


 A photograph of Oscar-winning musician John Legend and Jean-Charles Boisset of Boisset Collection. John Legend is seated at a piano, wearing a dark tuxedo and bow tie, looking towards the camera with a smile. Jean-Charles Boisset stands behind the piano, wearing a blue patterned tuxedo jacket, white shirt, and dark bow tie. On the piano are several bottles of Raymond Vineyards wine, including one labeled 'LVE' (Legend Vineyard Exclusive), and two glasses of red wine. The background is dimly lit with warm, golden light from chandeliers and floral arrangements.

Oscar-winning musician John Legend and Jean-Charles Boisset of Boisset Collection created Boisset's Legend Vineyard Exclusive (LVE) Collection.

Number 1 with a Bullet

FLEMING'S WINE PROGRAM AND
BOISSET'S LEGEND VINEYARD
EXCLUSIVE (LVE) COLLECTION ARE
BUILT TO MAKE PALATES SING

by Rich Manning

Take a look at the Billboard Hot 100. Any week will do. You're bound to see legendary acts, trendy performers, newcomers with all the earmarks of long-term staying power, and a couple of tunes by bands with cult followings. You'll also see enough range within those 100 tunes for any level of music aficionado to find a few things they like.

As National Director of Wine of Fleming's Steakhouse, Maeve Pesquera uses the principles behind the popular music chart to drive a hugely successful wine program across the restaurant's 67 locations. The guiding force behind its popularity is the venues' Fleming's 100—Pesquera's curated eclectic "playlist" of 100 wines by the glass. The mélange of wines featured on the constantly evolving catalogue share the same soul as the performers found on its musical cousin; familiar labels and varietals readily share space with emerging wineries and esoteric wines boasting a legion of dedicated followers. According to Pesquera, the F100's breadth is designed to strike a chord with guests regardless of their level of wine appreciation. "My mission with the wine list is to meet people where they



PHOTO: MARGARET SOSS

Maeve Pesquera, National Director of Wine of Fleming's Steakhouse, features the LVE Collection from Boisset-owned winery Raymond Vineyards on her wine list.

are,” Pesquera says. “That’s the power behind the F100. It allows us to engage people regardless of what wine experience they want, from acclaimed high-end wines to popular value. This allows them to make them feel welcome.”

This sense of belonging Pesquera creates through her F100 extends the commitment to inclusion that founders Paul Fleming and Bill Allen exhibited when the first Flemings’s opened its doors in Newport Beach, CA in 1998. It’s a philosophy, Pesquera notes, whose impetus has shifted to match the needs of the ever-evolving wine drinker. “When Fleming’s opened, their vision was to create a comfortable, contemporized steakhouse where guests wouldn’t feel intimidated,” Pesquera states. “Today, people are more knowledgeable than ever, and they come to Fleming’s looking to explore. It’s why the F100 is more important than ever. They can take a look at the list and know they will find

something they like, which makes it very approachable.”

Of course, it could be argued that the Billboard Hot 100 is occasionally stuffed with performers of questionable musical repute. The same cannot be said about the Pesquera’s F100. Her astute palate and constant feedback from guests and industry partners like Jean-Charles Boisset of Boisset Collection keeps Fleming’s by-the-glass offerings a malleable, trendsetting list driven by excellence. “In order to make the F100, it has to be an incredibly well-made wine,” she states. “I’ve had to kiss a lot of frogs in order to find the princes that deserve a spot on the list.”

Two of the list’s current princes come from the hand of one of pop music’s reigning kings, John Legend. Co-collaborated by acclaimed Boisset-owned winery Raymond Vineyards, the Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon that make up the Grammy- and Oscar-winning musician’s LVE Collection has

earned a place on the F100 not because of the name attached, but because of the juice in the bottle. “The LVE Collection is not a celebrity wine—it’s a wine that was hand-crafted by Jean-Charles Boisset, Raymond Winemaker Stephanie Putnam and a passionate artist,” Pesquera states. “There’s a huge difference.” With that being said, Pesquera acknowledges that featuring Legend’s name on a bottle helps perpetuate Fleming’s desire to create an approachable ambience. “We’ve already seen people that are just barely getting into wines try a glass of LVE because they are big John Legend fans,” she says. “When they do, they’re getting introduced to a great wine in the process. To me, that kind of experience is the embodiment of Fleming’s wine program meeting guests right where they are at in their life’s wine journey.”

You might say that it’s a wine program that hits all the right notes. ■■

A LEGEND IN THE MAKING

Jean-Charles Boisset doesn’t really do celebrity collaborations. “We’ve turned down 99% of the artists that approached us, because they aren’t passionate about the winemaking process,” he states.

John Legend represents why Boisset allows that 1% of wiggle room. When the award-winning musician and longtime fan of the Boisset portfolio approached Boisset to create the sumptuous Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon that make up the LVE Collection, his desire to make something beyond the liquid equivalent of a B-side was too strong for the President of Boisset Collection and Proprietor of Raymond Vineyards to pass on.

“John Legend wanted to approach making the wine in the same way he approached making his music,” Boisset states. “He wanted to make sure there was a message in each bottle—something ethereal, romantic, powerful.”

In order to achieve this goal, the lines separating the worlds of wine and music were deliberately blurred. The duo spent plenty of time listening to the soulful sounds of Legend’s deep catalog during the winemaking process, “tuning” the wine so the most visceral musical moments emerged in liquid form. This approach created a duo of complex, critically acclaimed wines that effortlessly connects

with Legend fans and enophiles. It also created a bit of an educational experience for Boisset. “This collaboration was an engaging exercise because it allowed me to connect the art of winemaking with the art of creating music,” he said. “The partnership was filled with these exciting moments of discovering movement, charm, and seduction that spilled across both mediums. It was like they got to know each other as ethereal creations.”

TASTING NOTES

LVE 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley Tart, black fruit and mineral-rich tannins line the upper palate, while balancing tart, toasted caramel oak and graphite coat rest of the mouth. —*Meridith May*



PHOTO: MARGARET SOSS

Jean-Charles Boisset and Grammy- and Oscar-winning musician John Legend collaborated on LVE Collection from Boisset-owned winery Raymond Vineyards.