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# WINE ENTHUSIAST

MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 1, 2010

## CELEBRATE AT HOME

WITH JEAN-CHARLES  
BOISSET & GINA GALLO

*Crémant*  
A GREAT ALTERNATIVE  
TO CHAMPAGNE

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# Silver & Gold

Cultures unite as vintners  
Jean-Charles Boisset and Gina  
Gallo host a lively holiday fête  
on San Francisco's Nob Hill.

BY SUSAN KOSTRZEWA  
PHOTOS BY VICTORIA YEE

With soaring views of the San Francisco Bay Bridge, Coit Tower and Alcatraz as dramatic backdrop behind him, Jean-Charles Boisset exuberantly greets his guests with a kiss, bottle of sparkling wine in hand.

As the group is whisked onto comfortable sofas and chairs in the main sitting room, it's clear that Boisset, the president of historic Burgundian producer Boisset Family Estates, is no novice at hosting. His social ease and sense of fun make for the ideal afternoon as he and wife Gina Gallo, winemaker for Modesto, California-based Gallo Family Vineyards and granddaughter of late wine icon Julio Gallo, host a holiday feast in their elegant but whimsical Nob Hill apartment.

The guest list—a mixture of family, old friends and cherished colleagues—reflects the down-to-earth nature of a duo that also exudes glamour and sophistication. The balance seems totally natural for the two vintners who claim country







beginnings—Gina in Modesto and Jean-Charles in Beaune, France—but also grew up with the opportunity to travel and experience diverse cultures. Their marriage in 2009 joined two of the world's most powerful wine families, but accounts of their meeting and subsequent romance sound much like the beginnings of many couples: boy meets girl, boy is smitten, girl plays hard to get, and love conquers in the end.

**A**s the group gathers around a plate of local Tomales Bay oysters and toasts the season with Louis Bouillot Grande Reserve Crémant de Bourgogne, enticing aromas of the Italian and French repast Chef Gia Passalacqua is preparing in the kitchen abound. Passalacqua has been the Gallo family's private and winery chef for years and is also co-owner with Gina of Dry Creek Delectables, a catering company based out of Dry Creek General Store in Healdsburg, California.

"I wanted to bring the traditions of both families to the tables," explains Passalacqua as she arranges one of the starters—the frittata, a Gallo family holiday favorite. "Food is such a great way to celebrate family and friends and both mean a lot to Gina and Jean-Charles." The menu, a collection of traditional recipes reflecting the couple's French and Italian heritage, is elegant without being complicated.

Gina's sister, Mary, reflects on the family affection for wine and food: "[Growing up during the holidays] we would be in the kitchen cooking. Mom would be playing the piano and we would all sing carols," she says. "Food was a main focus and then the wine—we'd have bottles out and would taste all sorts of different stuff throughout the day."

Her description of the Gallo holiday feast, "somewhere between casual and formal but always boisterous," is played out in the living room where Jean-Charles' characteristic devilry and the comical waddling of the couple's French bulldog (whose name varies from Frenchie to Yoda to The Emperor, depending on mood) keeps the group in jovial spirits.

"This is such a unique time," Jean-Charles explains as he and Gina pass out squares of fragrant frittata and serve up frog legs to the guests. "We can all slow down and enjoy one another during the holidays, which with busy schedules doesn't always happen."

Taking time to enjoy family was a creative exercise in the Gallo clan, Gina recalls. "As a child I remember my mom coordinating plays for all of us cousins before dinner, like the Nativity scene or other holiday plays. This would usually take about an hour to organize and then we would put on a show for the adults," she says.



Previous pages: Chef Gia Passalacqua, Kate MacMurray, Mary Gallo, Gina Gallo and Jean-Charles Boisset toast the season.

Above: Family friend Angie Jordan admires the sweeping views; official oyster-tasting duties go to Jean-Charles; JCB No. 81 Chardonnay and MacMurray Pinot Gris offer a delicate complement to the Dungeness crab legs starter.

Right: Gina offers up a taste of her grandmother's pesto hot to guests; the appeal of Claudine Boisset's country terrine isn't lost on Frenchie, the resident French bulldog.



## **GALLO-BOISSET FAMILY HOLIDAY MENU**

### **Amuse Bouche**

Bob Gallo's Almonds

Tomales Bay Oysters on the Half Shell  
with Mignonette sauce

*NV Louis Bouillot Grande Reserve Crémant  
de Bourgogne*

Grandma Aileen Gallo's Frittata

Grandma Aileen Gallo's Pesto Hots

*2009 MacMurray Ranch Pinot Gris*

Dungeness Crab Legs

with Butter, Garlic and Parsley

Wild Colossal Shrimp and Bay Shrimp

with Cocktail Sauce

*2009 JCB No 81 Chardonnay*

Claudine Boisset's Country Terrine

*2008 Gallo Family Vineyards Sonoma Coast*

*Two Rock Chardonnay*

### **Appetizers**

Père Louis Deschamps Escargot

*2007 Gallo Family Estate Sonoma Coast  
Chardonnay*

Jean-Charles Boisset's Frogs Legs

*2005 Domaine de la Vougeraie Clos Blanc  
de Vougeot Monopole*

Gia Passalacqua's Ravioli

*2008 MacMurray Ranch Russian River  
Pinot Noir*

*2007 DeLoach Vineyards Russian River  
Pinot Noir*

### **Main Course**

Gina Gallo's Roasted Turkey

with Grandma Aileen Gallo's Bread  
Stuffing with Mashed Potatoes  
and Fresh Cranberry Sauce

*2005 Domaine de la Vougeraie  
Clos de Vougeot*

*1967 JC Boisset Charmes-Chambertin*

Claudine Boisset's Braised Rabbit  
à la Moutarde

*2005 Gallo Family Estate Northern Sonoma  
Cabernet Sauvignon*

*2005 Raymond Vineyards Generations  
Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon*

### **After Dinner Salad and Dessert**

DeLoach Garden Greens

with Julio Gallo's Vinegar and Matt Gallo's  
Olive Oil served with 24-month-aged  
Fiscallini Cheddar, Brillat-Savarin, Cowgirl  
Creamery Mt. Tam and Comté cheeses

*JCB Neige Première Cidre de Glace*

Crêpes Flambées

*E&J Brandy*



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GROUP IN JOVIAL SPIRITS.



Interestingly, Christmas plays are popular in Jean-Charles' family, too. "One wonderful tradition in Jean-Charles' family is that his grandfather, Louis, as well as a few other family members will write plays," Gina explains. "During the holidays there will be at least one play acted out by various family members. Even historical memories are acted out: last Christmas his grandparents told the story in detail of being in the resistance during World War II and what it was like for his grandfather escaping as a prisoner of war with the amazing help from his wife."

As hosts, Gina and Jean-Charles are both attentive and engaging, constantly moving to ensure glasses are topped off, plates are full and guests are engaged. Their hands-on, collaborative natures are part of what makes them approachable as people, and keeps the party informal and fun.

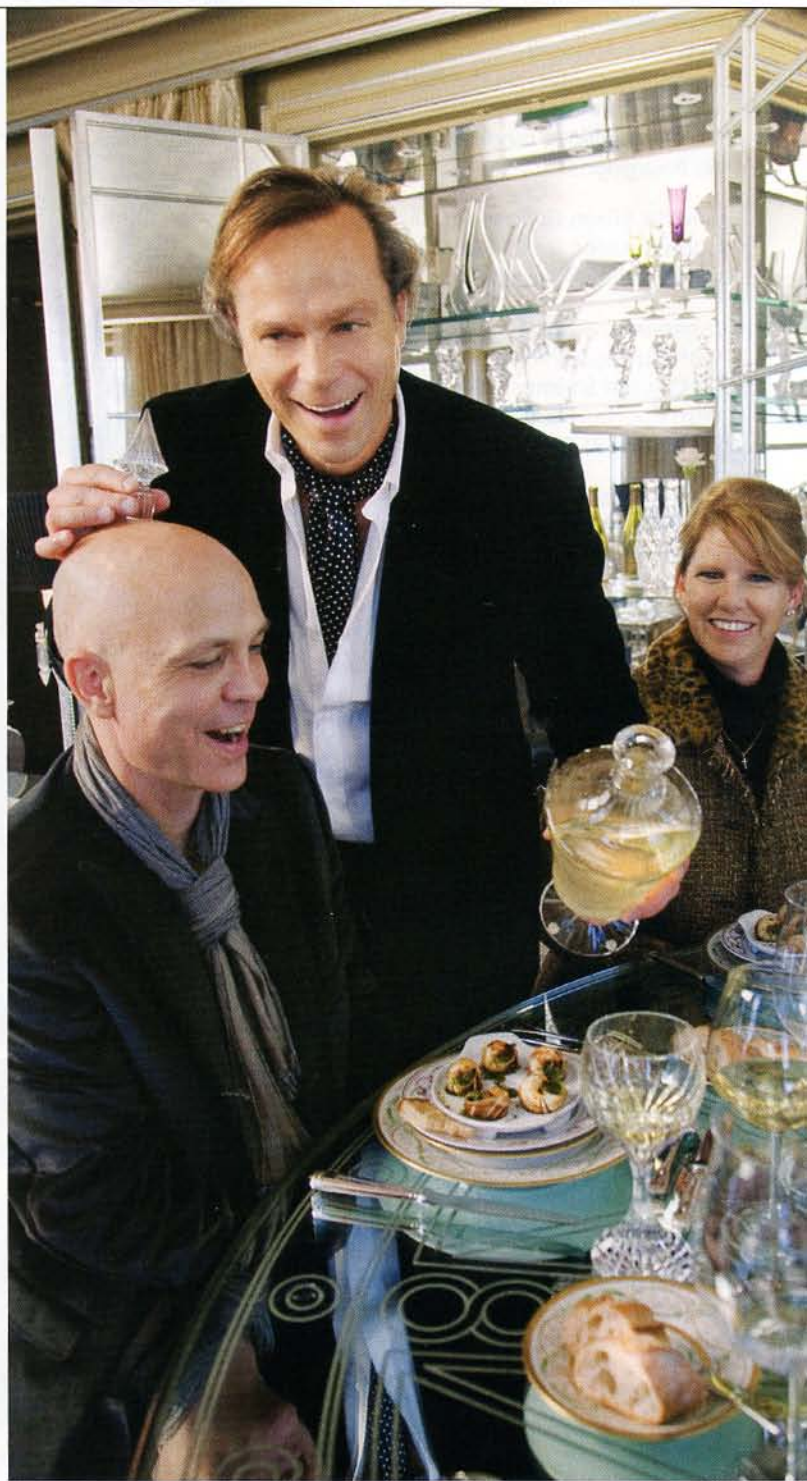
"Gina's and Jean-Charles' parties are always very warm and family-oriented," says François Pouliot, who produces the apple ice cider *Neige Première Cidre de Glace* out of Quebec, Canada that is later served with the cheese. "I attended a private party of theirs recently and it was amazing—every detail was perfect, down to the décor. But it was also relaxed."

**T**he apartment, decorated in accents of silver, gold and plum and modeled "partially after Versailles" in style, is the perfect setting for the holiday gathering. Because of the décor's inherent flair—think Baccarat crystal, silver foil ceilings and dual custom-designed stainless-steel fireplaces once again reflecting the symmetry of Versailles—the couple tastefully chooses a minimalist holiday table that showcases Gina's family china and the table's Baccarat Massena crystal. The setting is simple—white roses, plum-colored candles and elegant white linens play off of the glinting silver and gold in the apartment.

The glass and crystal predominant in the home, Jean-Charles says, serves function as well as fashion. "We wanted to maximize the space by creating mirrors and reflections. Everywhere you are in the main room, it's a reflection of the beautiful scenery and the people you are with. At night, with the candles glowing and the reflections all around, it's quite special."

After a rousing rendition of the traditional Burgundian *Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin* clapping song, a procession of dishes arrives at the table. The merry group toasts and tastes the myriad food-friendly wines at the table, Gallo Family Single Vineyard and Estates, *Domaine de la Vougeraie* (owned by Boisset), *MacMurray Ranch* (owned by Gallo) and *Raymond Vineyards* (also owned by Boisset) offerings included. Jean-Charles adds a modern twist to the lunch by throwing on a rollicking CD of North African music. As Gina's traditional family turkey comes to the table, Jean-Charles decants a 1967 JC Boisset *Charmes-Chambertin*, again linking past and present.

This theme of mixing modern and traditional elements resonates with the guests, who agree that mixing up dishes,



Above: Jean-Charles jokes with Canadian apple ice cider producer François Pouliot of *La Face Cachée De La Pomme* as Gina's childhood friend Kelly Mendoza looks on.

Right: Gina, Kate and Jean-Charles rock the traditional Burgundian *Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin* clapping song.





"GROWING UP, MY ENTIRE FAMILY GATHERED FOR THE HOLIDAYS, ALL GENERATIONS," SAYS JEAN-CHARLES. "IT WAS PLAYFUL, WITH GAMES, LONG MEALS, GOOD BOTTLES OF WINE OF COURSE AND ALWAYS SLEEPOVERS WITH THE COUSINS AND EVERYONE TOGETHER. IT WAS AND IS THE MOST IMPORTANT TIME OF YEAR IN OUR FAMILY."



#### Chef Gia Passalacqua's **TIPS FOR EASY HOLIDAY ENTERTAINING**

**Write down your menu and a list of the ingredients for each menu item.** Then, do as much of the prep as possible beforehand. This will make the day of the party more relaxing and enjoyable.

**When sautéing onions or garlic in olive oil or butter, start with a cold pan.** Put your fat of choice in the pan along with the savory you are using and gently simmer to slowly release its

flavor into the fat. This develops background flavor and the essential foundation for your final dish.

**When appropriate, balance a dish with an acid to brighten flavors.** Lemon juice, wine or vinegar can work wonders for a dish.

**In cooking, use your best judgment.** Taste, taste, taste. Recipes are useful guidelines but by tasting, you might

decide to make adjustments to the recipe.

**Cook simply.** Sometimes the best, most flavorful dishes have the fewest ingredients. Let the ingredients shine!

**Turn your leftovers into another simple yet delicious meal.** Mix some Parmigiano into your leftover mashed potatoes, spread out into a shallow baking dish and bake until crispy and warm.

**Use adequate salt.** Salt gives life to food.



décor, wine and music keeps holiday parties fresh every year. They also agree that some traditional influence is key, since “life is changing so fast these days, and the holidays may be the only time to really pay homage to tradition.”

A modern culinary sensibility drove otherwise traditional Christmases for Kate MacMurray, daughter of late actors June Haver and Fred MacMurray, who Kate describes as a devotee of Julia Childs. MacMurray’s winery, MacMurray Ranch in the Russian River Valley, produces the poised Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir served at the party. “We’d host an open house for 40-50 people on Christmas day and serve lamb, turkey and ham cooked by my parents, and wonderful wines. Everything was right from our garden, and we had a cattle ranch. So even then the focus was on fresh, local ingredients—which is still a theme I follow in my own house.”

**W**ith humorous flair, Jean-Charles announces dessert—a luscious crêpes flambées—and brandishes a sword to saber open another bottle of bubbly. By now, the table is bustling as guests mix and match wines with myriad dishes and admire the show-stopping white feather chandeliers that hang in the main room. The theme of white—white roses, white lamps, even white dog—evoke a wintry palette even as the California sun bathes the apartment.

Big, active parties are a natural for both Gina and Jean-Charles. “Growing up, my entire family gathered for the holidays, all generations,” he says. “It was playful, with games, long meals, good bottles of wine of course and always sleepovers with the cousins and everyone together. It was and is the most important time of year in our family.”

Gina concurs: “We would play games, like flag-football, in the yard for hours while the adults continued their conversations at the table, while watching us from inside,” she explains. “Today, it’s great for me to see the younger family members with their cousins and to feel what we felt in those days and to continue the traditions.”

As the party winds down, the group retires to the couple’s Louis XV sofa, glasses of wine and plates of California and French cheeses in hand. Even the spirited bulldog, Frenchie, who managed to discreetly vacuum up a few prized morsels from the table, seems content as he flops next to Gina’s feet.

“Now that I’m married, celebrating the holidays has only gotten better,” Gina reflects. “I now have more family to celebrate with and new traditions to incorporate, but the significance is the same. I am fortunate enough that my husband’s family shares the same philosophies as mine. We all help cook, we all add our own special dish to the table and feel so fortunate to have so much love in one place.” **ME**

*For recipes and wine pairings: article on page 80.*



## Gina Gallo's TIPS FOR EASY HOLIDAY ENTERTAINING

**Fresh, seasonal flowers or evergreens make for beautiful additions.** Simple, natural décor is always tasteful.

**Keep it simple, prepare as much ahead of time as possible,** in order to maximize the amount of time you can spend with guests—and your guests will feel more comfortable seeing their host relaxed.

**Seat guests next to someone they do not know;** guests will leave with new friends. Remember place cards are very helpful.

**Appetizers are important,** especially if you are serving wine or bubbles. It allows for guests to try a variety

of foods and keeps them satisfied while waiting for dinner.

**Something flop? It happens to all of us—if you don't let it ruin your evening,** neither will your guests. Remember, entertaining isn't about perfection. Most people are happy to simply be part of the fun.

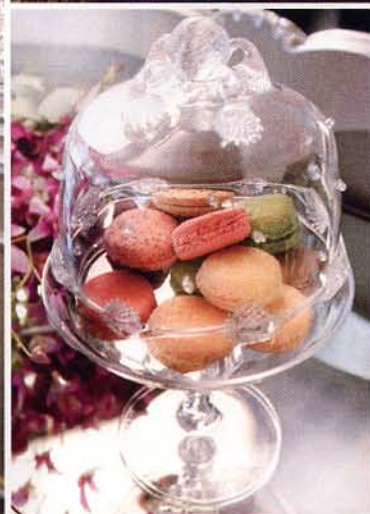
**Stay in your comfort zone.** Consider coming up with a list of “house specialties”—those tried-and-true favorites you can always count on to please guests. If you wish to experiment, complement your house specialties with dishes you've wanted to try.

**Don't forget wine and proper stemware—**Riedel stemware is a great choice. Plan ahead for what wine or beverages you will serve when guests arrive and with dinner.

**Have a designated bar area where guests can serve themselves while mingling.** Offer a variety of foods that make meals friendly to any guest should they have dietary restrictions or preferences (vegetarian, allergies, etc.).

**Remember the ambiance.** Lighting: candlelight creates warmth. Music: something universal; i.e. Rat Pack swing tunes, classical, etc. Most importantly create a playlist that doesn't need tending to.





Opposite page: Longtime Gallo family friend Chris Johnson joins Jean-Charles, Mary, Gia and Gina at the table.

Clockwise from above: Sabering another bottle of bubbly is tricky business in an apartment full of crystal; Gina's childhood friends Kelly Mendoza, Jackie Roehlke and Nicki Vasquez relax at the end of the meal; a cheese course showcasing artisanal cheeses of California and France reflects the hosting couples' tastes; Jean-Charles and Kelly imbibe the Louis Bouillot Grande Reserve; elegant treats under glass.

