

the clever root

fruit, flower, farm, leaf

the Prince of Panache

VITICULTEUR AND MASTER OF SAVOIR-VIVRE
JEAN-CHARLES BOISSET
BRINGS HIS AUDACIOUS
STYLE TO NORTHERN
CALIFORNIA WINE
COUNTRY AND BEYOND

Fall 2018 • \$6.95 U.S.



COVER STORY

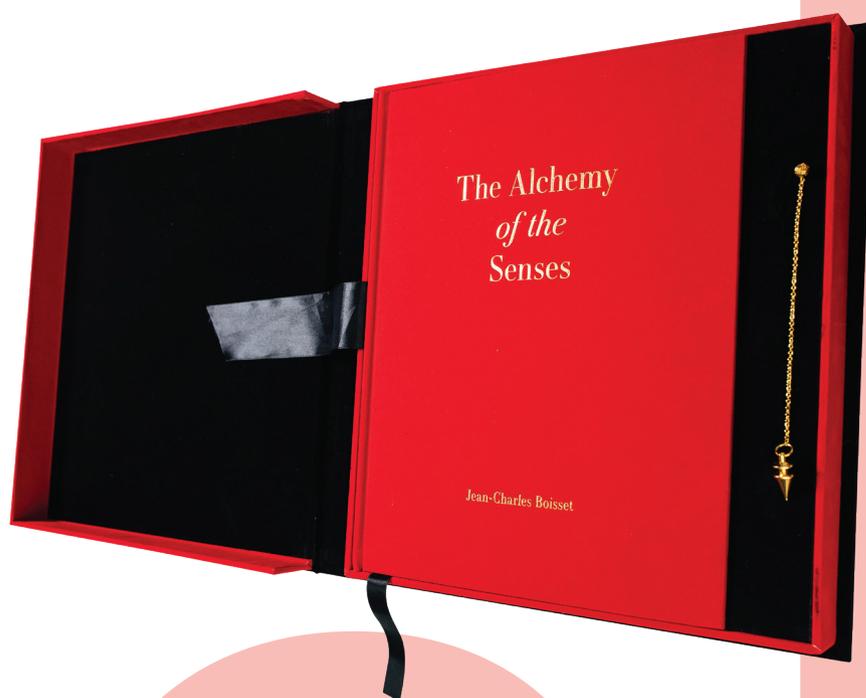
the Prince *of* Painache

"Let's not be vanilla!"
Jean-Charles Boisset,
reflected in the mirror-
covered ceiling of his
Yountville tasting salon,
exclaimed during our
cover shoot.



VITICULTEUR AND MASTER OF SAVOIR-VIVRE JEAN-CHARLES BOISSET BRINGS HIS AUDACIOUS STYLE TO NORTHERN CALIFORNIA WINE COUNTRY AND BEYOND

by David Gadd / photos by Alexander Rubin



Jean-Charles Boisset's new book, *The Alchemy of the Senses*, will be published in December by Chronicle Books. "I put all my years of understanding—everything I know—into it," he says.

"My mother will tell you

I was the child who smelled everything," recalls Jean-Charles Boisset over a private dinner at the JCB Salon at Raymond Vineyards, the venerable Napa Valley property he purchased in Rutherford in 2009. It's tempting to think it was that curious sense of smell that launched Boisset—or JCB, as he has so successfully branded himself—on a meteoric trajectory that began with his family's Burgundy-based wine business and is still accelerating at a breathless pace.

In 1961, when Boisset's father, Jean-Claude, was just 18, he founded a winery in the French commune of Nuits-Saint-Georges. Jean-Charles was exposed to wine and winemaking from the very moment he entered the world: "I was born in the room over the cellar," he says. "We used to play hide-and-seek in the barrel room." Eventually, Jean-Charles and his sister Nathalie consolidated the family's vineyard holdings to establish Domaine de la Vougeraie, now one of the most prominent domaines in Burgundy.

The Boisset estates now include other legendary Burgundian names (Bouchard Aîné & Fils and J. Moreau & Fils) and encompass properties in Beaujolais (Mommessin and Château de Pierreux) and the Rhône Valley (Bonpas). Broad-market labels from the south of France (Fortant and French Rabbit) are also represented in the company's portfolio alongside a collection of French and domestic *méthode champenoise* sparkling wines, including Neige ice cider from Québec and Jean-Charles' own JCB by Jean-Charles Boisset brand.

Boisset's reach has also expanded to California, where its estates include DeLoach Vineyards in the Russian River Valley; California's oldest winery, Buena Vista Winery in Sonoma; and Raymond Vineyards in Napa Valley. Jean-Charles has also partnered with Grammy Award-winning musician John Legend on the LVE (Legend Vineyard Exclusive) label, offering a Cabernet Sauvignon, a red blend, a Chardonnay, and a Côtes de Provence rosé. The list could go on . . . and that's just the liquid side of JCB.





Storytime with Jean-Charles: "I always wanted to write a book that takes people on a journey and allows them, chapter after chapter, to discover who they are," he says of his upcoming release *The Alchemy of the Senses*.

Recently, the unstoppable entrepreneur has branched out in his signature no-holds-barred fashion to become a full-spectrum lifestyle purveyor. Among his various forays into the luxury-goods marketplace are gourmet foods with Yountville-based Atelier Fine Foods and Catering); coffee via First Growth Napa Valley Grand Cru; jewelry, scented soaps, and candles; and the top-shelf JCB Spirits line, which features a gin and caviar- and truffle-infused vodkas all made with Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes. His large-format book *The Alchemy of the Senses*, meanwhile, is set for release in December by Chronicle Books,

and—perhaps most apropos for the former child with the inquisitive nose—he's poised to also add two highly anticipated unisex perfumes to the JCB Collection.

After working with several Paris-based perfumers, Jean-Charles will launch the first fragrance in the JCB Collection, JCB No. 0 Essence de Parfum, next spring. ("Zero is the eternal shape, the beginning of everything," he explains.) As a homage to his wife and fellow industry leader Gina Gallo, Jean-Charles named the sibling perfume, No. 13, for her lucky number. Both fragrances, which can be ordered in glass bottles for \$350 or in Baccarat crystals for

\$2,000, will be available at all JCB locations and online, as well as through Jean-Charles' upcoming Alchemy of the Senses pop-up tour and, eventually, at select luxury retailers.

The World According to JCB

Jean-Charles arrives for our Monday dinner at the JCB Salon in a tuxedo jacket, French cuffs, and velvet loafers, but as anyone who meets him soon discovers, he's as down-to-earth as any Côtés de Nuits *vigneron*—if much better dressed. Out of the vineyard and under the light of his beloved Baccarat chandeliers, the man becomes a fountain of



The crystal pendulum included with *The Alchemy of the Senses* can be used to “program crystals with intention,” according to Jean-Charles. “I can feel the energy,” he says.

sparkling conversation and seems as at ease with his staff as he is with finance moguls and other wine-world luminaries.

Over dinner as elsewhere, the ebullient Jean-Charles conceives at least one new idea every three minutes. Director of Marketing Patrick Egan, JCB’s *de facto* right-hand man, busily takes notes, some of which will no doubt lead to future campaigns and projects. During our leisurely five-course meal, prepared by Chef Justin Drake using produce from the on-site garden, we glide through food and wine pairings featuring no fewer than eight selections from the Boisset portfolio. (“You must *indulge!*” Jean-Charles

commands mischievously.)

Standouts wines include the daring JCB No. 3, a unique creation that blends Pinot Noir from three top vineyards in Burgundy with Pinot from five Boisset vineyards in the Russian River Valley. Yet another label that blurs the lines is Château Buena Vista, a magisterial Napa Valley Cabernet from Rutherford grapes made by Boisset’s Sonoma-based winery. “People don’t realize that the Count [Hungarian-born Agoston Haraszthy, founder of Buena Vista] was also largely responsible for Napa Valley,” Jean-Charles explains.

Raymond Vineyards, a microcosm of the

world according to JCB, is somewhat of a revealing summary of Jean-Charles’ accomplishments. When he purchased the property less than a decade ago, its core was a simple ranch house belonging to the Raymond family, Napa Valley pioneers who crushed their first vintage in 1974. Today, however, the property has been transformed to reflect Jean-Charles’ singular vision.

Our tour begins with the demonstration garden—or, in JCB parlance, the five-act “Theater of Nature”—created on a former parking lot under the supervision of Joe Papendick, Garden & Landscape Manager for all Boisset California properties. Visitors can witness



these five acts (known as The Soil, The Plants, The Animals, The Vineyardist, and Wholeness) while discovering the organic and Biodynamic principles Jean-Charles rigorously applies at all of his properties. “We listen to the bio-rhythms of Mother Nature,” he says.

Inside the winery, the theatricality escalates unexpectedly in a series of increasingly dramatic spaces, from the relatively understated Main Tasting Salon and Barrel Tasting Cellar to the Corridor of the Senses, where a dozen custom atomizers dispense aromatic components found in Napa Valley wines. Then there’s the intimate Library, displaying floor-to-ceiling Raymond Cabernet Sauvignons from four decades, and the Rutherford Room, which is dedicated to local appellations and features a large-scale model of Napa Valley.

In the Blending Room, guests can blend, bottle, and label their very own JCB cuvée through the Winemaker for a Day program. (Boisset himself designed the velvet-lined, quilted-metallic lab coats participants wear during the sessions.) Meanwhile, the show-stopping Crystal Cellar, complete with jewel-toned lighting and the signature Baccarat chandeliers, vies for high style akin to a Paris discothèque. Unconventional descriptors for the wines available at the tasting bar are hand-written on the walls in Jean-Charles’ wife Gina’s lipstick—the most visible being “Sexy.”

Displayed items for sale include Jean-Charles’ jewelry designs, as well as luxury goods from his favorite French manufacturers: hand-blown stemware from Baccarat and St. Louis, crystal from Lalique, silver from Christofle, and Limoges china from Bernardaud. “We adore craftsmanship,” says Boisset, who partners with these traditionalist manufactories to spread the renown of French workmanship.

Like so much of what Jean-Charles does, the mystery continues to unfold even after you think you’ve seen it all. For example, in the unexpectedly seductive, by-appointment-only Red Room lounge, Jean-Charles created a jaw-dropping interior inspired by his favorite historical period, the reign of Napoléon III. Bathed in soft light, the lounge is swathed in crimson velvet, trimmed in mink, carpeted in leopard, and filled with beloved books. Over the top? *Mais oui*. Excessive? *Bien sûr*. Outrageous? JCB wouldn’t have it any other way.

It Takes a Village

Down-valley in the tony enclave of Yountville, Jean-Charles is busy creating JCB Village, which will soon serve as a one-stop shop for all

things Boisset. A new luxury-goods boutique will open in spring 2019 with a perfume-bar centerpiece where guests can blend their own fragrances. “We are firm believers in bringing wine country to the city,” Jean-Charles had told me over dinner the previous evening, referring to his chic tasting salons in Beverly Hills and at The Ritz-Carlton in San Francisco.

The reverse is also true: He’s ramped up the urban-glam factor in Healdsburg and here in

**“In this life,
we have to
create our
own world.”
—Jean-Charles
Boisset**

Yountville with lavishly appointed facilities that exude the JCB lifestyle. “We want to bring a bit of *savoir-vivre* to the party,” says Boisset with a characteristically coy grin.

JCB Village already boasts Atelier Fine Foods, a 1,750-square-foot epicurean boutique. Like Boisset’s other food-related projects, Atelier falls under the guidance of veteran Napa Valley chef Victor Scargle, who serves as JCB Culinary Director; master *fromager* James Ayers, meanwhile, oversees the 150-selection cheese case. Bread is both brought in daily from the Acme bakery in Berkeley and flown in regularly from Poilâne in Paris. Drop-in visitors can indulge in a glass of wine at the adjacent JCB Tasting Salon, where the Baccarat chandeliers glitter even during the morning hours.

Directly behind Atelier is the opulent Salon Privé, where a red grand piano pops among taxidermied white peacocks and mirrored jewelry cases. “Let’s not be vanilla!” Jean-Charles exclaims, donning a flower-print jacket during our photo shoot. This off-the-cuff utterance sums up his daring panache, but his near-mystical take on life is embodied most literally in his signature rock crystals. According to Jean-

Charles, they’ve been ritually “programmed with intention” with a crystal pendulum to enhance five areas of the human dynamic: passion, balance, health, energy, and love.

Created in limited numbers and hand-mounted in gold wire in accordance with his own design, the five-faceted amulets are among Jean-Charles’ most cherished creations. “You can see something in the crystal—everyone has his or her own vision,” he says. Each

boxed copy of *The Alchemy of the Senses* contains a pendulum that can be used for similar ceremonial purposes.

Before the development of the JCB perfumes, Jean-Charles first sought to create scented candles nearly a decade ago. Characteristically, his approach was hardly understated as he sought out highly regarded perfumer Olivia Giacobetti, “one of the best noses in France.” Giacobetti turned him down several times before he sent her a wooden box containing some of the components he sought in a fragrance: rootstock, vine canes, grape pits, and barrel staves. “She got it,” Jean-Charles says matter-of-factly of the finished product.

JCB: Viticulteur

As the September sun sets over the ripening vines at Raymond Vineyards, Jean-Charles returns to the winemaking that serves as the driving force of his many passions. At the end of the day, he stays true to his Burgundy roots and is first and foremost a *viticulteur*.

Espousing the benefits of organic and Biodynamic agriculture, he speaks passionately about the need to preserve the vineyards for generations to come. “The Napa County authorities tell me how many guests I can receive here at the winery and what time the music has to be turned off at night, so why can’t they stipulate that all Napa Valley vineyards must be farmed organically?” he says in a tone just short of exasperation. “It doesn’t make any sense.”

Any sense of frustration with the Napa powers that be quickly disappears, however, as Jean-Charles shifts to discuss his ever-evolving plans. They transcend any temporal rules and regulations, and winemaking, like everything else he pursues, must likewise feel transformative: “I use wine as a means to get people to know themselves better,” he says. ■ **cr**



"I'm extremely sensitive to smell—it's my number-one strength," Jean-Charles says as he samples trials for his two new perfumes, set to launch next spring.