

Would You Go to the Wine Equivalent of a Tupperware Party?

By Elin McCoy - Dec 8, 2014

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This is a serious question. When a major wine producer embraces the Tupperware selling model, an at-home wine-buying party just might be in your future.

“It’s the social marketing way of selling wine, friends to friends,” says Jean-Charles Boisset, proprietor of the Boisset Collection, his family’s group of 20-odd wineries in California and France. He started quietly testing the in-home tasting experience idea about a year and a half ago with his new venture, Boisset Wine Living. Now, based on its success, he’s aiming to expand.

“Our program is like Tupperware’s, but it’s high end,” Boisset explains over lunch in New York, during a stop off on his way to Burgundy’s annual Hospice de Beaune auction.

Noted for innovations like putting a screwcap on a \$200 grand cru Burgundy, he explains the Boisset Wine Living concept as we sip his bright, fruity JCB #69 Brut Rose Cremant de Bourgogne, a good fizz for the price (\$20).

One of its “wine ambassadors” is New Yorker Liz Howng, who works in corporate finance. Several evenings a month she grabs her Boisset Wine Living kit of Riedel glasses, wine fact sheets, and corkscrew -- and heads out to pour and talk about Boisset wines for friends of friends at their apartments.

How it Works

Because of byzantine U.S. wine regulations, the host orders the tasting package of five or six wines through an ambassador like Howng, purchasing one of the eight offered (or a custom mix) at a deep discount (prices range from \$99 to \$389). After the tasting, guests can order bottles of their favorites -- and any wines in the Boisset Wine Living catalogue -- again through her. Howng scoops up a 25 percent commission on sales. Wines are shipped directly to customers from a winery warehouse in California.

“Not everyone can experience our tasting rooms in Napa or Burgundy,” says Boisset, who’s married to

winemaker Gina Gallo. “But everyone should have their lips in it.”

The bottom line, though, is how good are the wines? Those offered by other in-home tasting schemes have been seriously low level, typically generic bulk wine.

Boisset Wine Living draws from wineries owned by the Boisset family, such as DeLoach, Raymond, Buena Vista, Lockwood, and JCB. All make solid wines, with a few standouts. The best are the single vineyard pinots and chardonnays from Sonoma’s DeLoach, Raymond’s expensive cabernet blend Generations (\$165), and the good value JCB cremants.

Try Before You Buy

Many of the wines are exclusives, available only in one of their California tasting rooms or made for the program. Party guests sometimes pay more for those that are also available in a retail outlet, but, hey, they get to try before they buy.

M. Boisset’s next project? He points to the gold-plated starburst brooch on his lapel, which he designed. He’ll be launching a line of expensive wines in bottles that double as decanters, each decorated with a copy of one of his 24 brooches, which will also be for sale.

Pairing wine and jewelry? “Wine,” says Boisset, “should be about having a blast.”