

Mr. Pinot Noir becomes wine packaging's prince

By Leslie Gevirtz
NEW YORK | Tue Nov 9, 2010 5:00am EST

(Reuters Life!) - Jean-Charles Boisset, scion of Burgundy's largest wine empire, has been called Mr. Pinot Noir for his enthusiasm for the grape that he tends on both sides of the Atlantic.

The 41-year-old, who spent much of his youth in California soaking up sun, surf and a business degree, lives his life by a few rules he learned as a child.

"We are the stewards of the earth - this I learned from my grandmothers," said Boisset, who married into a U.S. wine dynasty last year when he wed Gina Gallo.

During his childhood in Vougeot, France, one grandmother, a science teacher, "taught me about nature. About how important each part of nature is - the insects, the plants. And from her I really learned about organic and biodynamic farming."

His other grandmother taught him about recycling.

"I was a little kid, maybe eight years old and I was cooking with her in the kitchen. And I took a piece of foil and tossed it away." Miming being pulled by the ear, Boisset continued, "She came over to me and said, 'Jean-Charles what are you doing? This little piece of foil could be used many, many times. So instead of throwing it away, why don't you wash it instead.'"

That's where he learned about recycling.

Boisset's blue eyes light up recalling when he first learned that 70 percent of the some 31 billion bottles of wine drunk each year sell for \$10 or less per bottle. "And of that 70 percent, another 70 percent are drunk within half-an-hour to three hours.

"Now, about 70 percent of the cost of a bottle of wine is the packaging, the shipping, the labeling, all that. That means that the wine inside represents just 30 percent of the cost of that bottle.

"What if we could reduce that 70 percent and invest that money in the quality of the wine?" he said.

And that is pretty much what he has tried to do in a few of the vineyards his family owns in France and California.

Concentrating on reducing his company's carbon foot-print, he put Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay wines from the Languedoc-Roussillon region into liter-sized (1 liter = 0.22 Imp gallons) laminated paperboard cartons, the same kind of packaging from which children sip juice.

Boisset bottled Fog Mountain, a California Merlot, in one-liter polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles - the same kind of recyclable plastic bottles used for soda drinks.

For consumers, it means more wine in unbreakable, light-weight containers that are easy to take on a picnic. For Boisset, it means a drastic drop in shipping and packaging costs and reducing the carbon foot print.

And for his packaging prowess, Wine Enthusiast magazine gave him its first Innovator of the Year award in 2009.

Another recent venture involves putting small wooden barrels, lined with reusable plastic bladders filled with wines from his organically certified DeLoach Vineyards, on bars at restaurants so customers can have wine by the glass.

His 2010 Mommessin Beaujolais Nouveau to be released later this month - will be in lighter weight glass bottles.

"The important thing, in all of these different packages, is that the wine is a good quality. Quality is what differentiates us. And the packaging is a way, just like growing grapes organically and biodynamically, we can respect nature," he said.

Boisset thinks of his wine empire, which also has holdings in [Italy](#) and a joint venture in Canada, as a "small family business really" that he runs with his sister Nathalie.

And he is also quick to concede that some of their wines, which sell for much more than \$10 a bottle, such as Domaine De La Vougeraie Bonne Mares Grand Cru or Musigny Grand Cru, belong in traditional glass bottles.

"The way we do things today, the way we live today, is not like the way we did centuries ago. And I don't think one needs to associate wine with fussiness and stuffiness. It is supposed to be fun and that's what I try to do...always keeping respect for nature," he said.

(Reporting by Leslie Gevirtz; editing by [Paul Casciato](#))