

# NAPA VALLEY

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## PHILANTHROPY ISSUE

**JEAN-CHARLES BOISSET:**



# BOISSET'S RAISON D'ÊTRE

A LIFELONG PHILOSOPHY ON PHILANTHROPY

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It's virtually impossible to be a part of the Napa Valley wine world without knowing about French-born Jean Charles Boisset, a prolific vintner, hospitality visionary, entrepreneur, and philanthropist known for his dynamic presence. He owns The Boisset Collection, a group of wineries in France and California, including historic wine estates like Sonoma's Buena Vista.

Boisset has quietly become a force for good, not only in the vineyards of Burgundy, where his family's roots run deep, but right here in Napa Valley. Known for his elegant wines and deep reverence for tradition, Boisset has channeled his passion for service into a lifelong philanthropic mission that began during his childhood in Vougeot, France.

"I was born in a small village," he said, "where everyone knew each other. We helped each other. You'd carry groceries for older people or tend someone else's garden without being asked. It wasn't charity—it was just life."

That ethos, planted early like the vines he would come to master, has become the foundation of his worldview. Whether in his gardens as a child or in the vineyards as a young man, he learned the rhythms of nature and the responsibility of caretaking—not just for the land but for the people around it. “My parents lived off Mother Nature,” he recalled. “So, you had to respect her. We had plenty of food in the garden. I couldn’t imagine others going without.”

From this early sense of abundance came an enduring passion for environmentalism, one of the foundational principles supporting Boisset’s five pillars of philanthropy: combating hunger, supporting healthcare, building community, and promoting the arts and historic preservation.



*Jean-Charles with his mother Claudine Boisset*

### **Pillar One: The Environment**

Even before the term ‘sustainability’ became a rallying cry, he practiced water conservation and zero-waste living—lessons passed down from grandparents who had no hot water or indoor plumbing until later in life. “We never threw anything away,” he said with pride. You used every crumb of bread, saved them for the birds—it was just how we lived.”

This philosophy extended to his work in wine. He embraced organic and biodynamic farming long before it became fashionable, viewing vineyard management as part of a greater ecological cycle. His understanding of nature and its interplay with agriculture led him to advocate for sustainable practices early, restoring historic vineyards using age-old methods.

Today, all of Boisset’s estate vineyards are certified organic and biodynamic. Boisset uses solar power at every winery in California and France except Buena Vista, a historic winery unsuitable for modernization. Napa Green-certified wines and lightweight glass debut this year, and Boisset has been a pioneer of sustainable packaging since 2004.

## **Pillar Two: Community**

His philanthropic efforts extend to those around him. He engages customers, team members, and even shareholders in his causes. By integrating charitable giving into some of the company's wine sales, where a portion of certain bottles sold supports diversity, heritage preservation, or health initiatives, he creates opportunities for everyone to contribute.

One standout campaign is Boisset's JCB Unity wine, which has raised over \$300,000 for the Association of African American Vintners. The model proved so effective that major retailers like Sam's Club and the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) in Canada embraced the project, making it an international success. His Joy & Serenity Cabernet Sauvignon and auction lots he creates typically raise \$50,000 yearly for Jane Seymour's Open Hearts Foundation, which empowers emerging nonprofits through consumer purchases.

Boisset supports VineTrail, donating over \$100,000 to fund a Napa Valley Vine Trail shelter for the walking and biking path connecting Calistoga and St. Helena. He also donates to and works with the Napa Valley Vintners' Collective Napa Valley Barrel Auction to support Napa's children's charities, helping raise \$1.5 million for children's health.

Although environmentalism and community form two pillars of his philanthropy, over the years, his causes have expanded to health care, hunger relief, the arts, and historic preservation—all areas where his impact is deeply personal. His diverse philanthropic work reflects his commitment to making a broad difference in many aspects of society.



*In Support of the Napa Fire Department and the National First Responder's Fund*

## **Pillar Three: Health**

Through partnerships with the V Foundation for Cancer Research, the American Heart Association, Ole Health, and breast cancer awareness organizations, he has helped raise millions of dollars for medical research and support services. “We haven’t built a hospital,” he said, “but we’ve helped fund the work that keeps them running.”

Boisset is the V Foundation’s exclusive sparkling wine sponsor, providing wine, auction lots, venues, and more to support their cancer research mission, which has raised more than \$1,500,000 in several auctions.

One of his proudest moments? Partnering with John Legend at Auction Napa Valley to raise over \$1 million for cancer research. “Napa showed up in full force,” he said, smiling. “It was one of those nights where you could feel the power of this place—its generosity, its unity.”

One organization especially close to his heart is the Salvation Army in Napa Valley, whose lesser-known work in addiction recovery has received his time and resources. “They bring people in for 12-week cycles,” he explained. “They teach cooking, offer structure, and allow people to rebuild through employment.”

## **Pillar Four: Fighting Hunger**

Boisset’s support is more than financial. He’s known for getting directly involved—packing meals for food banks and delivering them to families. “It’s one thing to write a check,” he said. “It’s another to stand in line and hand someone a meal.”

One of his most cherished initiatives was a cause-related campaign in which wine sales directly funded millions of meals. “That one was special,” he recalled. You could see the impact. It was a powerful reminder of the difference we can make.”

This direct engagement is part of what makes his philanthropic work so authentic. “It’s not a movement,” he said. “It’s part of the rhythm of life. You help because it’s who you are. It’s our *raison d’etre*.”

That rhythm—small, steady acts of care—defines his approach to philanthropy. He credits his consistency—year after year, initiative after initiative—as one of his most meaningful contributions. Organizations know they can count on him for big gestures and steady, unwavering support.

In one particularly memorable moment, he helped raise \$6 million for fire relief after the devastating California wildfires in 2017. “It wasn’t even a question,” he said. “We had to help.” Teaming up with local partners, chefs, Festival Napa Valley, and many community leaders, he helped raise funds for housing, replanting, and community services in the months following the devastation.



*With John Legend, Co-Founder of LVE Wines*

### **Pillar Five: The Arts and Historic Preservation**

His care extends beyond soil and vine. Boisset's reverence for history has made him one of the region's most passionate preservationists. Born in a 16th-century home once occupied by a monk from the famed Château du Clos de Vougeot, he grew up surrounded by architectural heritage. Today, he's the steward of multiple historic sites, which he lovingly restores to tell the stories of those who came before.

"These buildings have meaning," he said. "They teach us about the past. They shape future generations' understanding of culture, style, and purpose. When a building is preserved, it invites questions. It opens conversations."

But for all the headline-grabbing numbers, it's the quieter work that he values most. His support of the arts comes from the belief that "art makes us better humans," as he said. "It opens us. Whether painting, music, or design—it shapes who we are."

Through partnerships with institutions like the renowned Mosaic Art School in Ravenna, Italy, and the Nimbus Arts Academy in St. Helena, he has helped emerging artists find footing through scholarships, auctions, and exhibitions. In Calistoga, where he's helped sponsor art programs and community dinners, he often speaks about the wine/art intersection. "Art and wine have the same goal," he said. "They bring people together."

Unsurprisingly, he has even more ambitious projects on the horizon. “We’re working on something new,” he said. “A way to invite guests to create; a space to inspire others to be creative.”

What drives it all, he says, is the desire to restore that village spirit—the unspoken social contract that lifts one another not for applause but because it’s what neighbors do.

“I remember, as a child, walking with an elderly woman, helping her use her cane,” he said. “It wasn’t something we talked about—it was just what you did. That’s the kind of world I want to build again.”

Through wine, architecture, acts of quiet service, and bold generosity, he’s already doing just that.



*Inducting Jane Seymour into the Confrerie de Chevaliers du Tastevin at the Chateau du Clos de Vougeot, Burgundy*

The actress Jane Seymour co-founded Open Hearts Foundation in 2010, inspired by her mother, Mieke Frankenberg, a WWII internment camp survivor. The Foundation champions the “Open Hearts Philosophy”—giving back through resilience and compassion. Through its grantmaking and volunteer programs, it supports nonprofits aiding vulnerable communities across the U.S., with a focus on women and children. Its Young Hearts Program connects youth with service projects, and annual galas raise significant funds and honor impactful philanthropists.

The Foundation has awarded over \$1.79 million in grants to date. The 2023 gala raised nearly \$500,000 and honored Jean-Charles Boisset and Gina Gallo-Boisset for their humanitarian efforts. Seymour described them as “a couple whose love for winemaking is only matched by their boundless compassion for others.”