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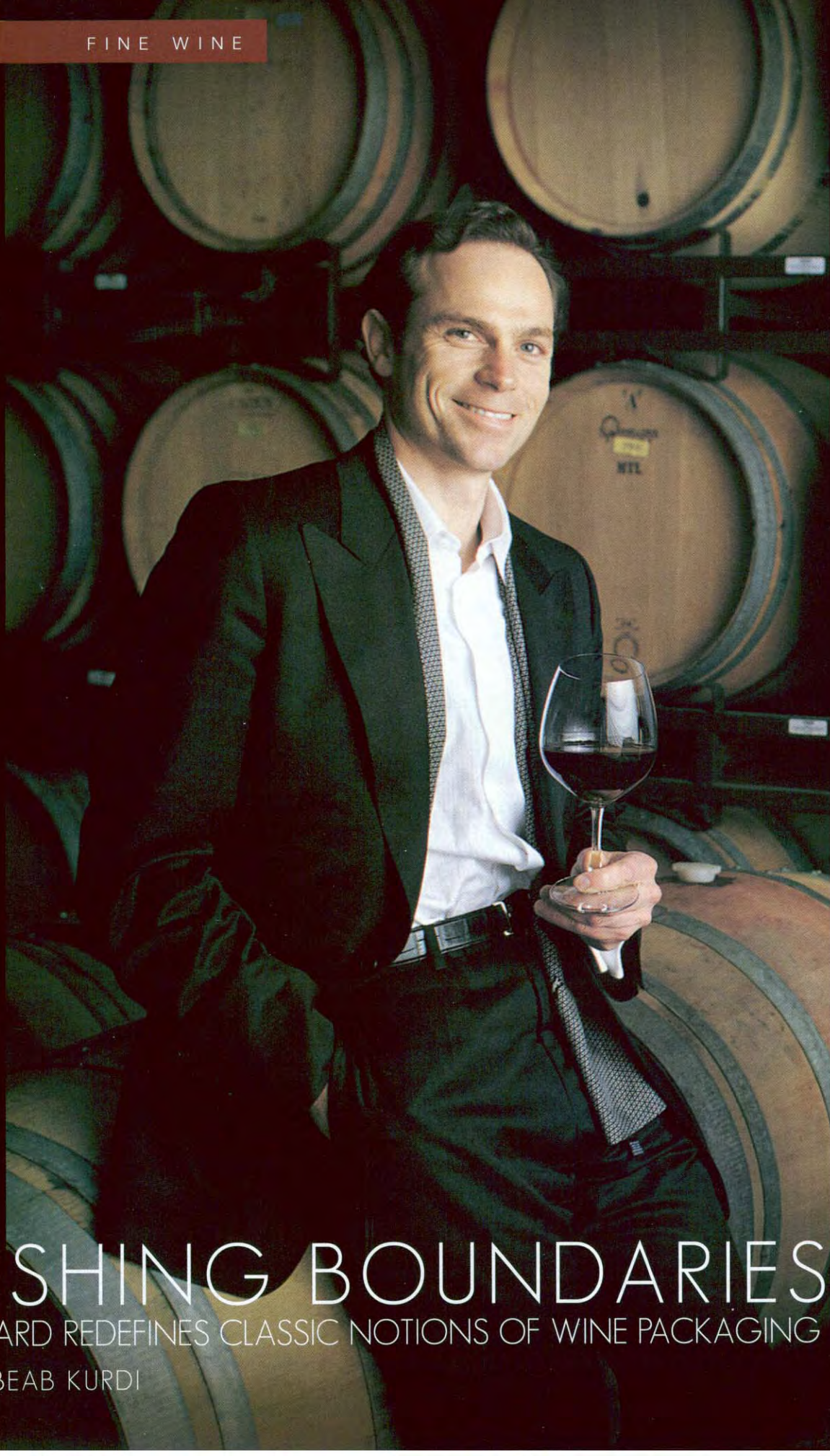
BOISSET
FAMILY
ESTATES
REDEFINES
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THE SPICE
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GUIDE TO
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PUSHING BOUNDARIES

VINEYARD REDEFINES CLASSIC NOTIONS OF WINE PACKAGING

BY HABEAB KURDI



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BOISSET VINEYARDS AND MELISSA HOFF WINERY

Jean-Charles Boisset awakens enthralled. Boisset, bearing resemblance to his grapes about to burgeon into great wines, bursts with enthusiasm and determination. At the forefront of his mind, he hopes the wine world wakes up invigorated with him as he creates world-changing designs and -renowned wines.

The wine maker's biodynamic farming methods don't stray from ensuring the elements are taken care of, starting in the soil, to the vats and into the bottle. However, the Boisset Family Estates president sees no point in preserving fine wine for later years if the same care and craftsmanship are not applied to the other elements, which led the award-winning brand away from standard glass to alternative packaging for its quality wine.

With vineyards in California and France, the company is bottling luscious wines in innovative packaging such as PET, Tetra Pak, aluminum, and even lightweight glass depending on the style of wine and region.

This summer, the company became

the first to launch a wine sold in the U.S. exclusively in eco-friendly PET plastic bottles.

"Everything bad going into the earth was the first focus," Boisset says excitedly. "Then we went to organic ink

“In today's time, we need to go much further.”

and recycled paper, [and] then [came] the obvious evolution—the packaging. We had to minimize packaging, the shipping waste, energy deployed. I can certainly be a better citizen in that, be a leader in this field. Everyone focuses on sustainability and organic.

"In today's time, we need to go much further."

To craft top-rated wines such as the elegantly glorious 2005 DeLoach OFS Pinot Noir (The New York Times' rated number one), Boisset bought the fading California DeLoach estate and revamped it into one of America's best. The palate-pleasuring Pinot still comes in traditional glass bottles (for now), yet it's becoming more the exception than the rule.

Whether mashed, fermented and weathered grapes become a wine to be savored in two decades or two days, every ounce can be produced and bottled better, according to Boisset.

This led him to two earth-moving, planet-friendly designs—new packaging for the always-anticipated annual release of Beaujolais Nouveau, and a new receptacle for the Mommessin Beaujolais Grande Reserve.

Amid falling leaves, cities and towns across the globe become hotbeds for tasting parties celebrating a new harvest of Beaujolais Nouveau—made from Gamay grapes each November.

Long ago in France, wine makers unveiled their annual Nouveau from the Beaujolais region so townspeople could judge what an aged wine from the same grape might be, and place an order for the vintage bottles. As the phenomenon grew, the release of the fresh wine being shipped worldwide was organized as French law decreed: The release will occur on the third Thursday of November (November 20 this year).

Every year at midnight, wine lovers from Hong Kong to Paris to Austin take pleasure in what is becoming an entrenched worldwide tradition.

Though much lighter and brighter than typical Beaujolais wine, the Nouveau is meant to be an uplifting red wine enjoyed slightly chilled. The lighter red will be even lighter now with its new packaging.

Every drop of Mommessin Beaujolais Nouveau bound for North America will come inside 750-millileter PET bottles. Boisset also took advantage of the eco-smart packaging by using it for other wines, such as the robust Yellow Jersey wine.

"The (Beaujolais Nouveau) parties are always so exciting, of course, and I'm really thrilled about (this year's harvest)," Boisset said. "It has dynamic characteristics—primary raspberry, cherry. It's always very fun. The beauty is PET chills a lot faster than glass; it uses less energy. There are all kinds of amazing attributes, which are of course being put forward thanks to that."

Surging with flavor, the Mommessin Beaujolais Grande Reserve recently released the world's first wine nestled inside chic aluminum 750-millileter bottles fitted with bluedot technology. Because the bottle cools quicker than usual, it has a nifty indication dot that signals the wine's readiness in the fridge and at the table. Not to mention the bottle can be recycled over and over again.

"The savings are enormous as far as carbon footprint and transportation. We are very excited about this; it's changing the wine world, taking people by surprise," Boisset said. "The consumer really wanted it, the trade is a little slower to adopt."

Like a drop moving from bud to bud, Boisset's excitement hops to the organic certification that recently made the DeLoach Vineyard ready to boost Boisset to another world first.

The DeLoach estate, stemming from the Russian River Valley, is producing the first organically farmed California Nouveau, which will be released for the first time on the same date as the Beaujolais Nouveau. The Californian twist of the Beaujolais classic is aptly named Fog Mountain, and will be the world's first organic wine to be packaged in highly reusable and recyclable PET.



GOOD FOR WINE
The Yellow Jersey bottle is made from lightweight PET plastic, which saves fuel in shipping.



GOOD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

This bottle is made from aluminum, which chills quickly, and preserves wine as well as glass.

"I think we're taking the wine world to new level. Not only PET, but something of a dimension of parallel is putting an organic wine in it. It's something no one has done either," Boisset said. "We could not be more excited."

While glass bottles still dominate the shelves and minds of wine enthusiasts, the hardest part of making the conscious switch will be changing the stereotype that wine in anything other than glass has a lower quality.

Quite the contrary, as Boisset points out that seventy percent of wine is drunk on the same day it is purchased. That fact moved Boisset to start using Tetra Pak, putting his French Rabbit wine in the bottles, with an organic version—Green Rabbit—to follow this winter.

Tetra Pak is made from paperboard and lined with aluminum on the inside, and is used for many alternatively packed products from orange juice to soy milk to chicken stock. The container actually limits oxidation of the wine better than glass does, and leaves only about ten percent of the carbon footprint of traditional bottling.

"It takes a lot of convincing to convince people it's still a great wine and a great thing; we have to explain it to everyone," Boisset said. "That's the big challenge we are facing."

"We are dedicated to that mission. This wine is every bit as good if not better. We were really the first one to do it; it takes a lot of guts, but it's a long-term commitment."

As the centuries-old family business continues to thrive (Jean-Charles' sister Nathalie Boisset helps run the business just as their parents before them), Boisset envisions America as the next great wine frontier—not to mention a driving force in biodynamic methods.

Boisset took over the downtrodden DeLoach Vineyard in California three years ago and immediately began work to make it certified organic. Before that, he transformed his father's winery in Burgundy into a fully biodynamic, small batch farm. Whichever corner of the planet he's in, Boisset sees wine uniting around the kitchen and globe.

"The future is very bright. We'll see an incredible growth in the U.S. and around the world," Boisset said. "I really believe it's only the beginning, and it's going to be thrilling to observe in 20 years. The wine business in America will probably double. Americans are drinking more every day. They've really started to understand wine. It's an ingredient and a food process, not just an alcoholic beverage."

"It's a phenomenal drink. Slowly but surely, [wine is] becoming part of a culture." ●

WARM UP TO CHILLED RED WINE

BY HABEAB KURDI

As a rambunctious child, Jean-Charles Boisset roamed his father's vineyards in their hometown of Burgundy, France.

The trek across rows of grapes led Boisset to take a much larger voyage into the wine world after he embarked for America and took ownership of the family estates in California, while his respected and renowned father, Jean-Claude Boisset, still runs and owns the family vineyards in France.

The Boisset Family Estates now own—or are partners of dozens of—wineries in France, Italy, Canada, and California. Boisset still checks in on every vineyard between worldwide ventures to promote the wines and global health.

"Everyone as earth lovers and people who adore the plant, we are very lucky as one people to be here to live with Mother Nature," Boisset said. "To maintain this we need to preserve it and be extremely responsible in the way we do it."

What Boisset is thrilled about most is changing misconceptions, and the chic new aluminum bottle the company is using for the Mommessin Beaujolais Grande Reserve.

With a muggy humidity still hugging the outdoors, it's tempting to reach for a colder wine, which in these parts almost always means a white variety.

Yet worldwide, red wine is enjoyed chilled. Where the notion or assumption came from that red wine should be served warm isn't quite clear. What is clear, habits are changing—slowly.

A cool red delights the spirits and elates the mind and body. Of course, almost as important, it's a beautiful compliment to a day of grilling or a night of barbecuing.

The best of the rest:

There's the PET plastic-bottled Yellow Jersey Pinot Noir, which is smooth going down, unlike the difficult climb in the Tour de France to win the coveted Yellow Jersey.

The exuberant Louis Bernard Bonus Passus boasts an erupting jam-like finish, tucked into PET as well with a twist cap. The PET bottles have an oxygen barrier called MonOxbar, which prevents oxidation and ensures quality.

Another sumptuous, ingenious design is the French Rabbit line of wines, which come in lightweight, flavor-protecting Tetra Pak.

