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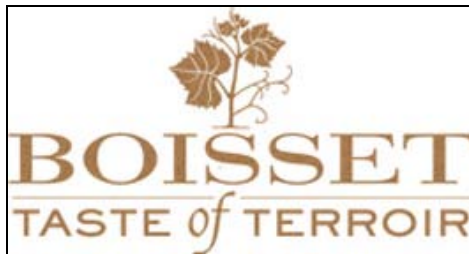
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Boisset Taste of Terroir

By James Knight



I aspired to an evening of classical music and chamomile tea, but instead, friends showed up with Champagne and we cut the rug until dawn. Or that's what I used to hear upon reading umpteen "about us" statements from wineries that aspire to make Pinot Noir in the style of Burgundy. Although its anglicized appellation has been spread thin to include anything from a hue on the painter's palette to jug wine for the plebeian palate, Bourgogne is the undisputed seat of one of the world's most noble wine grapes, and nearly every new-minted California vintner must needs make their pilgrimage to Rome. I mean Beaune.

Local markets, stocked full of local wine, often have only inexpensive Burgundy on offer, labeled "Pinot Noir." Curiously, this is the only context in which it translates as French for "don't bother." Burgundy is situated a sight too far east of Napa than my current travel budget allows, so I gassed up the auto and drove to the wine merchants of San Francisco, where a hundred and then some dropped on few bottles nets a promising sampling from the golden slope. And? How about that herbal tea. If there's hope that my West Coast tastes might reconcile with Old World terroir, it'd have to be at Boisset Taste of Terroir. Occupying the former Gallo tasting room on the east side of the Healdsburg plaza, French wine magnate Jean-Charles Boisset has taken the unusual step of offering samples from his Burgundian portfolio alongside corresponding varietals from De Loach Vineyards, which he has owned since 2003. The requisite merch is glossed with a Euro flair: angular JCB Private Collection chrome spittoons, Champagne sabers and swan-necked decanters. The soundtrack is Euro techno, but the black-clad staff exceeds continental expectations, being, to wit, welcoming, ready to share knowledge with unpretentious ease, and keeping a full house busily chatting over their pours at tables and at the bar.

Like a silky tea made from potpourri, the Bouchard Aîné & Fils' 2005 Beaune Premier Cru (\$40) followed the wind off of a cut hay field with subtle flavors of orange peel, rose hips and dried cranberry. The Jean-Claude Boisset 2004 Chambolle-Musigny (\$55) combined fine leather aromas with an equally supple finish tinged with tangerine skin, while the 2005 Gevrey-Chambertin (\$55) saw the first appearance of fresh, albeit tiny, fruits: wild raspberry perfume over a firm palate. Now, how does California cousin DeLoach Vineyards' 2007 O.F.S Pinot Noir (\$40) compare? Remarkably Burgundian, in style, but . . . with a gloss of delicious cherry fruit. That's the party that I want to be at.

Boisset Taste of Terroir, 320 Center St., Healdsburg, Daily 10:30am to 5:30pm; till 9pm Thursday-Saturday. Tasting fees from \$12 to \$100. 707.473.9707.

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