

Born in Burgundy, Boisset Collection
vintner/proprietor Jean-Charles Boisset
has a deep connection to the land and the
grapes grown in the region.

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Spirited GRAPES

JEAN-CHARLES BOISSET
INTRODUCES A NEW LINE OF VODKAS AND
GIN MADE FROM BURGUNDY WINE

by Michelle Ball / photos by Jeremy Ball

THERE'S NO DOUBT that the farm-to-table movement transformed the face of the restaurant industry and the purchasing decisions we make today. Our demand for sustainably-sourced, high-quality ingredients has inspired thousands of artisanal products, especially within the beer, wine, and food industries.

Yet one could argue that the demand for craft spirits is still in its infancy, with an emphasis placed more on brand name or reputation than ingredients sourced. In an effort to prioritize the latter, Boisset Collection Vintner/Proprietor Jean-Charles Boisset created JCB Spirits, a new line of limited-edition vodkas and gin made not just from grapes from the famed Côte d'Or in Burgundy, but from the region's highly-prized wine. "I've always thought that whatever you eat and drink, the essence is coming from Mother Nature—from the soil, the roots," explains Boisset. "My 'aha' moment was when I tasted spirits and thought, they've got to come from wine. We've got to be the ones doing it, setting a new trend, and talking about what they're made from."

Boisset Collection, which owns more than 25 wineries and vineyards throughout Burgundy and California, embarked on its laborious endeavor to produce spirits from wine 15 years ago. The company began harvesting grapes throughout France solely for the purpose of making spirits and experimented with many varieties, including Syrah, Petite Sirah, Grenache, Marsanne, and Roussanne. "Our goal was to create that *je ne sais quoi* of delicacy—that absolutely phenomenal elixir that you'd want to have all the time," recalls Boisset.

As they struggled to attain that desired delicacy, Boisset and his colleagues regrouped at their offices in Burgundy and, given their location, decided to change their approach and get back to basics: They'd focus on making wine that could stand on its own, rather than pressure themselves to produce the elusive "ideal" base for a spirit.

The change in approach hardly amounted to taking a shortcut. Boisset says his team tinkered with the ratio of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir for years and even attempted to distill the wines separately before blending them later to determine the optimal ratio.

For some time, the results were "disjointed," recalls Boisset, until the perfect balance was found—coincidentally, in nearly equal parts—to form the base of the four spirit releases. "We had the luxury of time—we never rushed to make this," explains Boisset. "The wait here has been so exciting, because we're finally releasing it!"

Each JCB Spirits bottle exhibits a jewel around the neck with a diamond cut on both sides.



The JCB Spirits lineup includes a London Dry-style gin infused with 44 botanicals, including wild herbs grown in Boisset's Biodynamically-farmed vineyards and gardens.



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BUILDING THE BASE

Hand-harvested grapes from Boisset's estate vineyards in Burgundy make up the aforementioned blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir for the base spirit: After the varieties are fermented separately, the grapes aged for six months in barrel before they were blended and allowed to sit for two months for the flavors to meld before distillation.

The base spirit was distilled seven times purely for texture to attain a silky, voluptuous mouthfeel and then filtered four times. Although labeling laws won't allow for vintage designation, the inaugural release of JCB Spirits are specific to the 2012 harvest in Burgundy.



THE VODKA

\$125 (Only 3,600 bottles produced)

Served slightly chilled in a Burgundy glass, the JCB Vodka was the first to emerge as I sat down to taste through the spirits lineup with Boisset. I tilted the bowl and inhaled the aromas: The vodka was delightfully feminine and “wine-expressive,” with characteristics of wild blueberries and lavender. Glossy, floral, and perfumed, its tantalizing characteristics pique your curiosity and invite another sip. “It took us years to get this aromatic expression, which is purely the distillation of wine,” Boisset noted proudly as we tasted.



THE GIN

\$125 (Only 2,400 bottles produced)

As strong supporters of the principles of Biodynamic farming, the Boisset family worked to ensure that all of their estate vineyards are Demeter certified. As part of the certification, a portion of the land must be set aside to encourage biodiversity, and the native flora that thrives in the Boissets' vineyard gardens—such as dandelion, chamomile, and lemon balm—is infused with the base spirit to create a gin truly expressive of the terroir: “We wanted depth, density, richness, and juniper, but then we bring more than 30 organic plants in[to the spirit]. This is the ultimate concoction,” Boisset said.

The base spirit's innate floral elements are dramatically heightened by the gin's violet notes and exotic mix of botanicals. The palate experience is quite textural and polished, yet pleasantly prickly from the blend of herbs and spices—adding to the overall sensory experience.



THE TRUFFLE VODKA

\$150 (Only 2,500 bottles produced)

Boisset told me that as his team conceptualized which spirits to produce, the JCB Truffle Vodka was one of the first infusions they sought to make. “We thought, what would pair best with these grapes? The obvious is mushrooms in general,” explained Boisset, adding that he’s also considering a morel-infused vodka.

To produce the Truffle Vodka, Périgord black truffles are infused with the base spirit in a patented process. During the tasting, the truffle was less obvious than I expected—possibly due to the infusion of *real* truffles versus a synthetic flavoring (which is used for most truffle products, like olive oil). The subtlety begged for a deeper inhalation, and although the aromas and flavors distinctly emanated truffles, there was still a sense of discovery.

The aromas, meanwhile, transported the senses: Damp, black soil and white pepper evolved into a sweet, savory display mingled with hints of rose petals. “You smell the underwoods, you smell the leaves in the autumn, and you smell that incredible soil,” Boisset said.

THE CAVIAR VODKA

\$150 (Only 2,500 bottles produced)

We rinsed our glasses with vodka as we were given a spoonful of Petrossian caviar to pair with, fittingly enough, Boisset’s caviar-infused vodka. “We thought the earth was great; let’s go in the ocean,” he quipped, adding that the spirit was “extremely complicated to craft.” As they experimented with different ratios, Boisset said the guiding question they referred back to was, “What should caviar smell and taste like?” They focused on the flavor found inside the egg and worked backwards, monitoring the amount closely.

I’ll admit I was skeptical. I had no desire to try a fishy, briny vodka, yet after one inhale, all my doubts melted in a bouquet of verbena and vanilla cupcakes as if someone had opened a pack of lemon Girl Scout Cookies. The creamy, delicate caviar eggs burst with sweet, savory salinity reminiscent of a Brillat-Savarin cheese; alongside the vodka, they were transcendent. “It’s precision, it’s excitement, and it has that umami feel,” Boisset said.



DELIVERING “ULTIMATE LUXURY” TO THE SPIRITS SPHERE

Although a price tag of \$125–\$150 for a bottle of vodka or gin makes JCB Spirits an ultra-premium product line, it’s also a value considering the extravagant ingredients used. Distillation generally yields only 20–40 percent of the base mash, which in this case is Burgundian wine, and multiple distillations will also result in greater evaporation. In that regard, each bottle of finished spirit requires the equivalent of several bottles of wine to produce.

Boisset says that while production is extremely limited, the hope is to grow to 1,000 cases of each spirit. “We wanted to bring ultimate luxury to vodka by the ingredients we use, by how we make it, and by the emotion it brings you,” he explained, adding that he views the lineup as representative of an imminent trend in the industry—a trend they hope to pioneer, regardless of cost. “Economically, it’s our belief that this changes the spectrum of the world of spirits,” he reflected. *§J*