established contracts with nearby growers in the interim, Boisset re-planted the vineyard in accordance with organic and Biodynamic principals, consistent with Boisset's vineyard holdings in Burgundy.

After conducting a detailed soil analysis, a planting density of 1915 vines per acre, low vigor rootstocks and numerous selections of pinot noir and chardonnay were selected. Initially a network of subsurface drains was installed to encourage optimal moisture in the Huichica Loam soils. To keep vine roots above the dense, water-holding clay layer that spans across the vineyard, the pre-plant soil preparation featured wing-tine ripper shanks penetrating to a maximum depth of two feet.

A Double-Guyot cane pruning style was chosen to ensure even shoot growth. Acknowledging that he is in the minority in his thought process, Pooler says, "While dry-farming can work well in certain areas, not for this site. Here, irrigation equates to uniformity. Uniformity and quality are synonymous. To achieve uniformity I need to be able to control growth. Water is the throttle



The mannequins around the table in the tool museum enhance the over-the-top educational experience of learning about the evolution of tools used in winemaking.

The Boisset Collection

AN IMPRESSIVE, EXPANSIVE PORTFOLIO

I was aware before my visit that Boisset was the leading producer of wine in Burgundy; I was not aware, however, just how many properties the family owns in Burgundy, throughout other regions in France, within California and beyond. The Boisset Collection has grown to include over 25 wineries.

Notable French wineries include: Domaine de la Vougeraie, Jean-Claude Boisset—the négociant winery his father started in 1961 in Nuits-St.-Georges—Bouchard Aîné & Fils, Château Pierreux, Mommessin, J. Moreau & Fils, Ropiteau Frères, Bonpas, Fortant, Louis Bernard, Louis Bouillot, Charles de Fère and Grandin.

In addition, Boisset's Californian endeavors include: Buena Vista Winery, DeLoach Vineyards, Raymond Vineyards, JCB by Jean Charles Boisset, Lyeth Estate, Lockwood Vineyard and Wattle Creek.

The Collection also includes Neige in Canada, which produces sparkling cider and apple ice wine.

Boisset himself is passionate about wine education and has two wine tool museums—one at Buena Vista and one in Nuits-St.-Georges—as well as The Tour of the 5 Senses at Bouchard in Beaune which has inspired similar experiences in his properties in California. An artisanal marketplace in Yountville by the name of Atelier by JCB and extravagant bubble lounges at many of the wineries complete the impressive sensory portfolio.

and the brakes. I want roots to stay within the top two feet of soil, not into the clay. Our rootstocks are riparian in nature. They want to grow relatively shallowly. My strategy to foster robust horizontal root networks includes spring root-pruning and short, frequent irrigations over the course of the grower season."

Pooler oversees contracts with numerous external growers of varying vineyard sizes as well. "If you looked at the average size our contracted vineyard it would be very small compared to other wineries of our scale. While logistics get trickier, our tool chest gets deeper. No vineyard is too small," smiles Pooler. Grape sprucing for DeLoach depends upon grower relationships and the constant attention to detail that Pooler delivers. The model, not dissimilar to the negotiant profile of Burgundy, results in pristine fruit that can then produce impeccable wines. The growers' various vineyard sites allow the Russian River Valley style to shine, while wines from the DeLoach vineyards display the defined terroir of an estate in the center of the AVA.

Winemaking: Marrying Logistics, Science and the Elusive but Ever-Important Art

We visited the DeLoach property during the height of harvest, but Maloney and the winemaking team were gracious enough to spend a great deal of time with us explaining their philosophy. First, they are quick to compliment the viticulture team for the quality of grapes they get to vinify. Maloney then states his bottom-line: "A big part of winemaking is getting the wine to its lowest energy state." I take this to mean that his job is to monitor and manage the unstable juice during fermentation, through aging, so that once the wine is bottled, he is confident in what the consumer will receive—a high-quality, delicious wine that embodies DeLoach and expresses the Russian River Valley.

While the facilities at DeLoach are capable of processing about 1,000 tons of fruit during harvest, the DeLoach label uses approximately 2,000 tons all together. Because of this, they utilize two custom crush facilities nearby, checking on them daily. The winemaking team oversees the production of more than a dozen wines, including the Estate wines, the Vineyard Designates, the O.F.S. blends, the Russian River Valley blends, Monterey County wines and California blends. We tasted Chardonnays



Brian Maloney, Director of Winemaking.



Jean Charles Boisset introduces the recently released Buena Vista La Victoire Brut Champagne.



Having fun on the back porch of the DeLoach guest house in between games of cornhole.



Eric Pooler, Director of Winegrowing.

and Pinot Noirs from Russian River Valley side by side, identifying exposure as the biggest stylistic factor.

"The solar expression trumps it all," shares Maloney. The most emblematic examples were the DeLoach 2013 Stubbs Vineyard Chardonnay, showing pineapple, a hint of butter and overt acidity, alongside the DeLoach 2014 Estate Chardonnay, exhibiting red apple and fresh buttered corn with a clean finish. For Pinot Noir; the DeLoach 2012 Green Valley revealed red fruit and soft tannins while the DeLoach 2013 Maboroshi Vineyard was spice driven and displayed a darker fruit profile.

In addition to teaching and tasting, the winemaking team invited us into the cellar for a day. From sorting incoming fruit to punching down fermenting Pinot Noir tanks to (partially) understanding key lab measurements to adding nutrients to fermenting Chardonnay barrels, we were immersed in winemaking, if even for just a day.

Breaking Down Biodynamics™

THE ABSTRACT IS ACTUALLY PRACTICAL

Agricultural ecosystems cannot continue to have resources depleted without weakening. Relying exclusively on synthesized fertilizers to replace these resources can have negative downstream consequences. Enlivening ecosystems naturally, can lead to healthier, higher quality crops. The philosophy of Biodynamics

takes the concept of sustainability one step further by not only considering bio-diversity on the farm, but broadening bio-diversity to insulate crops against the threats of pests and diseases and take into account how the agricultural ecosystems are affected by celestial forces. Bio-diversity makes sense to us: This bug likes benefits from that plant, this plant benefits from that bug, and they work together symbiotically. Natural fertilizers like compost provide more than just specific nutrients.

One aspect of the Biodynamics continually draws questions: cow horns. What's with the cow horns? A Biodynamic practice is to

fill cow horns with manure from a female cow, then bury them in a designated area on the farm over the course of the winter. Boisset Collection Garden and Landscape Supervisor Joe Papendick finally gave me the answer for which I have been looking for years. The horn provides a natural cavity for the manure to decompose in. As the manure, rich in microbes, interacts with the microbially-rich soil while buried, calcium and phosphorus, two important soil minerals, are integrated with the manure. In essence, the horn is not only a container, but also a source of nutrients which help to "potentize" the manure during decomposition. The end result of the process is nothing more than extremely powerful compost. Practical not mystical!

As for farming in congruence with the celestial influences, it makes sense to me. Farmers have been doing it for thousands of years. Take the moon for instance, just look at the oceans' tides. They happen, rising and receding, every day. Why is it so hard to believe in that same effect on living things? If a plant is pruned during a period where the moon is pulling away from the earth during its synodic cycle, doesn't it make sense that the sap would flow more readily if the plant was pruned as the moon's force was pushing back toward the earth? Ultimately, Biodynamics believes in the energy in this world. The ethos of Biodynamics lies in respecting the forces of nature. Jean-Charles Boisset spoke about his passion for Biodynamics throughout our time with him, and he wondered how to convey his passion to the broader public. By evaluating Biodynamics, practice by practice, the philosophy seems less esoteric and more pragmatic. ❧

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Joe Papendick, Boisset Collection Garden and Landscape Supervisor, explains the practicality of burying cow horns in the vineyards.

The dramatic statue sitting in the center of the DeLoach Vineyards symbolizes the circle of life and energy, the essence of Biodynamics.

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