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# The Art of the Matter

## BEHIND THE RELAUNCH OF RAYMOND VINEYARDS' R | COLLECTION

by Ruth Tobias

Since its purchase by well-known vintner and bon vivant Jean-Charles Boisset in 2009, Raymond Vineyards in St. Helena, California, “has gone from what I would describe as a stalwart Napa Valley classic that’s been around forever to this really unique, avant-garde, dynamic destination,” says Boisset Collection senior vice president of marketing and communications Patrick Egan. “Blending tradition with a sense of theater, [it] offers impeccably crafted wines alongside bold design, interactive exhibits, and a touch of glamour [as well as] joie de vivre . . . that express Jean-Charles’ creativity.”

By the same token, the 51-year-old winery’s R | Collection is in Egan’s words “the winemaker’s chance to be creative in terms of the way that they pull the wines together from vineyards across California.” So it only makes sense that, in relaunching the entry-level brand this fall, the Raymond team would highlight creativity, and specifically artistry, as an organizing principle; as brand manager Emily Glusic puts it, “Wine should delight the eye as much as the palate. Studies show that label colors and design inspire discovery and shape how we connect with a wine, and bold displays draw us closer. These vibrant, expressive bottles capture attention, spark curiosity, and turn every pour into a celebration of Raymond’s playful spirit.”

Consisting of five California-appellated expressions priced at \$15 per bottle, R | Collection “is meant to be your everyday wine,” notes Raymond vice president of



winemaking Stephanie Putnam, “but it’s also true to what we like to do overall, which is really overdeliver on value.” The gorgeous new packaging is part and parcel of that mission. Each label showcases a different painting—most from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, which according to Egan “has a great collection of historical paintings in the public domain”—in order “to reflect the flavor profile and the feeling of the wine inside.”

Gracing the Sauvignon Blanc label, for instance, is Robert John Thornton’s 1807 work *Cupid Inspiring Plants With Love*. While encapsulating “the sensuality of wine,” says Egan, the image is also “fresh, it’s crisp—it has that sort of bright, sunny feel” in keeping with the stainless steel-fermented white, which Putnam describes as “more of a California style, so it’s got that classic gooseberry aromatic.” The Chardonnay label, by contrast, bears Henri Fantin-Latour’s *Still Life With Pansies* from 1874, “a darker, moodier image [that] feels luscious,” Egan explains. “The richness of the colors gives you that sense of a richer white”—one that undergoes partial malolactic fermentation and sur lie aging to ensure “a broadness across the palate,” as Putnam puts it, along with notes of stone and tropical fruit. Yet it retains the acidity that “makes it a great food wine,” she adds, an asset perhaps hinted at by the pile of apples depicted in the painting.

Marco d’Oggiono’s *Girl With Cherries* from the late 15th century is a fairly self-explanatory choice for the

R | Collection Merlot as what Putnam calls a “young, fresh, easy-drinking wine” with, yes, notes of cherry. Still, she takes care to give it some dimension. “People don’t like Merlots that are too soft,” she says, so “I blend in some Cabernet just to get a little bit more structure, a little bit more seriousness. And then Petit Verdot’s my favorite varietal, so I try to squeeze it in a lot of different places.”

That includes the Field Blend, whose name “is an homage to the way that a lot of the older vineyards in California were planted,” Putnam continues. “It’s kind of like a Bordeaux blend with a California twist. Cabernet gives it that classic fruit—strawberry, raspberry—and some structure; the Petite Sirah adds a little bit more darkness, a little bit more weight, and more tannins; the Petit Verdot adds what I call more midpalate presence; and the Merlot just makes it a little bit softer and rounder.” Accordingly, Gustave Caillebotte’s 1893 painting *Chrysanthemums in the Garden at Petit-Gennevilliers* adorns the label: As Egan explains, “[The flowers’] different colors remind us of the different flavors of the varietals that go into the wine and make it pop. Boldness meets balance.”

And then there’s the Cabernet Sauvignon, for which the team chose *Hummingbird and Passionflowers*, a late 19th-century Martin Johnson Heade work. “Passion is one of our key themes; everything that Jean-Charles does [exudes] passion and energy, so it made perfect sense to [show] passionflowers, with their bright red

pop of color,” Egan remarks. “That painting really reminded us of the energy of Raymond, the energy of Cabernet, and the power of red wine.” Not that this particular Cab, which is tank fermented and tank aged, packs an overwhelming wallop: Putnam calls it “a classic Cab without the bigger tannins,” noting that it has “a small bit of Merlot blended in, mostly just to add a little bit more broadness across the palate,” as well as aromas of dark chocolate and cherry cola.

Meanwhile, R | Collection’s back label is just as creative as the front from a marketing perspective. There, a QR code serves multiple purposes: First, it “tells the story of the painting” for consumers while providing tasting notes, says Egan. And second, they can use it to “register and start a dialogue with us, and we can reach out to [them] and say, ‘We’re so delighted that you enjoyed that wine.’”

In fact, the entire marketing plan for the brand’s relaunch is inventive. Egan’s team has partnered with a local school, Nimbus Arts, to host monthly art classes at Raymond. They’re also organizing pop-ups at art fairs. And they’re even “taking the art that’s on the labels and transforming it into black-and-white images that you can download, print out, and paint yourself, so you can host your own wine and art party at home,” he says. “That’s always the idea of Raymond—to really inspire people to be involved and engaged, to be part of the process.” And the R | Collection makes for the perfect starting point. **LE**

