

SHANKEN NEWS *Daily*

Boisset Applies The Burgundy Touch With Its Winery Acquisitions In California

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Burgundy-based Boisset, La Famille des Grands Vins is renowned for a French wine portfolio that includes Jean-Claude Boisset, Bouchard Aine & Fils, Domaine de la Vougeraie, J. Moreau & Fils, Mommessin, Ropiteau Frères, Jaffelin and Louis Bernard, among many others. In recent years the company has spread its wings in California, acquiring Sonoma-based DeLoach Vineyards in 2003, Napa Valley-based Raymond Vineyards in 2009 and Buena Vista Carneros in April of this year. With each of those acquisitions, the focus has been *terroir*-based wineries with strong identities. “We have a leadership role to play, partly because of our strong background in Burgundy,” says Jean-Charles Boisset, president of the company’s U.S. arm, Boisset Family Estates. “We want future generations to observe what we’ve done in mapping and understanding key California vineyards, just as in Burgundy.”

At DeLoach, Boisset has maintained the historic focus on Pinot Noir and Zinfandel while creating new wines at higher tiers—most notably the Vineyard Designate series, which includes Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Zinfandel. DeLoach currently has 24 Vineyard Designate wines—what Boisset calls his “little *premier cruor grand cru* vineyards of California.” At \$45 a 750-ml. bottle, they’re priced above the winery’s previous top-tier label, OFS (\$32 for the Chardonnay, \$35 for the Zinfandel and \$40 for the Pinot Noir). “When we acquired DeLoach, its wines came predominantly from their own vineyards and from three or four growers,” Boisset says. “Today we have 54 growers. We’ve gone into Green Valley, Sonoma Coast, Occidental—even all the way up to some amazing vineyards in Mendocino, like Manchester Ridge.”

At Raymond, acquired shortly after the 2009 harvest, Boisset has implemented an ambitious innovation program. One new label is Sommelier Selection—a Cabernet Sauvignon made by eight sommeliers who are chosen by Raymond each year to assist in the blending process at the winery. Sommelier Selection, an on-premise-only brand, has no suggested retail price. For the off-premise, Raymond has created Family Classic (\$20 a 750-ml. bottle), also a Cabernet Sauvignon. Other new labels include a wine from Raymond’s “R Collection” called Field Blend, Lot Seven (\$15). It’s made in a Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape style with seven grape varieties, the core five being Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Zinfandel, Merlot

and Petite Sirah, with some Carignane and Mourvèdre added. “The idea is to build upon Raymond as a staple Cabernet and Chardonnay house while creating new things,” Boisset says.

The April acquisition of Buena Vista Winery has redoubled Boisset’s California focus. Founded in 1857 and considered to be California’s oldest premium winemaker, Buena Vista is a top producer of cool climate Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Merlot and Syrah. Located at the southern end of the Carneros appellation, Buena Vista sources its wines from the 523-acre Ramal Vineyard estate, comprised of 167 small blocks, including 21 clones of Chardonnay and 13 clones of Pinot Noir. New winemaking plans are at an early stage, but Boisset has secured long-term contracts on the Ramal Vineyard and will add other Sonoma-sourced wines such as a Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Zinfandel, including reserve-level offerings. A sparkling wine will commemorate Buena Vista’s role as California’s first sparkling wine maker, and Boisset will add a red blend, The Count of Buena Vista (\$19.99 a 750-ml.), named for “Count” Agoston Harazsthy, a pioneer in California viticulture.

In total, Boisset owns more than 20 wineries, primarily in France and California. Other California labels include California Rabbit, Fog Mountain, Sonoma Cuvée, the Dan Aykroyd Discovery Series and JCB by Jean-Charles Boisset. Based on 2009 figures, Raymond is the company’s biggest U.S. brand at 225,000 cases, followed by DeLoach at 210,000 cases, J. Moreau & Fils at 95,000 cases, Mommessin at 41,000 cases and Buena Vista at around 40,000 cases.