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Winery: St. Helena's Frenchie a tasting room that partly goes to the dogs

By Jennifer Graue

For the Mercury News

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The number of people who take their dogs with them almost everywhere is growing -- a circumstance that includes **wine**-tasting forays. Naturally, dog lovers are loathe to leave their canine companions in the car while they sip and swirl, but that's not a problem at Frenchie **Winery**.

This **winery** within a **winery** is part of the **Raymond Vineyards** estate in St. Helena and the brainchild of its clearly fun-loving owner **Jean-Charles Boisset**, whose French bulldog, a gift to his wife, Gina Gallo, is the label's namesake.

Dog owners can leave their four-legged family members in a posh kennel in the estate's biodynamic garden, where the digs are decked out with dog beds made from **wine** barrels, plus artwork -- and even a chandelier.

At Frenchie, the **winery** within **Raymond Vineyards**, dogs relax in **wine** barrel beds while owners sip and savor the estate's bounty. (jennifer graue)

Inside the tasting room, their humans can sample Frenchie **wines**, a boutique label that makes up a small fraction of Raymond's total 150,000 case production, while they keep an eye on their pooches via a closed-circuit TV above the tasting room bar.

For an upgraded tasting experience of Raymond's premium **wines** (\$30), the Crystal Room marries the gleaming stainless steel tanks in the production area with mirrors, Baccarat chandeliers and a fur-covered trapeze (for real). There's also a **winemaker**-for-a-day program (\$100), where visitors make their own blend while decked out in shiny silver lab coats that look straight out of a sci-fi B movie.

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The details: Frenchie **Winery** is at 849 Zinfandel Lane in St. Helena and is part of the larger Raymond Estate. Tastings start at \$15 for the Frenchie label.

The sips: The 2012 Ben Franklin Red **Wine** (\$30) is a lip-smacking, fruit-forward merlot blend that's low in tannins. We also liked the 2013 Estate Collection chardonnay (\$38). Thanks to a short time on oak, it's crisp and refreshing with notes of lemon and lychee.

Two more stops: V. Sattui, William Harrison.

-- J. Graue, Correspondent

Audience provided by Nielsen/NetRatings

Highlights: winery, Winery, wine, Frenchie Winery, Raymond Vineyards, Jean-Charles Boisset, wines, winemaker, Frenchie Winery, Wine