

Sommers gather around the "Tree of Life" sculpture with Jean-Charles Boisset (bottom row, second from right) at the JCB Tasting Salon in Healdsburg, CA.



THE SOMM JOURNAL  
**CAMP**

THE COLOR OF

# crushed grapes

**DELOACH VINEYARDS** CELEBRATES THE MANY PROFILES OF PINOT NOIR AND CHARDONNAY DURING A TWO-DAY SOMM CAMP

by Michelle Ball / photos by Jeremy Ball

Harvest is the most thrilling time of year to visit any winery: There's a palpable excitement in the air as clusters of plump fruit cover sorting tables and forklifts zip by with barrels and bins as if engaged in a game of Tetris. All the while, fermentations bubble, filling the space with an ether of sweet, crushed grapes.

Fast-forward a few years, and there's nothing quite like tasting a wine you had a hand—or foot—in making. To help foster these experiences, *The SOMM Journal* and DeLoach Vineyards hosted an esteemed group of sommeliers and buyers from across the country for the third annual Harvest Somm Camp.

Located in the Russian River Valley and a member of the Boisset Collection portfolio, DeLoach Vineyards works with a remarkable number of growers throughout Sonoma and Marin counties to produce wines from meticulously farmed vineyards, each with a distinct climate and soil profile. Reflecting proprietor Jean-Charles Boisset's contagious enthusiasm for education, the two-day tour was chock-full of comparative tastings, vineyard tours, on-the-job winemaking activities, elaborate feasts, and of course, a plethora of releases to taste.

## day 1

The first wine to fill our glasses was the Le Royal, a 2015 Blanc de Noir that tickled the nose with aromas of fresh pastry and lemon zest, as we congregated around the "Earth & Sky" bronze statue in one of DeLoach's many gardens. Jeff Colton of Boisset explained that the sculpture symbolizes the company's deep-rooted commitment to the land while reaching for the stars—a guiding principle that would become increasingly evident in the hours to come.

The DeLoach family was one of the first pioneers in the Russian River Valley, where they focused on Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Zinfandel. In 2003, the Boissets purchased the estate and implemented the sustainable farming techniques seen here today. Like many of its vineyards, DeLoach is certified Biodynamic and organic, and while the health of the land and its surrounding environment is central to the company's philosophy, the fundamental intent is to produce a better glass of wine. "The less we have to do in the winery to allow the grapes to speak for themselves, the better," Colton explained.

Ken Hoernlein, Vice President of Sales for Boisset Collection, next set out to discuss "the birthplace of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay" beginning with a tour of Burgundy. The Boisset Collection, which now owns 25 properties across California and Burgundy, originated in 1961 when Jean-Claude and Claudine Boisset purchased the Les Evocelles vineyard in Gevrey-Chambertin.

Hoernlein explained that when Jean-Charles Boisset joined the business, the négociant winery produced about 300,000 cases annually. When Boisset posed a question to his father on why they "would have [their] name on something [they] wouldn't necessarily drink," the decision was made to make domaine-quality wines as a négociant from that point on. "To do that, you had to make a very serious commitment



*Standing on a knoll surrounded by native flora, fruit trees, beehives, and boxes sheltering baby barn owls, Jeff Colton of Boisset describes the principles of Biodynamic farming and the importance of biodiversity on the DeLoach estate.*



***In a comparison of Old World and New World profiles, DeLoach highlighted its estate and vineyard partners throughout Sonoma and Marin counties.***



***Somms examine a 3D map as Brian Maloney describes the geography of the North Coast.***

to your winemaking and your equipment, as well as long-term contracts with your growers," Hoernlein added.

Like California—though its story unfolded millions of years earlier—Burgundy can credit much of its terroir to upheaval. Tectonic shifts lifted the valley floor, which was previously marshland, and exposed ancient sea beds throughout the region. "Often Burgundy soil is much like a marble cake where you have clay and limestone mixed together on the same site, and if you took a slice of it, it would look swirled," Hoernlein explained.

After tasting through ten wines from the Chablis 1er Cru to the Clos de la Roche Grand Cru, we were introduced to the wines of DeLoach by Director of Sonoma Winemaking Brian Maloney. Although playing the second act to a Burgundy tasting would likely intimidate most winemakers, Maloney didn't skip a beat. Listening to him share his acute knowledge and understanding of wine, geology, and chemistry is akin to hearing a master violinist at work.

"Sonoma County and Burgundy are not the same place. We are much, much further south, so we have a more temperate climate throughout most of the year and our day length is shorter, but we do have some similar influences

in terms of our soil bases," Maloney said, noting that more than 30 soil series can be found throughout the county, ranging from marine-based sandstone to clay loams and volcanic soils. Like Burgundy, the best vineyard sites are also planted on well-drained soils with a poor holding capacity for nutrients and water.

In addition, Hoernlein notes that although Sonoma County is further south, Burgundy technically maintains more growing degree days due to its continental climate. The cold Pacific Ocean has a profound effect on nighttime temperatures, causing shifts of up to 40 degrees. "That's one of the secrets to the North Coast: That diurnal shift means the acid retention is huge," Maloney said. "Nighttime is where the acid goes to die, so if you have warm nights, the acid goes down. If you have cool nights, all that acid is regenerated. That does mean we tend to have higher sugars and higher acids compared to Burgundy." It made sense to the somms in attendance: With more sugar and resulting alcohol, the California wines balance out their acidity, resulting in greater power overall.

"There are all different terroir and different ripening styles, and what we're trying to do here at DeLoach is spotlight that," Maloney continued as he pointed



***The somms tasted through an extensive lineup of Burgundies from the Boisset Collection.***

to images of the winery's grower partners—each with a corresponding jar of soil—displayed on the walls. "We try and make sure that our wines really represent the terroir and that distinctive personality that's coming out of each vineyard."

After an enlightening introduction, we were swept away to visit the new JCB Tasting Salon in downtown Healdsburg. Upon arrival, Boisset warmly greeted us with bubbles to reset our palates. The emerald-green front room is adorned with jewelry, velvet, and leopard prints that surround the "Tree of Life," the Salon's iconic gold sculpture that repurposed 50-year-old Napa Valley rootstocks. "Our hope is to draw guests into a world of surrealism," Boisset mused. Though

conversations with the inventive entrepreneur trend toward the playful and imaginative, his company's projects and portfolio are undoubtedly executed with precision and careful consideration.

During our visit, we sampled two Crémant de Bourgogne wines: JCB N°65, made from 100% Pinot Noir in honor of Boisset's parents' anniversary; and JCB N°39, a 100% Chardonnay produced in celebration of the year his grandparents were married. Noting that Burgundy was once a significant producer of sparkling wine, Boisset said his intent with these bottlings was to meld the past with the present.

After we finished our bubbles, a mystery



**Jean-Charles Boisset serves somms the JCB N°3 Pinot Noir.**

sacrilege! A lot of people wanted to kill me," Boisset said with amusement.

According to Boisset, the number "3" in the wine's name signifies the marriage of two worlds, as well as the notion that their



**The group stands with hands raised during dinner as Jean-Charles Boisset leads them in what he calls the "Burgundy Song," a version of a drinking tune dating back to 1905.**

Pinot Noir was poured as Boisset challenged the somms to determine its origins. They grappled with whether to characterize it as New World or Old World before Boisset hinted, "Well, what if, we bring the best of what two worlds have to offer?"

He then revealed the wine as the JCB N°3 Pinot Noir, first conceived in 2009. Wines from three vineyards were crafted in Burgundy before being flown on Air France Flight 084 to San Francisco; upon arrival, they were driven in armored trucks to DeLoach Vineyards, where the blend was completed with fruit from five vineyard lots in Sonoma County. "The ultimate

unity is greater than the sum of their parts. "We wanted to bring the mouthfeel of Burgundy—the earth, the depth, the terroir, maybe a little restraint—and a little bit of the flamboyance through the aromatic expression of Sonoma," he explained.

The eventful afternoon closed at DeLoach Vineyards with a four-course farm-to-table dinner featuring ingredients from the winery's estate garden (aka the Theater of Nature). In addition to sharing pairings from DeLoach, Hoernlein challenged the somms' palates with more mysterious wines from the Boisset Collection's elaborate cellar.



**Emily Anderson, Wine Director for Tres Market Foods in Houston, TX, shows off her harvest attire at the DeLoach estate.**

## day 2

Back on the shuttle for an early-morning start, the somms attempted to tally up the wines we tasted the previous day (my notes put us at 36, give or take a few). By 7:30 a.m., our group was dressed in safety attire for that morning's harvest at the DeLoach estate. In our designated rows, we harvested just over a half-ton of La Tâche clone Pinot Noir. Roughly the size of a fist, the tiny black clusters burst with intense flavor, making for an ideal breakfast filled with antioxidants and tannin protein.

Back at the winery, we dispersed into small groups to execute various tasks. Somms sorted through cold clusters of handpicked fruit as others harnessed up for punch-downs, and after some semi-serious manual labor, it was time to turn back to tasting.

**Sami Seglin, Wine Director for Hog Island Oyster Co. in San Francisco, unloads her first bin of grapes.**





*Participants sample fermentations at various stages as Brian Maloney describes the process on a microbiological level.*

As Maloney invited us to sample wines at various stages of fermentation, a lively discussion ensued as he described the activity taking place on a microbiological level. DeLoach allows every fermentation to take off naturally with indigenous yeast, which adds a richness to the wine before local *saccharomyces* swoop in like a “big beach ball,” Maloney explained. He added that texture in wine is really about dead yeast, or nano-proteins, breaking down during fermentation. “When you have a lot more bodies, that’s a smaller surface-to-volume ratio and there’s a lot more of those nano-proteins coming out,” he continued. “So essentially you’ve built up a base mouthfeel into the wine that you wouldn’t have otherwise if it was just straight *saccharomyces*.”

Maloney went on to describe the battle that ensues: “*Saccharomyces* is incredibly efficient at gobbling up sugar *really* fast. That’s the goal: It wants to deprive everything else of sugar and then start polluting its own environment [with alcohol] to kill everyone else off,” he explained. “So in the end, all that’s left is *saccharomyces* in the tank. *That’s* what we want.”

After a well-earned lunch in the Theater of Nature, where we refueled on bowls of gazpacho made from the estate’s tomatoes, cucumbers, and watermelons, we filed back on the shuttle to visit Saitone, one of the oldest vineyard plantings in the Russian River Valley. Located on Olivet Road, the property was planted in 1895 as

a traditional field blend: a mix of primarily Zinfandel, Alicante Bouschet, and Carignan with small amounts of French Colombard, Petit Bouschet, and Grand Noir.

As we walked the 17-acre vineyard with Taylor Ramsey, Manager of Grower Relations for Boisset Collection, we sampled



*The somms sort La Tâche clone Pinot Noir from the morning harvest.*

the 2014 Saitone Vineyard Zinfandel. The wine, which burst with dusty aromas of hibiscus tea and tobacco with plummy red fruit, was incredibly mouthwatering. “That’s one of the best things about this site: the acidity,” Ramsey said.

We then traversed back to DeLoach Vineyards for a growers’ tasting with the owners of Pennacchio Vineyard, located in Sebastopol Hills, and van der Kamp Vineyard; based in the Sonoma Mountain AVA, the latter holds the distinction of being one of the oldest Pinot Noir plantings in California.

“These are all drought years, and the middle wine [2015] is going to be the



*The camp’s last feast unfolded in the original cellars of the historic Buena Vista Winery, which was established in 1857.*

## A Trio of Select Wines

### J. Moreau & Fils Chablis 1er Cru Vaucoupin

This happens to be the southernmost Premier Cru vineyard in Chablis with a high concentration of Kimmeridgian soil. “You get a ripeness off this vineyard that you don’t get with any other Premier Cru Chablis,” Hoernlein said. Flinty and chockfull of citrus with subtle hints of guava and salty-biscuit notes, the wine fills out in the mid-palate with a slight hint of lemon curd balanced by mouthpuckering acid.

### DeLoach 2015 Maboroshi Vineyard Pinot Noir

Higher-toned with pronounced blueberry and pomegranate fruit with a savory backbone. During the comparative tasting on Day 1, the murmurs around the room proved this was one of the favorites. “It’s juicy, lingering, and has more in the ripeness of the palate,” said Joel Arias Quito, Sommelier at La Mar in San Francisco.

### DeLoach 2016 van der Kamp Vineyard Pinot Noir

Savory, wild strawberry; blonde tobacco; and hints of geranium emerge alongside firm tannins. The prickly texture on the finish is reminiscent of fresh raspberries.

**Siblings  
Malia and  
Ulysses van  
der Kamp.**



most severe," Maloney said as we tasted the 2014–2016 vintages of Pinot Noir from these two distinctive sites. Pennacchio Vineyard, which sits on Goldridge sandy loam soil, was planted entirely to Clone 115 in 2000 by Joe Pennacchio. Now in his seventies, Pennacchio personally farms the original 5-acre vineyard, and his son, Mark, recently added a 2-acre parcel of clone 667.

Due to the severe drought in 2015, yields plummeted from an average of 2.5 to 3 tons per acre to only 1.1 tons. "So, you knew it was going to bad—what did you do as far as farming was concerned knowing that it could be disastrous to get nothing?" asked Ryan Gerni, Wine Buyer at Davidsons Liquor in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. "You just live with it," Mark replied. "Once the berries are set, that's what you get. That's farming."

We then transitioned to sampling the wines of van der Kamp Vineyard with siblings Malia (a former somm) and Ulysses van der Kamp. Sitting at an elevation of 1,250 feet above sea level on the west side of the Mayacamas, the 25-acre vineyard comprises numerous Pinot Noir clones planted in various clay-loam soil series. "It's a fascinating vineyard with a lot of micro-terroirs," Maloney said as Ulysses passed around clusters of fruit harvested that morning from some of the oldest Pinot Noir vines in the state.

"Between our vineyard and Pennacchio, I think they're more similar than dissimilar," Malia said, adding that other DeLoach wines from the Russian River Valley tend to have a more opulent fruit profile "as opposed to us, where we have that mountain fruit with more pine and tannin flavors." Maloney noted that he believes van der Kamp wines are the most Barolo-like of the Pinot Noirs they work with due



**Joe  
Pennacchio  
and his son,  
Mark.**

to their textural quality and their floral, herbaceous characteristics.

We said our goodbyes to the growers, Maloney, and DeLoach Vineyards and set off toward Buena Vista Winery for our final feast. The Boisset family purchased this historic winery in 2011, retrofitting the

beautiful yet waning estate and breathing new life into the property. Buena Vista holds great significance for Jean-Charles, as this was the first California winery he visited as a child in 1980. He still recalls sampling Buena Vista wines from paper cups with his grandparents in a nearby hotel room, as Jean-Charles was only 11 at the time.

As we sampled exotic wines from Buena Vista—including Valdiguié, Chabono, Angelica, and a joint project from India—in the cellar of the oldest premium winery in California, we couldn't help but take stock of where we were. Gerni even presented us with a Cabernet Franc from his home state of Colorado, expressing our shared sentiments in a final toast: "This is truly what makes our business awesome. Cheers to everyone!" **\$J**

## RUSSIAN RIVER SOMM CAMPERS

**Emily Anderson**, Wine Director, Tres Market Foods, Houston

**Rafe Gabel**, Senior Vice President of Restaurant Operations, Puccini Group, San Francisco

**Ryan Gerni**, Sommelier, Davidsons Liquor, Highlands Ranch, CO

**Phil Kang**, owner of Pearson's Wine & Spirits, Washington, D.C.

**TC Leroy**, General Manager, PRHYME: Downtown Steakhouse, Tulsa, OK

**Joseph Mayton**, Beverage Director, Rooh, San Francisco

**Vincent McGrath**, Dallas Country Club, Dallas

**Brian Munck**, Food & Beverage Manager, St. Regis, San Francisco

**Joel Arias Quito**, Head Sommelier, La Mar, San Francisco

**Tim Ryll**, Bar Director, Four Corners, Chicago

**Sami Seglin**, Wine Buyer, Hog Island Oyster Co., San Francisco

**Kori Tafoya**, Managing Partner, Royal Palm Tapas, Atlantic Beach, FL



**At Saitone Vineyard, planted in 1895 as a typical field blend, the somms sampled Carignan and hunted for white grapes.**