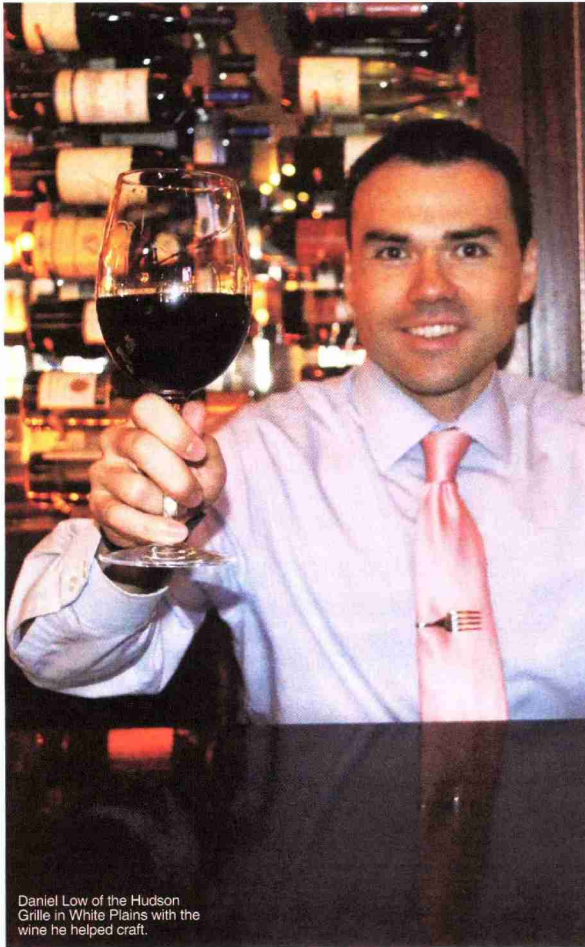


wine  
& DINE



Daniel Low of the Hudson Grille in White Plains with the wine he helped craft.

Daniel Low, general manager and sommelier at Hudson Grille on Mamaroneck Avenue in White Plains, was one of eight influential somms across the country chosen to participate in the creation of Raymond's 2011 Sommelier Selection wine.

These eight wine experts were flown to Napa where they met the Raymond team and immersed themselves in a weeklong orientation of Raymond vineyards and the region. They learned, on premises, about soil, grafting, leaf cover, sunlight influence, directional and altitudinal exposure and the effects these factors have on the grape.

The Raymond family established roots in Napa County in 1933, the same year our government wrote the 21st amendment ending Prohibition. The family bought some acreage and planted it with a variety of fruits and vegetables, including grapes. By 1970, California was in the process of becoming known as an ideal region for wine grape production, and the Raymond family began establishing and expanding vineyards and learning the intricate nuances of fine wine production. In 2009, Jean-Charles Boisset purchased the Raymond holdings and set out to take the name to a more exalted place. The Boisset family was an established name in the wine industry with vineyards and wineries in Burgundy, Beaujolais, the Rhône Valley and the South of France. Several of their Raymond properties have achieved certified organic and biodynamic designations, no small feat. Their plantings are predominantly Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Merlot and Sauvignon Blanc, with some lesser-known varieties used in blending. Today, Raymond has more than 300 acres of estate vineyards.

After the Sommelier Selection tutorial was complete, Low and the seven other participants formed four teams. Each two-person team had wine samples from Raymond vineyards in Napa, Sonoma and Lake County. Each wine was quite different and each would contribute its unique flavor and textural profile. The task was to create a blend of these three distinct districts to make the best and most expressive wine. Each team experimented with the percentages and each contributed its winning blend. These four wines were then presented to Raymond's director of winemaking, Stephanie Putnam, who

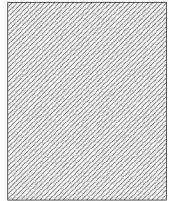
swirled, sniffed and tasted each blend until she chose a winner. That winning blend became the 2011 Sommelier Selection, a blend of 85 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 13 percent Merlot and 2 percent Cabernet Franc. Some 60,000 bottles were filled and labeled and are only available in restaurants, at an attractive price of \$50.

This is the fourth vintage of this Sommelier Selection wine. Each year, beginning in 2008, Raymond has impaneled teams of eight to create this blend. I love the concept. The back label has a "peel here" tab which opens a small booklet. There you will find a brief bio of each contributing sommelier along with a description of this concept and tasting notes. It remains to be seen if Raymond will be expanding this Sommelier Selection concept to other varietals. It would be quite easy to ship samples of Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, for example, to notable somms around the country, have them blend and taste and email back their choice of percentages, and then have Putnam pick a winner. And each sommelier becomes a dynamic point-of-sale representative for the brand.

The wine is delicious and will satisfy most palates. Straightaway, it had a pleasant grapey fruitiness. It showed black currant flavors with a peppery backbone contributed by the oak influence. It had a velvety smoothness with a satisfying finish. This wine is big on the price-to-value scale. If you happen to dine at the Hudson Grille, you're likely to meet Low. He will happily pour and discuss "his" wine and his Raymond experience with you.

Raymond produces wines up and down the price spectrum, ranging from \$24 to north of \$125 a bottle. If you've never been a winery wine-club member, it's something to consider here. It's free to join and wines of your choice and your pricing sweet spot automatically get shipped to your home or office at regular intervals. Wines are discounted about 20 percent and there are other cool perks like VIP visits to the winery and email and phone access to winemaker Putnam, who is available to directly answer any questions.

*For more, visit [raymondvineyards.com](http://raymondvineyards.com) or [hudsongrillenyc.com](http://hudsongrillenyc.com). Write me at [doug@dougpauldng.com](mailto:doug@dougpauldng.com).* ■



SWEET LOW  
*Hudson Grille's Daniel Low  
 and the wine he helped create*

By DOUG PAULDING