

EPIISODE #10 ANDREW HODSON, VERITAS

SPEAKERS

Fred Reno, Andrew Hodson

Fred Reno

Andrew, let's start with why does a successful neurologist from England decide to move to Virginia, put a stake in the ground, grow grapes and produce wine?

Andrew Hodson

Good question, Fred. I still don't really know the answer. But it was it was a it was if you've heard the term of Follie Adieu? So, it was my wife and I, we both we were working together, I owned a practice, which was, as you said, was successful and she owned a billing company. And the both of us both of us spend our lives working, right, we just worked. We, you know, the American Dream is the pursuit of happiness. So, we were pursuing happiness, but never really experiencing happiness. Here's the crunch. We were in Jacksonville, Florida. And I was working as a physician, she had her own business in medical billing, which, as you know, is, is an art form unto itself. We built this house on the river. We had a house on the river, we had a house at the beach. Everything was hunky dory, you know. And we looked at each other and thought, what are we going to do now? Like we reached the dream.

Fred Reno

okay,

Andrew Hodson

but it left us feeling sort of. So big deal. You know, mewcch. Funny enough, we went on a folk tour. We were in DC, and I was doing a medical conference. And as part of the medical conference, there was a film festival at Vermont, which is the home of George Washington, not Vermont, no, Mount Vernon, Mount Vernon, Forgive me, forgive me, Mount Vernon. And we met a couple there that lived in San Francisco. And they were one was an architect, and one was an accountant. And they live their lives frantically running the wheel of, you know, paying for the outrageous prices that you pay in San Francisco. And they said, we just gotta give this up. And they bought a small farm in Virginia. They were they have chickens and pigs, and you know, a small holding. And they've said they'd never been happier, they had two kids. They never enjoyed their kids so much. And we sort of looked at each other think we need to do that. Again, we reached a point both in our lives where we were in quote, successful, you know, we'd achieved all the milestones, there were something more than we needed to do. But that couple said to us, we live in Virginia, and they grow wine in Virginia, we said what, I had no idea that there was a wine industry in Virginia. And this was back in 1999. And we came up on our wedding anniversary, I say wedding anniversary, because it was so this is part of the fate of it all, you know, found a real estate agent who was based in Nellysford which is like 9 miles down the road. And they said, I've got this property, and there's a parcel on the property that 17 acres that is suitable for a vineyard. So, we came along with a real estate agent and we went to what we now call the Top

Meadow, okay, which is a part of our whole property. And we absolutely fell in love with it, you know that as we got to the Top Meadow, the music started singing the you know, the Sound of Music and what the hills are alive. All that stuff. Anyway, we found out that the whole farm was for sale, not just the 17 acres. it you know, you say it was beginner's luck, or say it was gestalt or, whatever you might say. We sort of looked at it and jumped. We said, Okay, this is what we'll do. And from there on, that was it. We put down a deposit that weekend. Wow, on the farm, and it took us two years to actually buy it. So, we came here in 1998. We bought the place, I avoid saying we bought the farm, you know, because it's got another meaning all together. We bought the property in 1999. Our first harvest was 2001. And at that time, our first harvest was we had 12 acres of grapes. And now we were cultivating over 100 acres altogether.

Fred Reno

Well, the vineyard wasn't here when you bought it. Right?

Andrew Hodson

Correct, It was it was a cattle farm.

Fred Reno

So, what drove the decision about what varieties you planted initially? I mean, did you have a consultant? Or did you just say,

Andrew Hodson

Oh, no, yeah, I'm

Fred Reno

gonna go do this. You know.

Andrew Hodson

Remember I was in medicine? Right? So, you know, in medicine, you surround yourself with people that are smarter than yourself. You know that Steve Jobs, I think, and I did just that. And we got a consultant, the guy called Chris Hill. Oh, Chris, I'm sure. Everybody you've spoken to Fred will say, Well, Chris Hill helped us. You know, it's like Gabriele Rausse. He helped us you know; they were the two sort of founding people in Virginia viticulture. So, Chris Hill came along. We also consulted with Tony Wolf is the state viticulturist. And here's a story I love to tell we got up to the Top Meadow and we looked at the Top Meadow. I said, I'm gonna plant sauvignon blanc. He looked at me and said, What? And I guess it's like all advice. If you get it free you can ignore it. So, I he said, don't plant sauvignon blanc plant Merlot, but I remember that the first time I tasted a wine that really impacted me was a Cloudy Bay from New Zealand. And that was the first time I thought about God This stuff is so good, you know this Sauvignon Blanc, right? So, I had in my mind that I was gonna grow Sauvignon Blanc, so I ignored Tony Wolf. I ignored him and I'm gonna say I am I mean, Patricia and I you know, we're we're complicit in everything we did in this.

Fred Reno

Well, I will tell you when I came to visit here last month, I hadn't had your Sauvignon Blanc and George served me some and I said, This is fantastic. Classic musque clone, but it was like fantastic I was like, wow, this is really good.

Andrew Hodson

Well at one time Fred we planted two clones, as you said the musque clone which is Bordeaux clone, and UC Davis clone 1 and we made a reserve sauvignon blanc with just the musque clone. It was too much sauvignon blanc. It was it was like it really stank. You know, I mean, talk about cat pee.

Fred Reno

Yeah,

Andrew Hodson

you know. I had all those. You know those really strong elements of sauvignon blanc. People liked it, but you have to be a fan of sauvignon blanc to drink it. So, then we found that if we blended the UC Davis 1 with the musque clone, we came up with a lovely sort of intermediary, which was like halfway between Sancerre and Marlborough Sancerre in France. Marlborough in New Zealand. Gotcha. And it was like this new people said somebody said it's like halfway between the old world and the new world again, and that's a good place for us to be.

Fred Reno

well, and so as I understand it, you were the first winemaker, it must have been interesting. I mean, you hadn't made wine before. Right? Yeah. You didn't really have any formal training. Who did you rely on for advice as you started to dive into that?

Andrew Hodson

That's right. Again, consultants. Right. So, I we consulted Brad. He was at Whitehall. Brad, I think of it in a sec. Sorry. That's alright. He was our winemaking consultant. But here's another thing Fred. When I was in medicine, my biggest joy was chemistry. I was one of those weirdos that actually enjoyed organic chemistry. You know, everyone says that the big stumbling block to doing medicine is understanding organic chemistry. Well, I did well in organic chemistry. And, you know, the whole idea of fermentation chemistry was a real challenge for me. I loved it. I got really deeply into it. Brad McCarthy was that was our consultant. Okay. Brad McCarthy, who was at Whitehall at the time. I loved it. And I I did an online course with UC Davis on winemaking and did lots of reading around lots of work with chemistry. And I made the wine myself for the first three years. The story I like to tell is that Chris Hill said, Why don't you plant Petit Verdot? So, I said okay, and never having heard of Petit Verdot, what's this Petit Verdot stuff? So, we planted it. And the idea was, we were going to blend it with the Cabernet Franc and with the Merlot to give because it's got so much color. Right? Right. We'll give some umfup to the other varietals well in 2002, which was a very, very good year for us in 2002 it was so hot in Charlottesville that they would serve food in the restaurants on paper plates with plastic knives and forks, because they didn't have enough water to wash the dishes. Right 2002 was like this superb growing year, we cultivated our Petit Verdot which was planted in 1999. So, it was like the third leaf, a young vine, third leaf and I made the single varietal Petit Verdot in a barrel obviously. And I loved it. I thought this stuff is fantastic. So, I made a single varietal Petit Verdot in 2002. And at the time, I'm not

quite sure how it how it got around to it but it was a one of the consultants with the Wine Advocate was a guy called Philip Ravani. Oh, sure, yeah, yeah. And he got to our Petit Verdot. And in the fall of 2003, there was an article in the Wine Advocate that was entitled, gems from the boondocks. Gems from the boondocks, and one of those gems in that boondock from the boondocks was Veritas 2002 Petit Verdot and he gave it a score of 88. And at the time, you know, I was reading the manual of how to make wine as I was making it and it just a coincidence of factors, but it was the young vines. The very good year and Petit Verdot. And so, we got this lovely wine in 2002 and I still got some of it and it still is lovely. And that launched us on using Petit Verdot as our sort of, not, I'm going to say signature great but it's one of the what I would say if you said to me What's your you know, what is the one you're most proud of? It would be either a Petit Verdot or a Cabernet Franc.

Fred Reno

Well, and then it looks like you your daughter decides Yeah, I want to do this she goes to school learns how the you know, the the enology and she comes down here and becomes a winemaker. Yeah, that must be fantastic.

Andrew Hodson

Absolutely. And you know, totally, I want to say unintentional, I don't mean unintentional, it happened by circumstance. It didn't happen. I never planned it. I never said like, Emily, we're gonna plant a vineyard and you're gonna come back and make the wine that was never on the cards. Emily, she had always helped me. You know, even for the first couple of years. She was going to Virginia Tech, and Bruce Zoecklein. I must say that the fact that we've lost Bruce Zoecklein is a big sadness for me because he was a good influence on Virginia, enology. At the time, it was Tony Wolf and Bruce Zoecklein. Right. They were the two forces that that helped us get out off the ground. And they did a really good job. When we set up our license. Fred, we were the 53rd Winery in Virginia 53rd. And I think it's almost 300.

Fred Reno

Right, exactly,

Andrew Hodson

yeah. So, we were at the beginning, but not not as early as Barboursville and not as early as Whitehall. Just one year behind the King Family. So, we were in that sort of that cohort of people that that started early on,

Fred Reno

or what I would call that next beginnings of the modern day, Virginia wine industry growth, right? We're right in there in that sweet spot in the early 2000s.

Andrew Hodson

what I would say there, Fred, is that before we got here, people were planting vines in the wrong places, right? And they still persisted in making wine. And of course, the wine wasn't very good. So, at the beginning, Virginia had a very bad reputation for the for the wine quality. And it all it took was the

understanding that you have to put the vines in the right place. And you know, the wine is made in the vineyard.

Fred Reno

Well, I agree with you there. I've been associated with vineyards most my career. And I would ask you a question because I had one vintner, say to me and it opened my eyes about a year ago, they said Fred, is good as the wine is being produced here in a lot of cases in Virginia. He said, I still believe that some of the best vineyards in Virginia have not been planted yet.

Andrew Hodson

That's a good point.

Fred Reno

Yeah. I think that's a valid

Andrew Hodson

Yes, oh yes, we've got one we've got one block on our, that we haven't planted yet. And it's the most favorable place. It's absolutely you know; the right height is southeast facing. And it's so good that we've got the paralysis of the analysis. Like, what should we plant here because this is going to be our very, very best site? And I think we've come I think we've gradually got round to realizing that because Petit Verdot has got a sort of I don't want a say gimmick because it's a sort of relatively unknown varietal. I think Petit Verdot is the best choice for us. Because we've made it, we've refined making it and we should continue on that. What people are telling me to do is to plant cab sav, and we haven't got any Cabernet Sauvignon. You know, if there was a site for Cabernet Sauvignon, that's where I would put it. But you know, we've got 20 years of experience of growing Petit Verdot.

Fred Reno

well, it's become what sounds like to me a signature wine for you. And what I learned a long time ago in the wine business, the more focused you are, yeah, on what you do and the less spread you are, the better you become at it. Right?

Andrew Hodson

That's right and Emily's perfected in 2013 we got a double gold in San Francisco. 2016 we got a gold in San Francisco.

Fred Reno

Is that block on this site here.

Andrew Hodson

Yes, sir. Yeah, but here's the thing, If you believe in terroir 2016. Afton Mountain got a gold with Petit Verdot in San Francisco. Veritas, I think we got a double gold and King Family got a gold now if you believe in terroir, you know those, those vineyards are almost in a line. You know, nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Fred Reno

Well, Petit Verdot as you know, because you have the experience. I mean, it's the perfect red grape for the Virginia climate.

Andrew Hodson

Well, yeah, I mean, many people would disagree. And when we planted it, you know, if you read the books, you wouldn't even have planted it because in France. It's the second best to Cabernet Sauvignon. If Cabernet Sauvignon doesn't ripen nor will Petit Verdot. So, it's not like it's a backup. And the French, they've got very little regard for Petit Verdot and people asked me, Why did we choose it? And I would, I would say the answer really is Beginner's luck. You know, we, we, you know, so many people are, you know, they get a bit of luck, and they make the best of it. You know, if you look at how Bill Gates succeeded, he was given access to a mainline computer, computer, when he was still studying, you know, he had this opportunity that he made the best of it. And I'm not comparing myself to Bill Gates for one second. But it's realizing when you got a break, what you make with the break.

Fred Reno

Let me switch to a subject of all right, so you you're growing grapes, you're going to make wine your daughter comes in? At some point, there's got to be a market strategy. Yeah. How did you develop your market strategy? And around that? What does the brand stand for?

Andrew Hodson

Well, that's a very good question. I would say, Fred, that it though it sounds cliché, I think it was because we were so invested in what we're doing. We were just absolutely invested; people would come to our winery. And we'd have like a couple of barrels on a plank, and a plank. And that was our tasting room. Okay, and they talk to us and they'd smile. And they say, these poor people, they really are doing their best. I would say it's our authenticity. And I told you, before we started the interview, one of our best friends, Christine and Dennis Vrooman realized that we were making good wine, and they said, we're gonna make, we're gonna plant a vineyard and make wine. And Christine said, we're gonna plant Pinot Noir. I said, Christine, you must be crazy, you know, I know, there are some grapes, there's, there's red wine, there's white wine, and this Pinot Noir. Pinot Noir is this so capricious, it's so difficult to understand. And she said, I'm gonna grow Pinot Noir. And she did. And she's done a very good job. And I would say that Christine's authenticity is similar to ours, you know, in the sense that we're completely invested in it to the point that, that people understand that, that that commitment, that authenticity, and I would say that, you know, if you looked at our advertising budget, you know, it is almost nonexistent. It and our success has been, I think, that we've grown slowly, with every step we've made, we've created a following of people that have stuck with us, you know, so we've got this customer loyalty, we've got no inventory. And as, as we've grown, we've been able to sell our wines, we've never had a problem, there are other wineries that have suddenly popped up in Virginia. And they produce huge amounts of wine, and guess what it doesn't sell, because they don't have a customer base. And we do have a customer base. The other thing that I will also mention, and I'm not trying to try to hawk anything, but we created the wine club concept. The wine club concept was you come to Veritas, you have a good experience, you know, the people that serve you are kind explain the wines that don't make you feel like you're an idiot, you know, we cultivate that experience. But we haven't done very much in the way of distribution. What we do is we say that, well, you can get the wine

every three months if you join our wine club. And people, you know, they say, Well, yeah, let's do that. And we've got over, I think last count was three and a half 1000 people are in our wine club, wow that every three months, buy three bottles of wine.

Fred Reno

And so, you managed to maintain that without really significant attrition. That's remarkable.

Andrew Hodson

Yes, I mean, it's still growing is still growing, you know, where we could not be happier with our wine club members. I know, Emily, my daughter makes wine every year for the wine club. Okay, right. So, we've always got a sort of a brand that's slightly different than the rest. Last week, we released our 2015 sparkling wine called Scintilla, that's that we kept on the lees for over three years. And that was for wine club members only. Okay, so that they get their sense of, of having some degree of privilege. Right. Yeah, that's it. exclusivity,

Fred Reno

So, then the rest of your family joins in. Yeah. George, how did you talk George in the coming here from Florida, and becoming the CEO and running the place?

Andrew Hodson

Yeah well, the funny thing is, George is our reluctant hero in a way. He was he was very reluctant to sort of as it were, join the family business. He was very successful in his own right. He went to Emory University got a degree in neuroscience. I used to be a neurologist. So, I've got two kids that are both neuroscientists. Neither of them used that in anything other than the fact prove that they can get a degree in anything you like. It's like getting a degree in marine biology. Nobody wants you to do marine biology. But it's just it's a marker of your intelligence. And George had a degree in, in neuroscience and was working for, I think, Biogen in the bio industry. He was faced with this, he was living a life where he was on the road, five days a week. And they wanted to promote him, And he was going to go to Boston, to be to be at Boston to carry on a life that he wasn't that much invested in. But his reluctance in joining, I think, was the fact that he didn't want to be seen, as you know, coming in on the coattails of his parents. But I can honestly say, I can look George in the eye right now. And he's done such a good job. You know, Emily and George, have been the backbone of the company. You know, we've started them off, and they've took the ball and run with it.

Fred Reno

They've just grown in the position. Well, that's got to be really gratifying. It is. When did your other daughter Chloe get involved?

Andrew Hodson

Yeah, well Chloe got involved in about 2010 or just before George okay. Yeah. And she came in on the entertainment side of things. So, she was running weddings, and running the events. And then she got married, went to New York, came back, and worked with us for a couple of years. But then she remarried, had two children. She happened to marry a friend of ours who was from England. And he had gone there's a school in England called Plumpton college, which is the only enology college in the

UK. So, Elliott had gone to Plumpton. And he had contacted us because we're friends with his family and said, you know, can he come over and do an internship from the UK, we said, sure we would love that to happen. Chloe met Elliott, and the rest is history. You know, they've had a very lovely relationship. Elliott is now our his position now is we've just launched a company called Virginia Sparkling Company. And Elliott is going to be our is our sparkling wine manager. He is in charge entirely of making sparkling wine. Having worked with us, this is his eighth harvest, having worked with us all along and of course, he's happy as a clam. Because he's got some, he can be in charge of that's his shtick, you know, that he's working with. We're really hoping that the sparkling wine is going to be a big part of our future business.

Fred Reno

Well, that that's a great segue, because I was gonna go there next with a different question. But it's like all enterprises, they have to find a way to grow, or they become stagnant. So, what, what's behind the decision first to buy Flying Fox? Yeah. Where did that what how did that develop?

Andrew Hodson

Well, Flying Fox was contiguous in terms of the vineyard, and it's about 10 acres. The guy who owned it was called Rich Evans. And he started that vineyard at the same time, as we did see, were like, We were like, you know, buddies in combat. And we have very good relationship with Rich Evans. And Rich Evans got the Seven Year Itch in the sense that he realized that growing grapes and making wine was, you know, hard work. It took seven years for the dream to to sort of evaporate. He came to us and said, you know, I'd like of all people I'd like to run have my vineyard be you guys. And we were able to with a bit of financial skullduggery, get Chloe, George, and Emily to buy the vineyard and buy the brand. So, they actually own Flying Fox. Oh, I see. So, it's a subsidiary, but it's not part of Veritas. It's, it's, it's that is a stand-alone operation. Yeah. So, Flying Fox, we got Flying Fox, we got Virginia sparkling wine. And George is also now working with a group of investors on a brand that we're calling True Heritage.

Fred Reno

Well, I was going to go there because I've had several of those wines and quite honestly, they're really good. Yes. And I'm I was, I looked at that and thought, here's a branding opportunity. This is interesting; oh, perhaps you can help Fred. You know, I thought this was interesting, but the wines are terrific. Yeah, fact I had the Chardonnay just last week and I sent George a message and I said what's the clones in the chardonnay because there's a salinity in this Chardonnay that I've never seen in Virginia Chardonnay before. Yeah. And it's gotta be the site to some degree clearly that I was curious about what the clones were too because it's a really terrific wine. But this is a very interesting project from what I understand and what he had described initially. There's a lot there.

Andrew Hodson

Yeah, potential. We got two we got two Chardonnays. We got a, you know, a stainless-steel Chardonnay and a barrel fermented Chardonnay. The barrel fermented Chardonnay, the source of do you know which one you had one was called Saddleback, and the other one's called Veritas Chardonnay Reserve.

Fred Reno

I believe it's Saddleback.

Andrew Hodson

Saddleback Okay, that's our stainless steel. That's our, you know, Chablis style, right, Chablis style. So, it's got that minerality.

Fred Reno

I am talking about the True Heritage. I was talking I'm sorry, the True Heritage,

Andrew Hodson

True Heritage. Okay. Yeah, that would be the stainless steel, different site. That is not our wine in the sense that not, it's up in Keswick area? That's right. That's right. Yeah. And they do have a different soil there altogether. And that's where you got that salinity from? Yeah, because it's not the same as it is here. But that's a lovely wine. I totally agree with you. The Viognier is lovely. had that. And the Petit Verdot is lovely.

Fred Reno

It's fascinating to me. I mean, it's just like, okay, let's, let's keep building on what we did. So how did you decide to get into the restaurant? B&B hotel business? That's to me that looks thankless.

Andrew Hodson

again. But it

Fred Reno

looks thankless to me. I'm sorry. But it'll just looks like a lot of work.

Andrew Hodson

It is true, isn't it that like 80% of bankruptcies are restaurants. And Fred, I would say that, that we've never had an overarching single business plan. I like to compare our business strategy with there's a video game called Frogger. In Frogger, you've got a frog on one side of the bank of the river. And you've got to get that frog to the other side of the river. And going up and down the river are these logs that go in different ways at different speeds, and you got to get the frog, to land on the log that's going that way, then he's gonna jump this way. And he's gonna jump that way. And the skill that we've done, is to jump on every opportunity. There was a time in like, 2007 when the seven years after starting, it was looking pretty grim. You know, we were growing grapes. We were selling grapes. But we weren't making very much money. You know, you know, the line about Virginia wine industry? How does make, make a small fortune? Start with a large one?

Fred Reno

that's, that's a lot of those.

Andrew Hodson

We started with a small fortune. And the wedding business, the restaurant business, have all been opportunities that we've jumped on, to keep us, to keep us going. (Cash Flow) Yeah, that's right. And

there was a point when, at the height of the wedding industry, I'd say probably 2015 when at least 50% of our income was wedding. But that's changed. That's changed a lot. The wedding industry, precipitated by the COVID crisis was waning anyway, so that the number of people looking to have weddings at wineries was decreasing.

Fred Reno

Well, you know, you just touched on something prior to that, that I always used to tell people there's no, there's no magic here. In the, in the wine industry, people always look at it like this romance and all this. I always used to say to the consumer, it's farming. Yeah, it's absolutely farming. And the old adage is, you know, when the farmer makes his money, when he sells the farm, and other than that, it's just hard work. Right?

Andrew Hodson

Yeah. You know, people come to me and say, I've got a little bit of land, and I think I'm gonna plant some grapes. And I said, you know, do you really want to do that? You know, are you doing it because you wanted it or doing it because you think can make money. And if they say because we want to make money, I say forget it. You're not going to its something you have to want to do?

Fred Reno

Well, it's generational too that's the whole thing when you look at the old-world model and that was gonna be my next question. That's generational. We should probably stop Fred we've got some people coming. Well, where I was headed with that, I was curious. So, you're getting into the wine business, but obviously you and your wife love wine. So, what was your model? You know what got you into wine loving wine yourself personally, prior to visiting the site to grow grapes make wine or anything? What was it? What was the model? What was the wine? There's always one wine that I remember mine. Yeah, there's always one wine. What was your wine? Well, believe it or not, it was I've been a Burgun, Burgundian lover ever since a Burg hound. Yeah, the very first bottle of Burgundy I ever had was a bottle of 1969 vintage Clos de Vougeot from Rene Engel one of the top producers prior that all I was doing was drinking Bordeaux and Classified Growths everything and I tried a Burgundy one night, and I was like, oh my god. Yeah, this is a different league. This is complete and it just sold me, and I became Burgundy focused, ever since. But that wine is what just turn my head from the I mean 69 vintage, I mean, how could I started on a better wine from a better producer? I mean.

Andrew Hodson

I've been there. I love it. I love that wine.

Fred Reno

So, what was yours? I

Andrew Hodson

well, I said, you know, the first time I tasted Cloudy Bay, okay. I sort of went Ding! You know, like, something went off in my head and then I started getting into Bordeaux's. So, when I was rich and famous, what I mean by that was when I was practicing medicine, because I was rich compared to being a farmer, now and I had quite a collection of Bordeaux's. 1982 Latour, you know, that would be

my sort of, yeah, I would often say to people, you got 24 hours to live, what are you going to open? And if they say, a full body red they didn't get the job. If they said 1982 Latour, they got the job for me, Fred, it was, it was just the absolute abject enjoyment of wine, it was, it opens up so many interesting, intellectual opportunities. And it's so fascinating. You know, I just, I love wine I mean. And I, you know, I, and so does Patricia, you know, it's not just me, for sure. It's not just me, it's been the two of us that have done it. And my wife still loves the fact that I come up with a nice bottle of wine, usually a red wine that she's going to enjoy. And you know, that's still part of our happiness together, having a good bottle of wine and have a nice day. I can't imagine having a decent meal without wine. It just can't

Fred Reno

Oh, it's against my religion. to have lunch or dinner without a glass of wine. I mean, sincerely. Yeah. Yeah.

Andrew Hodson

You know, I think it's inherent in you know, that you either really love it, or and it goes sparks off as, as we know, people in the industry, we know, several people that, you know, they'd rather have a bourbon than have a glass of wine. If you if you're in that situation, I don't think you can have that sort of inherent level of what we need.

Fred Reno

So final \$64,000 question, your opinion. What is it? And we touched on this a little bit prior to the interview? Why hasn't Virginia the quality of what we've seen here in wine growing and what's been happening? Why are the cognoscenti in the industry around the country nationally? not really aware of this? Why hasn't Virginia broken out? There's been good press as you said, incredible people writing about it yet.

Andrew Hodson

Spurrier, Oz Clark, and

Fred Reno

what is in your opinion held back? I have my own opinion, but what in your opinion is held this back?

Andrew Hodson

To be quite frank with you? I would say I don't know. But when I first met you, and I said to you Fred, if you're you know, you're starting out in this business, you know, what would you say is the most important factor? Why would you sell a bottle of Virginia wine to anybody, and you looked at me in the eyes and you said quality? That was your response? And I think we make the wine of quality, I think, I think it's a hidden gem in a way. But there just isn't enough Virginia wine. Writers are not going to write about a wine if people can't get hold of it. And if you look at the total production of Virginia wine 600,000 cases, Kendall Jackson made 600,000 cases of reserve Chardonnay,

Fred Reno

they make 2.5million.

Andrew Hodson

Okay. Well, at one point, Kendall Jackson made as much reserve Chardonnay as the whole of the Virginia wine industry. Exactly. And and I think it's because writers are reluctant to put their energy behind anything that people don't get hold of.

Fred Reno

Okay, so here's if you want my opinion, let me it's the broken distribution system we have in America, fair enough. That is the impediment to Virginia wine, becoming a national item in those corners that would really appreciate the quality and the authenticity and the story that's happening here. And there's no Robert Mondavi Napa Valley would not be what it is today if Robert Mondavi had not existed.

Andrew Hodson

Yeah, champion the cause

Fred Reno

somebody who had was just tireless, both nationally and internationally. Talking about the wine quality and putting it out there and tasting against it. He was, he was tireless, and he brought a whole industry along with them. That's what I see from my vantage point 40 years in his business. There's yet that Oracle to stand up and get in front of people and say no pay attention. This is unbelievable the quality here and the flavor interest. Especially because of the the natural acidity, natural lower alcohols, everything else that is going on. I mean, California is struggling with this, as you know, getting those alcohols under control. It really is climate change in this regard. And I learned this when I was doing this part of this over here. It's very difficult to get physiological rightness of the grape, right? At 24 brix even in California. Yeah. You mean it might be sugar ripe. Yeah. But the physiological ripeness of the grape itself? Totally not there. Totally. And so, what most consumers don't understand, they're now picking at 26. And then they're dealing in the wine. And by dealing, you're taking the soul right out of the wine. Yeah. And that's what Virginia has also they have soul in their wine still. And I think that's a message that needs to be tied to this authenticity, there's soul in these wines, there's a core in these wines that hasn't been stripped out of them, right, to just bring alcohol levels down.

Andrew Hodson

Right. Right.

Fred Reno

that makes sense.

Andrew Hodson

Absolutely. I think that's a very, very good point. Because you're, as you're taking away the authenticity, by de-alcoholizing the wine, you're manipulating what Virginia wines are, as we said, at the beginning, were authentic, were authentic, we don't use reverse osmosis. You know, they say that you'll never get a bad vintage, you know, in Bordeaux now, because they use reverse osmosis. And they can manipulate the wine in whatever way they want. I would say that we have this degree of authenticity. What's the name of the guy in California who everyone regards is crazy and had a wine Ran. Randall Graham. Yeah, Randall Graham. He talked about terroir wines. He loved the word, the term terroir. And

you know, in many people's minds that that's sort of a confusing thing. But I think what he meant by terroir, wine was authentic wine wine that is, you know, is from a place that you can recognize where it's from, without manipulation without adding enzymes without doing all this garbage that people are doing to make generic wine. You know, there's a lot of generic wine that you know that you can get gallons of it, you can get Jacob's Creek for five bucks a bottle, and it's generic. And what we've got is something that's not generic. And in a way you said that at the beginning, you said, the fact that we're not a big industry is a good thing. Because people say, Well, I don't want big industry. I don't want generic wine. I want a wine that's got some authenticity. I think every everybody I know in Virginia that I respect, agrees with those principles. I don't know if you'll ever get around to talking to Jim Law. He is one of the guys.

Fred Reno

well, he is definitely on my list.

Andrew Hodson

Yes. He'll, he'll tell you he'll preach the gospel according to Virginia terroir, and he's a great guy. Great guy. We learned a lot from him at the very beginning.

Fred Reno

Andrew, I know you're busy and I really appreciate your time today. This has been fun.

Andrew Hodson

Good. I've enjoyed it.