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Families meet in California's Napa Valley

Posted August 12th, 2009 by sean@bevix.com
 Source: Sean Ludford, BevX

Earlier this week it was announced that Boisset Family Estates had purchased Raymond Vineyard & Cellar in California's Napa Valley. The new caught me a bit by surprise as I had heard nothing of impending deal (although it was known that Kirin, the previous owner was looking to move some of their holdings) and Raymond has long been a favorite of ours.



The Boisset family has been a fixture in the French wine community for more than four decades. They have a diverse portfolio of more than 20 wineries in many of France's premier wine producing regions as well as wineries in Canada and California.

The Raymond's are a fixture in the Napa Valley being intricately involved in the famous wine zone's wine trade for five generations. They launched Raymond Vineyards in 1971 and have become one of the most reliable names in the California wine trade. Last season the Raymond's celebrated their 35th harvest at Raymond Vineyards.

I must admit to initially being a bit concerned. Would the Raymonds, one of the kindest and most genuine families in the California wine biz, still be intimately involved in the day-to-day operation of the winery? Would the wines change dramatically? These questions and many more swirled through my thoughts so I determined to go to the source. A couple of days ago I spoke with Jean-Charles Boisset, President of Boisset Family Estates, and Krisi Raymond, the newly-promoted Vice President of Raymond Vineyard & Cellar to get their unvarnished story.

Quickly I learned that this was far from a quick acquisition, as it may have seemed from an outsider's point of view. "We have been talking for about five years about all aspects of the business and a possible strategic alliance; it is a long standing relationship" says Jean-Charles. Boisset has been involved in successful partnerships in California with both DeLoach Vineyards and Lyeth in Sonoma County. To be involved in a Napa Valley winery has been a longtime desire for Boisset.

Well beyond the cache of being involved in the Napa Valley, Boisset was very attracted to the family aspect. "Families joining together is the way to go forward." This statement is given further emphasis as Jean-Charles related to me that the changes "...will reassert the role of the Raymond family."

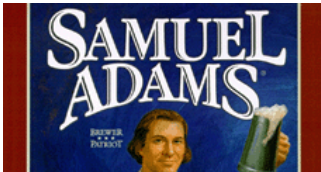
Krisi Raymond was audibly buoyant with the new partnership. "This is the outcome that we were hoping for," relates Raymond. The previous owners Kirin had made it clear for a period of years that they were seeking to sell their interest in the Napa winery. Fortunately the Japanese firm, who had purchased Raymond in 1989, worked closely with the Raymonds to find the "right" buyer. In the end the Raymonds got the buyer of their choice.

Krisi shared that while Kirin was a positive partner the long-term impending sale froze the operation in its tracks to some extent. "We have wanted to make improvements to our visitor experience and make other physical and personnel changes but we were reluctant to do so not knowing what our situation would be (in terms of a new owner)."

Boisset has a long-term vision for their new partnership with Raymond and by all accounts the both families are thrilled by the new challenges and possibilities. BevX will keep a finger on the pulse of the new ear at Raymond and I greatly look forward to my next visit.

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- My habits have not changed.
- I go out a bit less than I did a year ago.
- I go out far less than I did a year ago.
- I go out more than I did a year ago.