



bubbles

wearing his

HEART

on his sleeve

JCB'S SPARKLING WINES REFLECT THE EBULLIENT CHARACTER OF THEIR CREATOR, **JEAN-CHARLES BOISSET**

by Jessie Birschbach



The luxurious JCB Salon in St. Helena, CA.



Jean-Charles Boisset is proprietor of the Boisset Collection.

IN THE 1980S, after months of studying French culture and the history of Paris, Chinese American architect I. M. Pei set out to build an entrance to the Louvre that reflected its site rather than his own stylistic agenda. But after he proposed his plan to the city, many Parisians expressed dismay that the glass pyramid clashed with the surrounding classical architecture, causing a flurry of controversy and opposition. Nevertheless, it was approved, and today Pei's work is celebrated worldwide as a modern architectural marvel. It does indeed look very different from its surroundings, yet it also reflects them as intended: The simple shape seems almost to disappear through the transparency of its own glass windows, showcasing rather what can be seen through them as if to reveal the city's beating heart.

During my recent interview with Jean-Charles Boisset, proprietor of the Boisset Collection—a company that operates 28 wineries in California and France—it occurred to me that Boisset is, in a sense, the Pei of the wine industry. With unabashed flamboyance, he speaks of the wine he produces in a way unlike that of any other vintner. Rather than list technical specifications, he broaches eyebrow-raising concepts like emotions, energies, and scenesapes. Some may find this disjointing, but make no mistake—as much as he is a dreamer, Boisset is also a savvy businessman. As with his public celebration of his lavish lifestyle, the unforgettably entertaining way in which he describes his wines is, effortless as it seems, quite calculated. Consequently, like a shimmering, leopard-print black hole, his jubilation sucks in everything around him and spits out his own version of products in categories that extend well beyond wine: The continually expanding JCB Collection also includes spirits, jewelry, Baccarat crystal glassware, fragrances, books, home decor, and more.

Boisset attributes the *joie de vivre* with which he runs his business to the duality of his time spent in both France and America: "I go back and forth a lot [between both countries], especially lately, and I've realized that what really shapes me is the fact that America is such a phenomenal place, as it really allows you to become who you want to be, more so than any other

country in the world. . . . And perhaps it's my French background that allows me to look at things a little differently here," he said.

Born and raised in Vougeot in Burgundy, Boisset spent his childhood in vineyards and in his family's winery, which dates back to the 11th century. He fell in love with California during a visit to Sonoma as a young boy and vowed that he'd one day return. After receiving a business and finance degree from the University of London, he went to the University of California, Los Angeles, to earn an MBA and remained on the West Coast to run the U.S. arm of his family's



GALA BY JCB 2014 GRAND CRU CHAMPAGNE, FRANCE (\$150)

Technical specs: 100% Chardonnay from the Côte des Blancs, aged for at least seven years in stainless steel. 8 grams/liter dosage

Dreamscape: Dressed in lace, a beautiful blonde runs gracefully through the Hall of Mirrors in the Château de Versailles. She's holding a bottle of Champagne, and she invites us to taste it, but we cannot touch her.

Persona: Marie Antoinette feeding her lovers from a tall pile of macarons

Sound/music: Deep conversation with the seductive soundtrack of *Dangerous Liaisons* playing in the background—specifically Johann Sebastian Bach's "Concerto for Four Harpsichords in A Minor, BWV 1065"

Fashion/style: Karl Lagerfeld meets Marie Antoinette at her best, in an 18th-century dress with an opulent corset

Keywords: Past. Present. Future.

Ultimate pairing: Mille-feuille with Chantilly cream

This Grand Cru Champagne is as refreshing as it is opulent: Fresh butter, lemon zest, crisp green apple, juicy apricot, and a smattering of fresh ginger ripple gently over the palate, leaving citrusy minerality. Thanks to the cool, rainy vintage, it's drinkable now, although the acid will enable it to age for years to come. **97** —*Jessie Birschbach*



JCB 2016 N°44 PREMIER CRU CHAMPAGNE, FRANCE (\$85)

Technical specs: 56% Chardonnay from the Côte des Blancs/44% Pinot Noir from the Montagne de Reims and the Vallée de la Marne, aged six months in stainless steel. 8 g/L dosage

Dreamscape: It's the roaring '20s. The Orient Express barrels through a foggy night as a waiter wearing a white tuxedo and silk bowtie lights your Gauloise, affixed to a cigarette holder. You thank him amid a deep discussion about literature and life with beautiful friends.

Persona: David Bowie in an androgynous phase

Sound/music: Dixieland jazz

Fashion/style: Art Deco and Christian Louboutin high heels

Keywords: Lustrous. Fortuitous. Unrivaled.

Ultimate pairing: Sea scallops in a beurre blanc sauce or a delicate apple tart

Last word: This wine is about trying to grab the stars.

A frothy mousse reveals a golden, lemony richness with acid that keeps you on the hook. Lemon curd, lemon rind, yellow apple, and red Anjou pear (right down to its earthy skin) are wrapped in a creamy, silky texture that unfurls into chalky minerality. For vintage Premier Cru Champagne, the price cannot be beat. **95** —*J.B.*



JCB N°XX NV BRUT CHAMPAGNE, FRANCE (\$55)

Technical specs: 60% Chardonnay/30% Pinot Noir/10% Pinot Meunier from Premier Crus across Champagne. 10 g/L dosage

Dreamscape: Invited by a lover, you enter a velvet-covered chamber smelling of rosewood and adorned with melting candles. You sit on a velvet chaise lounge, where a passionate kiss is shared.

Persona: Madonna/Casanova

Sound/music: Champagne popping—is there a better sound?

Fashion/style: An embellished and embroidered cape-effect lamé evening gown by Oscar de la Renta

Keywords: Resplendent. Luxuriant. Effervescent.

Ultimate pairing: Beef carpaccio with olive oil, salt, and pepper

Last word: The wine already tells me so much through the nose, and that's rare in Champagne. . . . The most carnage is happening here—elegance turned animalistic.

Soft, dry, and floral: Heady apple blossom softens into yuzu, lime zest, and fresh lemongrass in this classic blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier sourced from Premier Cru vineyards. **91** —*J.B.*



business, Boisset America, which would eventually become Boisset Collection. In the late 1990s, he and his sister, Nathalie, co-founded Burgundy winery Domaine de la Vougeraie; in 2003, he purchased DeLoach Vineyards in the Russian River Valley, among the first of many acquisitions he would make stateside, and the rest—peppered by a marriage to Gina Gallo, the opening of the innovative JCB tasting lounges, and a partnership with John Legend—is history.

All this background is to say that any article about the character of

Boisset's wines—in this case, his sparkling wines—is bound to be as much about the personality of the man himself. His colorful suits and penchant for extravagance might seem incongruous with the agricultural aspect of wine, but just as the transparent glass pyramid of the Louvre reflects its surroundings, he exposes the aspirational culture of wine. "The beauty of Napa and Sonoma reminds me constantly to be very true to this beauty that is around us," said Boisset. "There is a whole world that we want

to create: the world of entertainment, hospitality, beautiful food, great wine, great fashion, great artistry of fragrance making, candle making, soap making, and more. Everything we do holistically not only brings our world together but also allows it to shine. We can all relate to these products of our environment, and that's what we are excited about: We're thinking much bigger [than wine]."

Read on for descriptions of JCB's sparkling wines as provided by Boisset, along with my reviews. [LZ](#)

The dimensions of this leopard-print PHI barrel at JCB's winery match the divine proportions of the golden ratio.

JCB NV CAVIAR SPARKLING BLANC DE BLANCS, BURGUNDY, FRANCE (\$45)

Technical specs: 85% Chardonnay/15% Aligoté vinified as a Crémant de Bourgogne and aged at least 18 months on the lees. 10–12 g/L dosage

Dreamscape: A time lapse of a stone being smoothed over hundreds of years by the ocean, until a swimmer, who's just been visited by a pod of dolphins, picks up the stone and notes its polished texture

Persona: A mermaid, encapsulating the freshness and energy of the ocean, the power and rhythm of the waves, the ebb and flow of the tide

Sound/music: Claude Debussy meets Lady Gaga

Fashion/style: Lady Gaga's liquid chrome coat by Candace Cuoco—a kaleidoscope of light and effervescence

Keywords: Pristine. Pearlescent. Desirable.

Ultimate pairing: Quail eggs, crème fraîche, and, of course, JCB caviar
A slick, streamlined, and well-made blanc de blancs: Sourdough leads into soft lemon-lime notes and almond skin over an undercurrent of talcum powder and salinity. **91**—*J.B.*



JCB NV N° 69 SPARKLING BRUT ROSÉ, BURGUNDY, FRANCE (\$32)

Technical specs: 100% Pinot Noir Crémant de Bourgogne made in the saignée method. 10 g/L dosage

Dreamscape: You follow a trail of rose petals to an ornate bathroom, at the center of which is a claw-footed bathtub teeming with bubbles.

Persona: Grace Kelly/Audrey Hepburn

Sound/music: Your favorite song on repeat to put you in a great mood (think John Legend's "All of Me")

Fashion/style: My favorite jacket or sweater

Keywords: Flamboyant. Vibrant. Sensual.

Ultimate pairing: Salmon with fresh lemon, dill, and Maldon salt

Last word: This is a wine you drink morning, afternoon, night, anytime. This wine is my favorite fragrance. My favorite smell. My ultimate companion.

The oscillation between Ruby Red grapefruit and tart Rainier cherry allows for the brief appearance of yellow raspberry and a smattering of salty clay before grapefruit peel returns in this bright and slightly earthy Pinot Noir-based Crémant de Bourgogne. **93**—*J.B.*



JCB NV N°21 SPARKLING BRUT, BURGUNDY, FRANCE (\$30)

Technical specs: Pinot Noir and Chardonnay Crémant de Bourgogne made in the traditional method and aged at least 15 months. 8 g/L dosage

Dreamscape: A magnificent, glowing apparition wearing a gold-plated dress emerges from a dense, lush Burgundian forest and floats over a vineyard, waving her wand.

Persona: Adam and Eve reimagined, to represent the harmony of the Pinot Noir and the Chardonnay

Sound/music: Electronica/house music to pump you up for a night out

Fashion/style: The Met Gala: pure energy and ingenuity

Keywords: Radiant. Mysterious. Luminous.

Ultimate pairing: Chocolate from the Côte d'Or

Last word: 21 is Burgundy's department number in France, and if someone says, "I'm going to 21," it means, "I'm going to collect wine." 21 is for most of us the Vatican or Mecca in the religion of wine.

With a mélange of orchard fruits in tow (red apple, green pear, and pluot), brioche marches into notes of wild chamomile and daisies. A crushable Crémant perfect for poolside refreshment. **90**—*J.B.*

