

# WINE BUSINESS

The Homepage for the Wine Industry

## Ponzi Vineyards' Next Chapter

by [LM Archer](#)

Feb 7, 2022



Sherwood, Ore. - Where does a French luxury winemaker invest in the future? For Champagne Bollinger, the answer is Oregon. Founded in 1829, the bespoke brand owns some of the best terroirs in Champagne, Burgundy, the Loire Valley, and Cognac. In 2021, they acquired Ponzi Vineyards in the Willamette Valley, their first venture outside of France.

Bollinger's commitment to craftsmanship, such as hand-riddling and reserve wines stored in natural-corked magnums, earns it the prestigious Patrimoine Vivant (living heritage) seal of quality in France.

But its ability to adapt with the times, such as product placement in popular James Bond movies, earns it a strong consumer following worldwide, especially in America. As markets adjust, so do strategies. "We realized that we need to change the way we were working in the U.S.," says Etienne Bizot, Chairman/CEO at Societe Jacques Bollinger (SJB). "And we realized that one of the best ways is to invest in the U.S."

## ***Terroir people***

For Bizot, establishing a footprint in America allows the company greater access and insights into American consumers, and also signals its respect for American wines and terroir. Bollinger honed in on Ponzi for a simple reason. “Pinot Noir was our favorite grape, because we are in Burgundy, we are in Champagne,” says Bizot, “And to be frank, the Ponzi Vineyards project was the one which [best fit] our criteria, because of Pinot Noir.”

But not just Pinot Noir. “What is different with Ponzi,” explains Bizot, “It’s a story of this couple, Dick and Nancy Ponzi.” Bizot marvels at the pioneering power pair who planted Pinot Noir over fifty years ago in the Willamette Valley - three young children in tow - sans vine growing, winemaking, or marketing skills. “It was quite entrepreneurial,” says Bizot. “And I do love entrepreneurship.”

For Bizot, this unwavering passion places Oregon among the pantheon of “authentic” wine regions. “I mean by that, I think they started the proper way,” he says. “They’ve built this wine region properly, by investing in wine, vineyards, producing great wines, and so on. They are really terroir people. And we are [a] terroir family business.”

## ***Brilliant Emulation***

“The Ponzis have contributed to creating Oregon fine wine,” concurs Jean-Baptiste (J.B.) Rivail, CEO of Ponzi Vineyards. “So I think that’s where there will be a very brilliant emulation between this Oregon family that’s been crafting wine for so long, and made a name for Oregon wine for themselves, and how we can help prepare this company for the new chapter, the future of where are we going.”

Second-generation winemaker Luisa Ponzi continues her current role. “I think that that my role is right now just to kind of keep that line of continuity in the winemaking,” she says. “What’s lovely is that they really respect the way that I’ve been making the wines. There’s no intention to change, stylistically, what’s happening. They would like a higher emphasis on lower volumes, higher quality - more of the upper tier, which is very fun for me.”

Ponzi also foresees changes in the vineyard. “I know that there’s a huge shift - that they’d like to move all their viticulture to organic,” she says. “That definitely is something that I’ve wanted to do.”

Technical innovations will play a bigger part in the winery’s future, too. “Innovations in the interest of preservation of the terroir and quality of the wine,” stresses Bizot. “There is this tension between what’s traditional, and what’s modern, and what’s good and what’s not good. I think Monarch is a good example of that, you know? They’re efficient, they’re clean, they’re safe.”

Recently, Ponzi visited her other Bollinger enology team members in France. “I’m really glad I went,” she says. “I got such great insight to that company, and not just Bollinger,

but the SJB holdings. “It kind of confirmed for me that we had made the right choice, that this company was really about trying to make the best wines possible. But not only that, to create this kind of family atmosphere between the wineries. This was so refreshing, because it reminded me of Oregon.”

### ***New Chapter***

“I like to say “it's not a new story, it's a new chapter that we're beginning together,” says Rivail, who has enthusiastically relocated with his family to the Willamette Valley. “So it has to be coherent and consistent with what has been done in the past. I think, if anything, the conversation is about fine wine, and fine wine only. That's the core of the DNA of Ponzi. How do we accelerate, amplify and magnify all the capabilities of Ponzi in the fine wine world?”

“The challenge is sales and marketing,” adds Bizot, “And that's where Jean-Baptiste is very good.”

“I love the fact that this particular company is very long-sighted,” concludes Ponzi. “They're not going to make quick reactions. They think very far in the future. And so I think that people should know that the wines are in good hands, that nothing really is going to move very fast.”