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## JCB Collection New Releases

Perhaps best known for his flamboyant fashion sense and decadent cabaret/burlesque events, behind the scenes, Jean-Charles Boisset has become a tour-de-force to contend with in the wine world.



## The Storyteller

Owner of 35 wineries in California and France, Jean-Charles Boisset is now a significant player in the premium and luxury wines scenes. That's without even considering his marriage to Gina Gallo, one of the world's most powerful producers/winemakers. But what gave me cause, some years ago, to first give his collection of eponymously named wines—JCB—more than a cursory glance beyond the designer packaging is what's in the bottles. The wines are high quality, which is a commendable attribute, sure, although not surprising given Boisset's resources. But apart from quality is the ability of these wines to deliver imaginative, compelling stories with their singular styles.

### "Every JCB wine needs to have a raison d'etre."

The entire JCB collection of labels now includes over fifty different small-lot wines.

"Every JCB wine needs to have a raison d'etre," smiled Boisset. "Having four Pinots makes perfect sense because each and every one has a very different style. Yes, JCB is a complex lineup. But it represents my passions, my stories."

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# "I was challenged by my French friends and family to show how great California is and make wine from there."

"JCB has become an important part of my life," Boisset said as we tasted his new releases together last month. "I'd always promoted other people's wineries—wineries with others' histories and names. Then I started JCB, mainly in Burgundy with bubbles. One day, I was challenged by my French friends and family. They asked me, 'Well, if you love California so much, why don't you show us how great it is and make wine from there?' So, in 2006, I started making Sonoma Pinots and Chardonnays under my JCB label. That year, Gina and I also made a Burgundy and Sonoma blend for our wedding wine."

## [2019 N°17 Cabernet Franc](#)

**99** - Deep garnet-purple in color, the 2019 Cabernet Franc No 17 struts out of the glass with gregarious scents of black and red cherries, boysenberries, and wild blueberries with hints of iris, fallen leaves, and fragrant earth and a waft of jasmine tea. The medium to full-bodied palate is firm, very fine-grained, and refreshing, with a lively backbone and long, mineral finish.

## [2019 JCB Phi](#)

**98** - The 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon Phi is a blend of Cuvees No 1 and No 10 aged in the Phi, a barrel constructed in the perfect golden ratio proportions. Opaque purple-black in color, it erupts from the glass with molten licorice, Indian spices, and chocolate mint over a core of creme de cassis and blackberry preserves with a touch of cast-iron pan. The full-bodied palate is rich, firm, and incredibly harmonious, with fantastic tension and freshness, and so many layers, finishing long, long, long. Only 3 barrels of this very decadent wine were made.

## [2019 The Surrealist](#)

**98** - A blend of 75% Cabernet Sauvignon and 25% Petit Verdot, the 2019 Surrealist is very deep purple-black in color. It swans out with showy scents of blueberry compote, blackcurrant jelly, blackberry preserves, and candied violets, followed by suggestions of dried mint, pencil lead, cracked pepper, and fallen leaves. Full-bodied, firm, and very structured, it delivers layer upon layer of black fruits and savory flavors, finishing very long and fragrant. It should age gracefully!

## [2020 N°33 Chardonnay](#)

**97** - The 2020 Chardonnay No 33 bursts with ripe juicy pears, allspice, honey-drizzled peaches, and grapefruit oil notes, plus a suggestion of honeycomb. The medium to full-bodied palate shimmers with energy and tension, supported by a satiny texture and delivering vibrant citrus and stone fruit layers, finishing long and spicy.

## [2019 N°17 Cabernet Franc](#)

**97** - The 2015 Cabernet Franc No 17 is a blend with Cabernet Sauvignon. Deep garnet colored, it pops with a fantastically perfumed nose of kirsch, rose oil, black raspberries, and wild blueberries, followed by hints of fallen leaves and lavender. The medium to full-bodied palate is soft, graceful, and elegant, featuring beautiful freshness and very fine-grained tannins, leading to a long and perfumed finish on this gorgeous wine.



## [2019 Enrapture](#)

**97** - The 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon Enrapture has 6% Cabernet Franc in the blend. Deep purple-black in color, it charges out with powerful scents of creme de cassis, blackberry pie, and plum preserves, plus suggestions of clove oil, licorice, and camphor. Full-bodied, concentrated, rich, and explosive in the mouth, it has a firm yet velvety texture with just enough freshness and a long, opulent finish.

## [2019 JCB Leopard](#)

**96+** - The 2019 Leopard is a blend of 56% Syrah, 32% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 12% Cabernet Franc. It needs vigorous shaking to bring out alluring notes of violets, dark chocolate, star anise, and garrigue over baked blueberries and preserved plums with a waft of black pepper. The full-bodied palate delivers lovely freshness and loads of palate treats - spices, pepper, meaty nuances - framed by ripe, rounded tannins, finishing with great length.

### [2019 JCB Knockout](#)

**96+** - A blend of 63% Petite Sirah and 37% Cabernet Sauvignon, the 2019 Knockout is very deep purple-black in color. It needs some swirling to bring out notes of boysenberry preserves, chocolate-covered cherries, and blueberry pie with hints of dark chocolate, licorice, and tar. The full-bodied palate is firm and super-rich, with nice ripe tannins and seamless freshness, finishing long, long, long.

### [2020 N°81 Chardonnay](#)

**96** - The 2020 Chardonnay No 81 comes barreling out of the glass with bold notes of apricots, green guava, passion fruit, and toasted almonds with hints of cedar, fresh ginger, and honeysuckle. Medium to full-bodied, it is rich, intense, and decadent in the mouth, with a creamy texture and long, savory finish. JC first came to the USA in 1981 and decided then that he would come back to make wine.

### [2020 N°6 Pinot Noir](#)

**96** - Bottled in mid-June, the 2020 Pinot Noir No 6 is medium ruby-purple in color. It opens with delicate, earthy/savory notes of wild sage, truffles, tree bark, and tilled soil, with a core of Bing cherries and redcurrants. The medium to full-bodied palate is firm and fine-grained, with fantastic tension leading to a long and minerally finish on this impressive wine.

Each JCB wine has an unmistakable style and meaning behind the label, suggested by the number or name it is given.

"This is called No 7," Boisset said, pouring me a taste, "because I was seven years old when I started tasting Pinot Noir. Seriously, there was no water added to my glass. Our barrels were in the living room back then. I was transformed."

Given his current status, you might think that Boisset grew up with a silver tastevin in his mouth, but his beginnings were humble. "My father's winery, Jean-Claude Boisset, only started in Burgundy in 1961," Boisset said. "I was born in 1969, so you can guess what the No 69 bubbles label represents. I came for my first visit to the USA in 1981. I decided then I would come back to the USA and make wine here one day—so that's my No 81 Chardonnay."

## "This is called No 7 because I was seven years old when I started tasting Pinot Noir."

Additionally, Boisset assigns three words to associate with the style of each of his JCB wines. The words for the No 7 style are Debonair, Charismatic, and Seductive. Now, you could argue that Boisset's story and three words are just a sales pitch, but what I can see, as someone who has tasted some of these JCB labels over numerous years, are distinct style definitions in the minds of Boisset and his dedicated JCB winemakers, Stephanie Putnam and Brian Maloney, which come through in the glass. It's the same style vision a Champagne chef de cave must have for blending to a house style. The vision is vivid, and the result is a consistent expression of style that is itself a story.



### [2019 N°7 Pinot Noir](#)

**96** - Pale to medium ruby in color, the 2019 Pinot Noir No 7 wows with a fantastic perfume of violets, pomegranate, raspberry coulis, and kirsch plus hints of crushed rocks, underbrush, and spearmint. Medium to full-bodied, it is very pure in the mouth with delicate red berry and earthy layers framed by seamless freshness and a soft, fine-grained texture, finishing long and mineral-laced.

### [2019 JCB Snake](#)

**96** - The 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon Zebra/Snake/Crocodile, made from 64% Cabernet Sauvignon and 36% Petite Sirah, is a Napa Valley red wine that is dressed 3 ways, available in a zebra, snake, or crocodile skin label. Deep garnet purple in color, it charges out of the glass with a vibrant melange of warm cassis, baked plums, and mulberries with touches of cedar chest, pencil shavings, and cloves. The full-bodied palate is rich and has a lively backbone to balance, firm and grainy, long and lifted.

### [N°11 Pinot Noir](#)

**95+** - The 2019 Pinot Noir No 11 delivers an emerging perfume that has wonderful restraint, offering up crushed rocks, iron ore, and fertile loam over a core of redcurrants, Bing cherries, and lavender plus a waft of Provence herbs. The medium-bodied palate is delicate and refreshing with a light chewiness to the tannins and loads of savory sparks, finishing with an herbal lift.

### [2019 N°22 Pinot Noir](#)

**95** - Medium to deep ruby-purple in color, the 2019 Pinot Noir No 22 needs a lot of shaking to wake up vibrant notes of black raspberries, chocolate-covered cherries, mulberries, and fragrant earth with hints of cinnamon stick, dried roses, and cumin seed. The medium to full-bodied palate is plush and playful with a serious backbone of ripe grainy tannins and just enough freshness, finishing long and savory.

### [2019 N°10 Cabernet Sauvignon](#)

**95** - Deep garnet in color, the 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon No 10 bursts with notes of baked blackcurrants and stewed plums with hints of sauteed herbs, pencil lead, and crushed rocks. The full-bodied palate is rich and powerful, coating the whole mouth with firm, rugged tannins, finishing long and earthy.

Jean-Charles Boisset has numerous vineyard resources to pull from for his JCB collection. Yet, it's important to stress that the production for these wines is grand-cru-Burgundy tiny. Of the recently tasted labels, the largest production label was the new 2019 Enrapture at 352 cases. The smallest volume was the 2019 Knockout at just 50 cases. Therefore, these JCB wines showcase some of the best estate-grown and purchased fruit from growers across Northern California. "The sourcing for the wines differs from year to year," said Brian Maloney, JCB's Pinot Noir and Chardonnay winemaker. "Ultimately, we're looking for the best fruit to achieve the style of the label."



- Brian Maloney and Stephanie Putnam with JCB

#### [2015 The Surrealist](#)

**98** - The 2015 Surrealist is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot. It delivers maturing, tertiary notes of unsmoked cigars, incense, fragrant soil, and crushed rocks over a core of blackcurrant pastilles, black cherry preserves, and preserved plums, plus a touch of dried mint. The full-bodied palate is firm, grainy, and lively, with muscular fruit leading to a lingering ferrous note on the finish of this wonderfully sophisticated wine.

#### [2015 N°1 Cabernet Sauvignon](#)

**97** - The 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon No 1 is deep garnet in color. It prances out of the glass with flamboyant scents of redcurrant jelly, warm cassis, and black cherry compote with hints of dried roses, cigar box, and sandalwood plus a waft of bay leaves. The full-bodied palate is firm and grainy with just enough freshness and loads of evolving fragrant layers, finishing long and earthy.

#### [2015 JCB Leopard](#)

**96** - The 2015 Leopard is composed of 77% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Syrah, and 11% Petit Verdot. Deep garnet colored, it needs a little swirling to reveal notes of charcuterie, tapenade, and black pepper with a core of blackcurrant cordial, prunes, blueberry compote, and menthol, plus a hint of tobacco leaf. The full-bodied palate is rich, firm, and grainy with a lively backbone, finishing long and energetic.

## Eventually, living in Napa and owning several iconic wineries there, Boisset had to cross over to the dark side: Cabernet Sauvignon.

His Napa-based winemaker, Stephanie Putnam, also in charge of his Raymond Vineyards winemaking, explained: "We had been making JCB for years without a Cabernet. I said to Jean-Charles, 'You are talking about JCB being the best of each location. Why not make a Cabernet?' So, he challenged me to make a Cab for Pinot lovers—elegant, not too alcoholic. This was Cabernet Sauvignon No 1. Then we had to make No 10, which is the opposite side."

The array of chic perfume-like, jewelry bedecked, velvet, and animal-skin coated bottle packaging appeals to a surprisingly broad wine audience and not just to hard-core collectors. Boisset has homed in on a set of consumers that love fine wine and are willing to pay a premium for it but are looking for more than just deliciousness, seeking out the multi-sensory, opulent experience of JCB.

"We have three main ways of promoting the wines," said Boisset. "Fine dining, direct to collectors via our ambassadors, plus we distribute through a few iconic retailers around the US. And some are only sold through the winery and our JCB tasting salons."

