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## Reclaiming the Winery

The heir of a long European winemaking tradition, Jean-Charles Boisset brought a chemical-laden vineyard back to life with organic gardening techniques and lots of TLC.



### When winemaker Jean-Charles Boisset

first visited California's pristine Russian River Valley, he felt an immediate, intimate connection with the land. It reminded him of home. A native of the Burgundy region of France, Jean-Charles was drawn to the valley's flowing river, gorgeous mountains and sumptuous soil. He was so taken with the lush terrain—and its potential for producing world-class wines—that in 2003 he added DeLoach Vineyards, an 18-acre, family-owned estate, to his winemaking family's generations-old repertoire. Potential turned out to be a key word: The vineyards had been polluted by decades of chemical-intensive farming practices that had left it lifeless. Jean-Charles called upon his family heritage to revive the tired soil.

The French term *terroir* denotes a particular, site-specific set of flavor qualities that derive from soil, weather and growing practices, and Jean-Charles knew his California land had the potential to create amazing flavors. "When I first visited Sonoma County, I was inspired by the incredible potential of Russian River Valley *terroir* to grow great pinot noir," Jean-Charles says. "But I knew that in order to make wine that fully expressed the great Russian River Valley, we would first need to restore health to the land."

#### DYNAMIC BIODYNAMICS

Jean-Charles' first initiative was to revitalize the chemical-laden soil by reconstructing its ecological harmony. To do this, he turned to biodynamic agriculture, a "beyond organic" farming method developed in the 1920s by Austrian scientist Rudolf Steiner, who also founded the Waldorf schools. Jean-

Charles' faith in biodynamic agriculture stemmed from his upbringing in Burgundy. "My sister and I were taught by our grandparents at a very young age to be stewards of the land," he says. The Boisset family, one of the largest exporters and producers of fine French wine, continues a long tradition of eco-conscious farming in its estate vineyards.

Biodynamic farming's guiding principle is to treat the land as a self-contained, self-sustaining ecosystem that creates and maintains its health and vitality without external or unnatural additions. Soil, plants, farm animals and humans work together to create a holistic, living organism: the thriving biodynamic farm. "What is essential, I think, in biodynamics is the essence of what we call *terroir*," Jean-Charles says. "And *terroir* is the definition of the earth, the plant and the climate—in addition to the passion of the individual—really working together."

LEFT: "Earth and Sky," an 18-foot bronze statue, greets winery guests as they enter the DeLoach Vineyards tasting room and organic garden picnic area.  
ABOVE: A crate of freshly picked pinot noir grapes awaits transformation into wine.

