

# Napa Valley *Register*

## Boisset collaborates with India's Fratelli Vineyards

Mira Advani Honeycutt Jul 19, 2018 Updated 18 hrs ago



There's no limit to Jean-Charles Boisset's enthusiasm for exploring new territories. His global reach now extends to India. The French-born vintner, whose Boisset Collection operates 25 wineries in California, France, Canada and England, is bullish on the emerging Indian wine market.

"When you have such a complex food you have a great palate and when you have a great palate you have propensity to enjoy great wines," Boisset said.

On a recent weekend in Napa Valley, Boisset introduced his Franco-Indian-American collaboration with Fratelli Vineyards, first in an intimate setting and then with an Indian-flavored bash at Raymond Vineyards that could rival a Bollywood star's wedding.

At his side the entire time was vintner Kapil Sekhri, founder and director of Fratelli Vineyards in the minuscule Indian wine region of Akluj. In all, the two winemakers introduced three wines — a white and a red named J'Noon and a sparkling wine called JCB No. 47 all produced at Fratelli.

J'Noon means passion/obsession in Urdu language, and there was certainly an abundance of passion in both men for their newly formed partnership.

“Indian soil, French planting and Jean-Charles’ blending,” said Sekhri, musing that you can’t get much more global than that.

A limited quantity of these wines is just hitting the Indian market but closer to home a small supply is available through Raymond Vineyards’ tasting room in Napa Valley. Boisset also hopes to place a few bottles in upscale Indian restaurants in the U.S.

The wines were uncorked with much fanfare at a Friday night media dinner hosted by Boisset and his wife Gina Gallo at their Wappo Hill villa (former residence of the late Robert and Margrit Mondavi), a home decorated with surrealist art and stylistic furnishings worthy of a modern art museum collection.

“You’ll be tasting an expression of our passion,” Boisset declared welcoming Kapil and his wife Puja along with guests seated at the long table lined along side the indoor pool. “This is just the beginning, there will be many more evolutions,” he said.

Indeed, the evening resonated a Franco-California meets India’s vibrancy mood with Boisset’s portfolio of wines poured from all three regions and paired with chef Victor Scargle’s eclectic menu prepared from produce grown in Boisset’s organic and biodynamic estate gardens.

“He has the tenacity of being a trailblazer,” said Gallo of her husband as we savored the 2012 JCB No. 3, a pinot noir blend of Burgundy’s Côte de Nuits and Sonoma’s Russian River Valley created by the couple.

The following day, a Bollywood-style soirée was staged at Raymond Vineyard’s scenic gardens where some 200 guests were welcomed with Indian and U.S. flags fluttering high at the winery’s entrance. There was more of J’Noon and JCB wines served with a lavish spread of progressive Indian fare including curries, biryanis and appetizers prepared by chef Sujan Sarkar of San Francisco’s tony Rooh restaurant.

J’Noon wines are produced at Fratelli Vineyards in Akluj, the region’s only winery, located on the right bank of Nira River, which is over 200 miles southeast of Mumbai in India’s western State of Maharashtra.

“The land we have chosen, nothing was grown there since mankind,” said Sekhri. “It was just volcanic barren land,” an area that experiences a diurnal shift of some 20 degrees. The 240 acres are planted on well-drained soil to 12 grape varieties imported from France. Under the direction of Italian winemaker Piero Masi, the winery produces 220,000 cases annually. About 60,000 cases are dedicated to budget brands such as Sidus and Vero produced from sourced grapes. The company also produces a red and a white wine label for Steven Spurrier called Master Selection.

“We have Sette, a premium wine from Fratelli, and now we have J’Noon,” Sekhri declared. Priced at \$60, the J’Noon red stands out as India’s first luxury wine.

The 2016 J’Noon white, fermented in stainless steel tanks and aged for 12 months in French oak barrels, is a blend of chardonnay (60 percent) and Sauvignon Blanc (40 percent). The crisp wine with a delicious mouthfeel is a riot of stone fruit flavors, singing with a vibrancy of lime and jasmine.

The Cabernet Sauvignon-driven 2016 J’Noon red is blended with Petit Verdot, marcelan and a splash of sangiovese. Stainless steel fermented and aged for 24 months in French oak barrels, the deep-hued wine is lush with black fruits on the palate with well-knit tannins and a lingering silky finish.

The non-vintage sparkling JCB No. 47 is 100 percent Chardonnay and named for 1947, the year India achieved its Independence from the British Empire. The seductively crisp bubbly rings with minerality and tropical fruit flavors, layered with traces of toasty brioche. The wine is fermented in French oak barrels going through a secondary fermentation in the bottle as per methode traditionnelle vinification.

The trio of three wines produced in limited quantities (200 cases of each) was enthusiastically received by the guests, many of whom were not familiar with India’s wine production.

Before the parties got into full swing, I talked with Sekhri, whose soft-spoken persona is the yin to Boisset’s unbridled high-octane yang.

What was the genesis of this collaboration?

It all began when Boisset visited India in January 2017, recalled Sekhri, who has been importing wines from Boisset’s French and California portfolios. Tasting events held in New Delhi and Mumbai included Boisset’s wines and the local Fratelli collection.

“We had no implication that we might have a collaboration,” Sekhri recalled. Boisset tasted Fratelli wines and was impressed. The initial tasting led to barrel tastings of all 2016 Fratelli wines.

“He liked what he tasted — Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Sangiovese, Cabernet Franc,” Sekhri said. Boisset, being an expert blender, was on a roll blending an array of Fratelli wines. The team started at lunch and continued late into the night on a marathon blending session.

“I was enamored by the Chardonnay/Sauvignon Blanc blend,” said Boisset. “It’s such a winner — you blend lily of the valley, iris flower and little bit of peonies and white roses together. It’s so unusual for us in France.” French laws prohibit the practice of such a blend.

Satisfied with their creations, Boisset sent the samples to his winemaking team in Napa Valley who fine-tuned the wines in collaboration with Masi based in India.

“It has started with blending but for next vintages we’re taking input on fermentation from Jean-Charles and his team,” Sekhri said.

Boisset was also impressed by Fratelli’s winery and its meticulous operation as well as the vineyards, the clonal structure and overall viticultural practice. “The shape of the vines and the pruning technique is tight similar to Europe,” Boisset said. “It’s not a surprise because Kapil’s advisor is Italian.”

During his week-long stay in India, Boisset visited Akluj as well as Nasik Valley, which is the wine region northeast of Mumbai, home to some 20 small wineries.

The trip made Boisset a believer in India, a country he said holds great promise. “We are here to establish a long term business with Kapil so our children can continue. If you’re short-term oriented, don’t come to India.”