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SPIRITS ▶

Boisset's Beau Monde

French vigneron Jean-Charles Boisset, owner of France's third largest wine group, has graced Haute Living and Power lists in the US. With his impeccable sense of fine living, he's in India to infuse some Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in our lives.

This suave, articulate Frenchman with an American accent is the ultimate oenophile. Born in 1969 in the tiny village of Vougeot (population 176) in Burgundy, in the winery founded in 1961 by his parents Jean-Claude and Claudine Boisset, Jean-Charles Boisset was literally raised in the vineyard. "I was raised making wine. Our garden was the vineyard, and my playground was the winery," says the Tom Ford-suited and Louboutin-clad Jean-Charles, in India to introduce fine wines from five of his wineries, through an exclusive tie-up with the Nashik-based Fratelli Vineyards.

As proprietor of the Boisset Collection – which happens to be France's third largest wine group – he owns a total of 26 wineries, from Burgundy, the birthplace and nucleus of the famed Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, to the South of France, the Côtes-du-Rhône, all the way to Napa Valley,



The stylish Jean-Charles Boisset likes Tom Ford suits and Christian Louboutin shoes

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Clockwise from top left: The JCB Crémant No. 69; Barrel room at the JCB winery in California; DeLoach Vineyards in California; The JCB Crémant Brut Rosé No. 69; Tasting Room at JCB winery, Santa Rosa, where the DeLoach Vineyards are located



Sonoma, and Russian River in California, producing a total of 86 million bottles a year. (That's the total consumption of wine in India.) He points to a bottle. "This is the Grand Cru of Burgundy, one of our most high-end wines, and it typically goes for €300 a bottle," he says. "The world comes to Burgundy as it's the Vatican, the Mecca, the Taj Mahal of wine." As a teenager, Jean-Charles became fascinated with wine-making and joined the family business. He grew the business from a dozen wineries in Burgundy, to encompass wineries in Lyon, Côtes-du-Rhône, and the South of France.

His first Californian acquisition was the DeLoach vineyards, in Sonoma County (he's also married to Gina Gallo, granddaughter of the founder of the world's second largest wine company, E & J Gallo Winery). "Our latest purchase was Buena Vista, which is the oldest winery between Napa and Sonoma," says Jean-Charles. "And what we are doing with Kapil today (Kapil Sekhri is the Managing Director of Fratelli Vineyards), is a collection of five wineries, each with a lot of history." So as

part of his Indian offering, Kapil is importing the Côtes-du-Rhône from the Chartreuse de Bonpas, a Rhone Valley winery from 1318 where the Pope is believed to have stayed for three centuries. Also on the list is a Chablis from J. Moreau & Fils, located just outside the town of Chablis, and renowned the world over. The third wine is from Maison Fortant from 3,000 hectares in the South of France, in the Languedoc area. The fourth comes from the "heart of Burgundy", the JCB by Jean-Charles Boisset, the Crémant Brut No. 21 and the Crémant Brut Rosé No. 69. "These two bottles bear my initials, and the sparkling wines are the trendiest wines in the world at the moment," says Jean-Charles. "Also, '69 is my year of birth, and it's a good year – in France we call it *l'année érotique*, named after the song by Serge Gainsbourg." And lastly, from the Californian DeLoach vineyards, Indians will be able to buy the California Chardonnay, California Pinot Noir, and California Zinfandel.

Kapil says they will import 14,000 bottles this year, and double the number by next year, initially through hotels, with prices between ₹1,800-5,000 for a bottle of Chablis. "The Crémant is the underdog," says Jean-Charles (the JCB No. 69 Crémant de Bourgogne is his fave), "And the sparkling market is growing. It's sexy; people like to celebrate with it. I look forward to showing the pyramid of the wine scale – wines at ₹10,000, ₹15,000, and ₹20,000, so people understand Grand Cru, Premier Cru, the hierarchy and aspiration of wine. It's like when you go to a jewellery shop or you see haute couture."

The man for whom wine is about sensuality, eloquence, and charisma, owes his success to his passion. "It's not a story about size, but about loving what you do," he says. "Loving wine, food, and regions. Wanting to discover, wanting to be audacious. And wanting to go beyond the *fait établi* and be willing to take risks." The man who's introduced biodynamic farming in his vineyards, even designs jewellery (he's wearing a pair of Queen Bee cufflinks) and socks, is fascinated with India. "Culturally, Indian people have the taste – and that is why we had to be here," he says. Spoken like a man of the world and a son of the soil. ■

