

EPISODE # 14 LUCIE MORTON

SPEAKERS

Fred Reno, Lucie Morton

Fred Reno

Lucie, welcome.

Lucie Morton

Thank you, Fred. Pleasure to be here.

Fred Reno

Well, it's all my pleasure. Of course, we'll start at the beginning because this is your story. How did you get into growing grapes and making wine? I mean, what was the driving force here that got you interested in grape growing and how did it start?

Lucie Morton

Well let's even beyond your 45-year window there. My journey started in 1971 when I was finishing up grad school, and my father had moved to my grandparents' farm on the King George Virginia on the Potomac River, and dad was looking for a cash crop for our farm. He was a very much of a French wine appreciator and had spoke French and had done World War Two, etc., etc. Anyway, he said, You know, I wonder we're on the Potomac River. How different can it be from the Gironde River in Bordeaux. Meantime, he had read in a southern states' cooperative magazine, because we did have grain crops on our farm at the time also, about a man named Willie Schwerin from Kentucky. And the article, the title caught my dad's eye said 10 acres of hybrids \$10,000 and Willie Schwerin in Kentucky, bless his heart had been buying grapes from Philip Wagner, and was one of the early growers of French hybrid grapes. And he saw the value added, you know, for them to get \$1,000 an acre, you know, when corn and soybean for maybe 50. Right, so Dad made that connection. He was a lawyer and commuting to Washington. I was just about to graduate with my history degree from University of Pennsylvania. I had spent a post grad year in England at Oxford, and dad said, and clearly you can imagine, I wasn't absolutely certain what I wanted to do. I thought it was international relations or law school. But dad said Lucie, would you take a gap year between getting your degree and going to graduate school? Would you be my farm manager for a year? And would you look into grapes. So, Fred, I looked into grapes, and I've never looked back. So, this was Morland Farm, Morland farm. You can look at www.morlandfarm.com Because one of the cool things that has happened to me in the last couple of years is that we'll get into it more. I did plant a three-acre vineyard for my dad but realized that actually wasn't where I wanted to spend my whole career and probably wasn't the right business for dad. So, in 1980 they sold the farm. I went on and by that time I was getting married and had my career and being a consultant and grapes and writing books and things. I never really looked back to Morland, although I love it and it's a beautiful place. In an auto magnet Ron Rosner bought it invested many millions of dollars into refurbishing everything. And two years ago, my nephew John Morton,

bought it back into the family. That's very cool. So, I am back to the future. But the first thing I said to John was, yes, we can have some grapes, but no vinifera and my best wines back I sold all my grapes, home winemakers and also Ingleside Plantation, but our fruit but my best wines were Chambourcin and Seyval Blanc. I think that the Chardonel grape, which is the Chardonnay Seyval Blanc cross makes much better. Well makes better wine for what I'm looking for, which is more acid.

Fred Reno

Well, I'm glad you brought it up, because I've been trying to find a bottle of Chardonel from somebody here because it's exciting to me when I read about it. And let me interject just for a second here. I haven't had much exposure in my career to hybrid wines made from hybrids, for obvious reasons, because most of my career was spent in West Coast of the United States. However, since I'd moved here, I'm a big fan of Seyval Blanc. I'm really enjoying Seyval blanc.

Lucie Morton

well, then there aren't that many Chardonels and one of the people I work with Rosemont vineyards in southern Virginia has 100% Chardonel, both bubbly and white wine, they call it Lineage. So, it doesn't necessarily say Chardonel on the label.

Fred Reno

Well, I looked into that and you have to be part of their wine club to get that.

Lucie Morton

I know I love that. You know back in the day, Fred, what's ironic for me is most of my career Early on actually was in California also and most of my clients today in the Mid-Atlantic region are probably 95% vinifera. It's just I knew I've always held out a torch for the grapes, as being unique to our area totally suited to our environment an opportunity to make very good value wines also.

Fred Reno

all well I'm a big cru Beaujolais drinker my wife and I it is essentially either Virginia wine or Cru Beaujolais those our go to now and Chambourcin if you could just take that little back edge off there, it's so close to a really good Cru Beaujolais that I love it.

Lucie Morton

right and guess where I bought Chambourcin labeled Chambourcin in France was in the Loire Valley. Chambourcin was the number one unauthorized but grown by quite a bit people don't realize there was almost a million acres of French American grapes in France in the 1958 census.

Fred Reno

That's amazing.

Lucie Morton

yeah, it was 40% of the French vineyard because they had just been through world war one world war two the depression, they didn't have money for tractors and sprays and etc. so as a student I bought a

labeled Chambourcin farmer wine at the farmers market in the Loire valley so you're right it's got a lot of that profile that people who like those wines are going to appreciate.

Fred Reno

well let's back up then because they see went to France in the late 70s, is that accurate?

Lucie Morton

early 70s so that's the thing I did work for my dad for a year became the farm manager looked into grapes and thank goodness right here in Virginia and also Maryland in particular we had Philip Wagner who wrote the first American book on winemaking and growing grapes in the united states, Boordy vineyard but he wrote his books before he ever had Boordy vineyard, Boordy vineyard celebrating the 75th anniversary it got he started that in 1945 and I work with them now but we bought our first vines from Philip Wagner my mom and I bought his book a wine growers a wine grower guide we had the book in one hand and we're pruning my mother's at my grandmother's old concord vines in the other so my grandmother planted Concord Keiko and Niagara in about 1930 in response to prohibition and my dad got her Philip Wagner's book oh my god in 1933 he bought that book, I have first edition that my dad signed to my grandmother and then later in the 70s when my parents and I met Phil Wagner he signed the book again for me so it's very special but another special thing is that a probably 20 or so of those old grapes that are now 90 years old are still there at moorland wow and my nephew and I and his wife have restored them we honor them and I even had them virus tested at Cornell they're clean of all viruses so if anybody needs wood for some beautiful concord grapes for their backyard but it is a testament to that that Concord grape the reason it is the grape for the millions in the east coast it was there for 90 years many of them without pruning, spraying anything else

Fred Reno

so, tell me about your interaction with Pierre Galet, yeah, how did that all happen?

Lucie Morton

so going back to I did that year with dad, planted and planted the vineyard in 1973 of like 13 different French hybrid grapes from all over the place you know I looked at the catalog and I said Cascade 13053 makes a nice rose oh I think 300 of those so it was kind of a wild you know wild west in Virginia at the time there were zero commercial wineries when I started none but I really anybody who gets into viticulture knows there's a lot to it and there was a raging debate then between hybrid growers vinifera growers and I said to dad, and one of my heroes was Hamilton Mowbray, Montbray vineyard in Maryland. Ham was wonderful because he did consulting for Piedmont vineyard in Middleburg Virginia and he had Mrs. Furness plant Chardonnay, Seyval, and Cabernet Sauvignon so Ham was one of these people who said this is not an either or situation he was a big Francophile and he was well known for his Seyval and he grew Cabernet Sauvignon I had a good model Philip Wagner was very pro hybrid and very distrustful of vinifera he'd had his test plantings freeze to the ground too many times or get lost to fungal disease etc. I was lucky and but I because of this experience I finally knew I didn't want to be a lawyer I didn't want to be a diplomat I wanted to learn how to grow grapes and I said to dad, there are two ways you can go in this-three-ways I could go. In the United States it would be UC Davis or Cornell. Then there is more Montpellier France. Davis, at that time realized that my history degree did not qualify me for their program. And they said if I would take two years of prerequisites, I could take

viticulture 101 in the third year, that was not happening. Cornell at the time, had a small fruits program, but it wasn't much. So, I ended up picking grapes, getting a job through my dad is a patent lawyer, and he was the lawyer for Chemise Lacoste, you know the tennis guy yeah, Rene Lacoste, and Bob Abdesselam was the French lawyer dad was the American lawyer. Bob when dad said Lucie wants to go pick grapes in Bordeaux. Bob says okay, I'll get her job at Chateau Fourcas Hosten in Lustrac Medoc but also our neighbors in King George was Caroline Guest, Raymond Guest was her husband Ambassador to Ireland. But she was French and her. She was best friends with Liliane de Rothschild. So, here's me in 1973 I planted the vineyard at Moorland in the spring and that fall I had two harvest jobs at Lafite and Lustrac Medoc. Can you imagine. Well, one along the conversation one of the guys who was a Negotiant, Guy Schyler, who was a negotiant in Bordeaux said, your daughter's not going to learn anything about viticulture harvesting grapes, she needs to go to Montpellier, and the register at Chateau Lafite at the time, and both of his sons went to Montpellier. So, talk to them about it. And I wrote a letter to the university and said I would like to come, and they wrote back and said you're not qualified, which is true. We the and I made no bones about it. But they said you can come as an auditor Libra, you can come and audit the fall semester here on your own money and time, you can come if at the end of that semester, you go before a faculty Review Board. We might consider sponsoring you for a seven-month international course from January 74 to August of 74 with 17 other students from five countries. So, I went off there and I said Dad, I'll be back for Christmas. I had no idea I never been to Montpellier, but I got there and took the I picked grapes which was great that month of harvest. Got my French in line so you did little bit. I had good schoolgirl French, I aced the SAT and couldn't ask my way to the local restaurant. But so, I did make the connection there between spoken French and an academic French and which I did. You know, I had studied it. I did the course there. But where I was super lucky was this international course was new. And they were planning on sending all of their agricultural engineering school students who were specialty viticulture to the international course, which was three months in Spain and a month of travel in Italy. And it was all over Europe, visiting research stations having professors come and talk to our group. The French students, we're going to do this instead of the traditional full year of viticulture at Montpellier. So, Monsieur Branas asked who the head of everything was, and had been there since the 1930s. I was in one of his lab students. He insisted that we do the entire that the French guys All guys, I was only girl, first woman they'd had in the program, first American, all that stuff. He wanted them to be sure they got a full year curriculum in that first semester. So, I totally lucked out, lucked out because we had classes five days a week, six hours a day. When I saw the curriculum, I'm like, Oh my goodness, I haven't I'm learning stuff in French I didn't know in English. The very first night I went to the bookstore and looked at every viticultural textbook that they had at the Poulin bookstore, bought a new Petite Larousse, which is just French on French. And after three hours, I picked a book called preceded de viticulture by P Galet, Galet. And I brought it home in my I had no friends; I had no life. So, all I did was at night I would study right, and I would, they would say tomorrow you're going to study Oidium, which is powdery mildew. So, I would look up oidium in Galet's, Galet's book was like Winkler's General viticulture, the French version. So covered the waterfront his 500-page book on general viticulture but all in French of course. I would read Oidium, and I look up every single word in the dictionary so that when I was at the lecture, at least the terminology was familiar to me.

Fred Reno

Yea so it would sink in.

Lucie Morton

right, but I had been there for three weeks. We have four different professors, all of them, of course, PhD, you know, wonderful researchers and teachers, when I noticed that the guy talking to us about grafting and nursery material was, and Vitus and different topics was p. Galet. And so, after class, I went up to him, I said, Monsieur by any chance, are you this P. Galet? Oh, Qui, Mademoiselle, Siwon. And he looked extremely pleased by the whole thing and I had him autograph it and went on. Well, it's a friendship that lasted I was in France. Last year. 2019 Galet was 98 years old. He was the subject of the two documentary movies. I was able to be there.

Fred Reno

Yeah, fantastic. You actually did a book with him.

Lucie Morton

Right? I came back to Virginia. So, I in the end, I got this interview, you know, could go on for two weeks Fred but got my degree, the from the Ecole nationale the Viticulture, core International, the thesis that they assigned me was Viticulturer de l'Est des Etats-Unis; viticulture of Eastern America because my professors realized that I was going to be coming home and working in Virginia, that wasn't lost on them. And they wanted to see how I was able to apply what they taught me about soils and climate and everything to Virginia. So, I had to do my research. I wrote back to Philip Wagner. This is back when people sent those, you know, little air mail letters little like, right. Yeah. Anyway, I made friends with John McGrew, who was USDA grape breeder in Beltsville, Maryland. And the first thing John said was, Lucie, don't let those French people tell you anything bad about the eastern East Coast of the United States, we have the highest diversity of Vitus species anywhere in the world. Cornell University will I guarantee you will be the first one to develop a mechanical harvester. So, John McGrew just said you stick up for yourself when I was doing the winery visits because in the international course, you would go and visit the vineyard and taste the wine. So, I got a really good sense of the relationship between the vineyard and the winery. But when they would introduce me to the winemakers, I could be it you know, rich, let's say Richbourg. I could be some really beautiful place and they would introduce me go. This is Mademoiselle Morton. She's here to learn how to make Coca Cola out of Vitus labrusca. So, I had to learn to laugh it off. Because of my guy friends were like Lucie, we're French. We're going to be mean, your best thing is to just, you know, laugh counterpunch. But anyway, I when I did get back to Virginia, I got back to the farm, had my first harvest in 1975. And there were no wineries yet in Virginia. So, I taught myself how to make wine. Then I sold my grapes. And I'm proud that some of my students were like Karl Flemmer, at Ingleside, Felicia Rogan, and John Rogan, Oakencroft. They came and made wine and they're like, hey, if we can make wine like this, maybe we can do this on our farms That was a positive thing.

Fred Reno

You had a connection, I thought I heard or read somewhere here some Robert Mondavi and you got involved in something.

Lucie Morton

Absolutely. So, what happened was what I had my Virginia vineyard to deal with, on the one hand, on the other hand, I came back with a graduate degree in viticulture. One of the other people that I consulted and met before I ever met him in person through his book, Leon D. Adams, Leon D. Adams wrote the wines of America, right. That book came out while I was doing my thesis. And I wrote to my parents and said, please send me that book because I'm writing on Eastern American viticulture, and I don't know anything, and Leon had made a point of studying the history of wine east of the Rockies. His whole mission was to he was into temperance and was to bring wine growing everywhere. So, people would understand that wine is an agricultural product, and not booze. That was that was his mission, and he founded Wine Institute in 1933. So, when I got back from Montpellier, I got to meet John McGrew for the first time at his office at the USDA. I got to meet Leon Adams when dad went out to law conference in San Francisco. I met Leon and after that when he was doing research, for the Third Edition second or third edition of the book. I told him, I'll be your driver, you know, because by then he was in the 70s. I was in my 20s. He wanted to see all the little wineries and wine possibilities east of the Rockies. I want to see all the vines. I traveled with him. And that was a big influence. Meantime, he was based in California, he understood that Napa Valley has phylloxera. He and I would go into vineyards. And I might never forget going to one in the Finger Lakes where I said to the guy, boy, you're Riesling is looking really good. He goes Lucie, that's not my Riesling. That's my Chardonnay. I said, Listen, you're telling that to the wrong person. I can tell from a moving car Chardonnay from Riesling. And so, we stopped, and it turned out that this Finger Lakes grower had just gotten a mistake. He just flipped the nursery tags. What was cute was he was one of the early he sold his grapes to Glenora. And everybody used to say that their Chardonnay had a real Germanic character to it. And they thought it was because it was a German winemaker. And it was the Finger Lakes climate. Really, after my visit, he calls them up and says, excuse me, my Chardonnay is actually Riesling. So that was where the Germanic character came. But this was on a trip with Leon, and I said, Leon, I get the feeling. Nobody knows how to do Ampelography here, you know that I've heard that the Gamay in California is not Gamay, that you know, the Gamay Beaujolais has nothing to do with Beaujolais Actually, it's a clone of Pinot Noir and the Valdiguie grape. So, I said I'm surprised about that. And Leon said Lucie, oh, I so I would go in with Galet's preceded de viticulture which was my textbook. I'd go into vineyard night show people know this isn't gamay it can't be this has to be, and I was showing pictures of the leaves. And I did that with Jim Haslett in the Finger Lakes. I said, Jim, here's what Riesling looks like. Here's what Chardonnay looks like. I said, somebody should translate Galet's book. Well, Leon being who he was. Said Lucie, you know who that it is. That's you I'm like, Are you kidding me? Absolutely not. You have no idea how complicated it is. There're so many words that I wouldn't even know how to translate into English and Galet himself. I don't know. He's a little temperamental. And so, but Leon got to me and I said, Well, if you'll help me find a publisher, or if you'll back me up in this professionally, because who am I? I'm a 26-year-old girl from Virginia, for goodness's sake. He did in the end I drove myself up to Cornell University Press, with a copy of the grapes of New York, which is a 1905 Ampelography by U. P. Headrick and a copy of Galet and I explained to them that we the English word speaking world needed, and English, Ampelography. Well, and as you kind of said in the introduction, Fred, what's Ampelography, I've never met a single person ever at a cocktail party or anywhere. Who knew what ample Ampelography was?

Fred Reno

Well, I didn't know until Chris Hill told me Yeah. And so really all it is, is grapevine botany, it's how to identify grapes by their leaves. For some reason, the French have always dominated in this Galet, unquestionably is the world's Ampelographer. My textbook that I used as a student is a distillation of a four volume 3,500-page book on all the grape varieties in Europe. I mean, in France, France, including he was the only one who cared about the American species. He cared had his volume one is American species, because they're so important for phylloxera resistant rootstocks. So, boy did I lucked out to find Pierre, have him as a professor, nobody else would have appreciated. The fact that I was from the east coast, I lived in the land of *Vitis riparia*, *Vitis labrusca* and that I lived in a place where these grapes had a home big time. One of the chapters in that book is on rootstocks, Galet is like the world's preeminent expert on rootstocks. So, by virtue of translating the book for him, and I made sure that I didn't just translate it, I made it useful for an English language office. I mean, he had organized his books, according to the hairiness of the growing tip, I'm like Pierre people when they want to know what Pinot Noir looks like they want to look at P after M for Malbec, oops, that's called Côt in French but we're going to call it Malbec because that's what call it English. Anyway, so that was a great adventure. And as I said, I was 28 years old when it was published. I was 26. When I started it. I knew that the heart of viticultural academia was in California. And if I was going to figure out what the Gamay really was, I needed to go visit the foundation plant material service every year. Because I saw there were a mix up in rootstocks, there were a lot of things that needed to happen. Well, you mentioned Mondavi all of the wineries there, recognize that I had learned things in Europe that just were not taught in the US. And so, they started hiring me as a consultant. So, the Virginia industry was small. They were all caught up in *vinifera* versus hybrid. And it's ironic, but I'd say, really, my career, I'd go to California four or five times a year, I would consult with, you name it. them, and I never named my clients, because I'm a little bit like the doctor. Nobody wants to say they have phylloxera right you know what I'm saying and so when AXR1 thing hit, they knew I'd written an article in 1979, which was 10 years before the 1998 when the university said, oh, by the way, we have a bio type that's killing ARX1 I had written in 1979, that they were on borrowed time on that rootstock. Because one of the Montpellier scientists in 1897, Louis Rivas had done a paper on why AXR1 and AXR2 would fail. And I learned that it wasn't like I was some genius, but I learned that it had failed in Sicily, and it'll last about 25 years or so before biotype develops, it will eat it up. And if you look at when AXR was first recommended, it was 1971. So, I just did the arithmetic. No, it was 58. Add 25 years to 1958, and you get into the early 80s, which is when phylloxera started taking out Napa Valley. Well, so who are they going to call? So, Lucie. So, I had a great time. Phylloxera buster.

Lucie Morton

Yea I was the Phylloxera buster, meantime, the Virginia industry was sort of percolating along more or less without me because I was more focused. I've always been attracted to solving viticultural problems. I mean, I'm kind of a geeky academic, my training at Montpellier was everybody there was being trained to be an extension agent, a researcher. So, I'm a geeky integrand.

Fred Reno

So, let me tie this back to Virginia, because when I interviewed Luca at Barboursville it was fascinating for him to say that when he was brought in there in 1990, when he, he eventually really did succeed Gabriele Rausse, because I, what I learned in talking to Gabriele was he left physically, Barboursville in 1981. But they kept bringing him back because there was all these other people in between. Finally,

when Luca showed up, that was it, okay. And he was brought in and Luca said, he just told the Zonin family that in order to improve your wine quality, you need to replant your vineyards. And I just said, What didn't let you just rip them all up did they? He said no, no it was a process. Was a process. So, were you when that was going on what was happening in Virginia?

Lucie Morton

Well, that's, that's a good segue for me though. I sort of stayed out. I was fully occupied. Plus, I had two children at the time. And you know, so I had a, I had a full life with my work in California. With the after I wrote the Ampelography, I did a 1985 book called Wine Growing in Eastern America for Cornell University Press. I was East Coast correspondent for Wines & Vines. So, I had plenty to do. I just was uncomfortable with what was happening in Virginia. I knew I would do things differently. I knew I was wanting to use more of a European approach to viticulture than the, let's say, the New Zealand you know, with the big trellises. And they were so afraid of vigor here that they thought they had to build bigger trellises and bigger vines, to deal with the vigor, Richard Smart invited me in 1988 excuse me to go to Auckland, New Zealand to the cool climate symposium. I was the only non-PhD speaker out of 80. And he invited me there because phylloxera was coming to New Zealand also to the South Island and he said, Lucie, you're the only one that makes any sense about rootstocks, I want you to just talk, which I did, but I listened carefully to Richard's approach to sunlight into wine. And something clicked. And I realized that the same principles he was using to make bigger vines I could use to make smaller vines. And I realized that high density planting 2000 vines an acre in Virginia at the time was like, five or 600 vines an acre. Vines were spaced, you know, 10 by eight, very wide and California thing, same thing. They were 12 by eight. And so, I did go through the close spacing work in tandem in California, working with Zelma at the Chalk Hill Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard. They insisted on planting of four and a half by six and a half Cabernet block. And Zelma was like nobody knows how to farm this you know; we'll call in Lucie she's she talks about small vine. So, I very happily worked with a lot of projects in Napa Valley, where they also went from eight by 12 spacing to 10 by six, you know, smaller and smaller. Now, you look at David Abreu with his four by five and while I was doing that in California, I'm like, why can't we do this in Virginia? Well, by this time, I didn't have my own vineyard and I'm very conscious as a consultant. This is other people's money. This is other people's future. This is their farm, and I waited. I said what if somebody asked me to consult and help them do a vineyard? I'm going to do close spacing. Well, late 90s 99,98. I got a call from the Wehner family. And Harrison and Joan Wehner had a vineyard in Great Falls Virginia. In the 70s. They made home wine, but they also had Juanita Swedenborg who's one of the early Middleburg wineries in the 70s. They had she custom crushed for them and their wine was the house wine Chez Francois, in Great Falls, Virginia. Okay, so this is the Wehners. Well, they heard you know, the industry was starting to go, and you know, you'd have the vinifera winegrower's festival. So American wine society was big and so people would talk and somebody Jon, John McGrew, they were talking to John McGrew. He's very big into the American Wine Society. They being Harrison and Joan Wehner with they're three acres, Vidal Blanc. They said we need help with this vineyard. And John said, Well, she's about to get off an airplane from France. You need to hire this young woman that I Lucie Morton, she's going back to growing grapes. She lives in Virginia, she is Virginia. And she just gotten a great education. So, they did. So, I worked with Harrison and Joan Wehner, Wehner. They were my first clients. So, when they called and said that they were going to move to their farm on the eastern shore, Chatham, and that they were thinking of doing a vineyard because their son Jon wanted to have something to do on the farm. I thought to myself, the

Wehners are the perfect clients, because they've been there, done that they understand that grape growing in Virginia is a challenge. You don't, you got to go into it with your eyes wide open. It isn't fun. It's a job. It's work. It's a challenge. It's very rewarding. If you get all that they called me and said we want to do this. I said under two conditions A. I know you know what you're getting into. And they're meticulous growers and B, you have to do close spacing. I said my heart will not be in it. If you plant if your vineyard back then for me, in Virginia, close spacing was seven feet by four feet, and they're flat. The tractor alley depends a little depends on your side slope, etc. But in their case, they're in flat land. I said, if you will do close spacing. I work with you if you won't, you won't. And they said, well, Lucie, your consultant will go for it. But it was very much against the times everybody else had these big lyre systems. It was a political is everything and I just I hate politics. I hate negativity. And I said to myself, we're not going to talk about it. We're just going to do it. I'm goanna let these vineyards speak for themselves. I'm not going to criticize anybody else for doing anything differently. We're just going to do this. But when they said yes, coming back to Luca, Luca had come into Virginia. I had seen how he'd gone from the catharsis system, which had its reasons for being but in the end, especially with mechanization, it's you're better off with smaller vines closer together, where you can cane prune and

Fred Reno

he also emphasized and this is right in your wheelhouse. That the quality of the plant material that they had planted initially was not

Lucie Morton

ah poor Gabriele he had luckily he knew how to graft, Gabriele made a huge contribution to Virginia he did this own grafting worked on the clones but he was in the dark ages and what he did was so great that you know it gave Barboursville the foundation on which to improve right and you can't do that without starting somewhere so he did an awesome thing but I had heard that Barboursville was going closer spacing I knew Gianni Zonin and he'd come and visited me and my parents at Morland and everything and I met Gabriele in 1976 I did an article on wine growing in Virginia for Wines & Vines I was their eastern correspondent so I met him when I and Joachim Hollerith is another one of the early ones I met all these guys when we were all young in in our 20s and starting I'm now what we're talking about at this moment is the 90s when Luca had come they, I'd heard they were going closer spacing they were pulling out the old ones both because of plant material and because it was an opportunity to do more of a European model so it was a combination that's what I went through in California that's interesting the napa valley AXR everybody says was a great opportunity to pull out the old clones the old rootstocks the old trellising and reconfigure the vineyard but I had a crisis of confidence when the Wehners were actually going to do what I said when I had never actually worked one on one with someone in Virginia doing it so I called up Luca and I said Luca can I come over and look at your close spacing you know let can I see what you guys are doing because they were doing the same thing eight feet on size slope seven where it's flat meter so between the vines I said I'll feel a lot better and I don't know a Franco, Fernando Franco was there yet but he had also worked with close spacing at Rapidan River and Prince Michel vineyard and he later was another very smart move by Luca was to bring Fernanda Franco over he knew how to grow those grapes because he done it for the Germans so I knew that those two would give me confidence to do it for the Wehners and we did and I did fantastic yeah and they never looked back in the Wehner I always look at do people repeat if people when they have an opportunity to do it over again do the same thing you know you've hit it and the one change

that we made at Chatham is I told them that for vinifera and for cane pruning which is what I believe in for a lot of different reasons but one meter spacings really better than 48 inches so I'll do four feet for the front like Chambourcin or Chardonnay but a meter spacing I've sort of got that into my baseline for any of my client vineyards

Fred Reno

so, let me ask you this question from your perspective and you obviously been here a long time doing this what terroir is if there's such a thing here Virginia yet what is distinguishing is it just climatic, I mean or are there's got to be different soil types as well.

Lucie Morton

absolutely soil is one of those things where.

Fred Reno

and let me stop because where I'm headed with this is, I had one vintner say something to me early on that stuck in my head and he said Fred it's entirely possible that some of the absolute best vineyards in Virginia have not even been planted yet.

Lucie Morton

absolutely right we have a lot of potential here in Virginia probably going to have to move some woods okay too think out forested it is Virginia is that's been one of our problems everybody plops a vineyard in the forest and I have a noxious slogan which is trees rhymes with disease so we have grape berry moth, grapevine yellows Pierce's disease all of the disease and insects issues we have are exacerbated if you just pop the vineyard in the middle of woods so that was a huge challenge for us so you get a vineyard like Barboursville now that's a few 100 acres or Stone Tower winery now in Leesburg they're moving the trees back I had a lot of pushback from people in the beginning because I laughed at them and I said well in theory I'm a tree hugger I'm you know for the environment in the rain forest etc. but if you're planting a vineyard in Virginia either you're planting grapes or you're planting trees but you know get rid of the forest was something but when we come down to terroir there's kind of a raging debate just in general and around the world about does soil influence wine quality and having done an entire year in five different countries Spain, Italy, France, Switzerland, Germany, having done that at a grad level, doing nothing but visiting vineyard tasting wine and being talked to about their terroirs, you cannot visit Burgundy. I know you, Fred. You can't visit those places and come away thinking soil doesn't matter, correct period. Correct. It matters not how it matters. It isn't that you're going to it's going to taste like the dirt. It doesn't. There's not a direct flavor transfer. But there's a lot to it in the depth of the soil in the water filtration. In the mineralogy, there's a lot to that.

Fred Reno

Well, you'd be the right person to ask this because I've always believed this myself. Certain clones, especially once they're planted into a particular vineyard site, over time they mutate and become very representative of that site, as opposed to just pure Pinot Noir let's say,

Lucie Morton

Oh, absolutely. They don't mutate, they're always the same. And believe me, I'm an Ampelographer. That's why I'm asking you. I can tell clones of Pinot Noir apart, I can tell the 667, from the 777 You can't even do that with a DNA probe at this time. So, I have a very tuned eye to grapevines. So, I'll tell you that they don't change I've seen 667 at Ankita Ridge, here in Virginia, up at 1800 feet and in Beaune with Christophe Bouchard, Christophe Bouchard of Bouchard Pere & Fils was in my international class at Montpellier. As was Lucien Guillement from Chateau Boyd Cantenac and Chateau Pouget. So, I remember the so-called Dijon clones early on, by Messier, Professor Bernard at Beaune. They were selected in Burgundy. And there was a huge controversy over do you want a vineyard, you know, of clones? Or do you want a vineyard mélange of just the massal selection, they call it, and my professor Branas was highly against the clones. And very much for the clonal massal, massal, the way I see it is, again, it is not an either-or situation. But the French were suffering badly with virus decline family virus, leaf roll virus. So, the whole clonal thing came about when they had to clean these vines up. So, what I like to see happening is we work with cleaner, clones or selections, but you use a lot of different ones in your I wouldn't, I wouldn't want to just have one clone of Chardonnay, you know, so that's a whole nother discussion.

Fred Reno

But that gives you that that sort of what I'm what I was talking about mutation, I didn't mean vine itself. But yeah, it starts to reflect the site as opposed to the variety.

Lucie Morton

100% if it does reflect the site, you see that Ankida Ridge is you know one of our I call it the little burgundy in Virginia but over time and don't forget we've got these young vineyards, it takes vines a while to really get established.

Fred Reno

I want to stop you there because I want to give you credit for doing something very brilliant. And that is that whole project at Ankita. Ridge, I was so blown away and impressed when I bought their wine was in California. In fact, when I started talking to people back in 2017, when I was still in California about moving to Virginia, and start talking and raving about Virginia wine, they looked me crazy, like what are you talking about? So, I'd have lunch with them, and I pull a bottle of Ankida Ridge Pinot Noir out and pour it for them. And they would look at me and be stunned. Right. just stunned. Yeah.

Lucie Morton

Well, they, you know, if you're up at 1800 feet elevation, you have a shot at Pinot in Virginia. I would not put it down low. I mean, Pinot, Well, we know Pinot its, but and I told them, nobody cared that they were by definition going to be a little teeny vineyard five, six acres. I said, there is only one grape that can pull that off. And that's Pinot Noir, that micro scale of wine. But yeah, so that's been exciting. But that is a terroir. I mean, what is terroir? It's elevation. It's the soil. It's the drainage. It's everything. And yes, there's a style and I think you probably will see it in their Gamay they have a little Gamay, Well, I'm excited. Chardonnay. Yeah, of course. I'm excited about that Gamay because of. In fact, where I went up and interviewed them, I gave them a bottle of Chateau Fleurie. Oh, yeah, my favorite,

Fred Reno

I was like try this. You will enjoy it. Well, I used to import it. Yeah. So, I'm very impressed with them. And it can only go up.

Lucie Morton

Well, exactly. They learn they mature. It takes a lot to learn your vineyard but coming back to soil. So, I didn't mention at the outset, Fred that I had been writing a book called The roots of fine wine. for 30 years, it got started as a bibliography that I wrote for three Napa Valley vineyards, they paid me more money than any publisher would ever pay me to do a bibliography for them. I did a bibliography because they wanted to know more about the rootstocks. And then I'm like, wow, this is we need a book on this, just like we needed an Ampelography. And I'm like, That's hard. It was hard. But I did that. This one that so I started my book I've been through I've had three publishers accepted it, Oxford, University California Press, etc. But every time I would get, you're working on your book. And all of a sudden what happened for me was these rootstocks that I had recommended people plant in Napa Sonoma, in particular. Mendocino north mostly North Coast, California. They weren't thriving. So, this is the late 80s, early 90s. These vineyards were having problems. So, you'd have four-year-old vineyards that were not thriving. How am I Oh, boy. I wonder why and people were blaming the rootstock genotype, they were saying 3309 is not adapted to Napa Valley. And I'm like, wait a minute, when I did my, the myth of the universal rootstock for Wines & Vines, it was published in '79. And I said, publish it again and '85 because nobody read it the first time. Anyway, I went back and read all the research papers at the Oakville Research Station all the California USDA, they did tons of rootstock research in California, when phylloxera came there in the late 80s, and 90s. And guess what one of the best root stocks overall was 3309. So, I'm like, just don't blame the rootstock. So, I ran around in California giving lectures called don't blame 3309. And I'd have all the vineyard managers from Yeah, all the big places, they come and listen to me. But I'm like, so what is it? Well, because I was doing so much consulting. I remember being in one Napa Valley vineyard in 1995. January. And let me back up. I had been in New Zealand in 1994, at Goldwater Estate their vineyard wasn't thriving too. And I said to Kim and Jeanette Goldwater. Can I need to dig up a vine, there's something wrong here. I need to dig this up and do an autopsy biopsy or whatever. And they you should see trying to get someone to give you one weeny little grapevine. It's like saying, Can I cut off your big toe, but we pulled it out. And I chopped in? I looked at the rootstock I went, Ut Oh, what is the you know, the pith? In the center of a grape cage should be a nice fluffy beige. It was black. The wood inside of it should be the xylem and all should be beige They had black dots. I'm like, wow, what are these like little black oil spots I said man, I've never seen that. And whenever that is, and then I dropped it because I had never seen it. Then put me in very swishy Napa Valley vineyard that wasn't thriving four-year-old Cabernet on 5C. And I said to the guys, I said Listen, I have an idea. Let's cut into your cordons, and if the center is starting to dry out. We're going to just keep cutting down the trunk I said I'm going to make a bet. Well, anybody bet me 100 bucks, that we're going to cut in the rootstock and you're going to have black exceed in the in the rootstock. 100 bucks anybody; no, they wouldn't do it, so we dug it up and sure enough, boom, there it was. And this was I had a Napa Valley, you know, vineyard management company, the owners. This is all you know, Super-duper high end everything right. And one of them pipes up and goes. We're going to call it Morton's disease. Oh, no, absolutely not. We're going to call it Well, let me think what we're going to call it but it's we're going to call it by the symptom.

Fred Reno

Black goo right. We're going to call it black goo. I said because we already have black rock, black spot black gum, we're goanna call it black goo because I guarantee you that word that disease has never been uttered in the grape world before now. So, this will mark 1970 1995 I discovered black goo in Napa Valley. That and that name did the trick. It annoyed the hell out of you know academics because they didn't think it was dignified and blahdy blah. But hey, it's in Oxford Companion to wine, so I mean, it ended up sticking but really, it ended up being my big adventure in the 90s. But guess what, it held up my book, because now I discovered a disease of rootstocks. So, what good is for me to recommend a rootstock variety or write a book? If I know my heart of hearts, there are problems that are being sold to people because I would go get flats of green growing vines and there be black goo in them Oh, okay. Yeah. So, it was coming from the nurseries and believe me talking about politics. Oh, I can't even imagine.

Lucie Morton

Oh, geez. But yeah, so my book got stalled.

Fred Reno

So, I'm going to direct you to something here. What do you see here in Virginia, for the next 10 or 20 years? I mean, where is this thing going to end up? Are we finally going to get the recognition here? Because I think it's still going to take a big player to come in here and put their stake in the ground whether Virginia likes it or not put their stake in the ground, like Zonin family did.

Lucie Morton

I was goanna say it's already been done by the Zonins,

Fred Reno

but they, that was before now is now.

Lucie Morton

still, we have a 200 they have a 200-acre property. Oh, no, I get that, you know, and but yes,

Fred Reno

what I'm saying I'm talking about somebody who comes in here and has the distribution clout has the capital and the experience to know what to do? Because it seems like to me, Shenandoah Valley is ripe for a lot of development and exploration for grape varieties. Would that be off the mark? Well, I think that we're more of a European model. I think we're more of a European model, because I don't think we have huge tracts of land like they have in California, that are appropriate for grapes. And even in the Shenandoah Valley, you have areas, you need the altitude, you need the elevation, they have some, you know, cold issues, frost issues. I've I know a lot of my clients are interested in expanding and are looking for vineyard property. So, I've been with people looking for vineyard property. I just don't think our topography lends itself to that one place that could happen is the Eastern Shore of Virginia. Okay, in any place where you've had, you know, farming, like Chatham vineyard has been there for a long time, they've done very well. But I also wonder, I see family estate wineries as being really good for the community being a sustainable scale. You know, you can have 20 to 50 acres of grapes and earn a living doing this if you do it well. So maybe a collection,

Lucie Morton

what's wrong with the small family? I think that's, I think that's the backbone and let for my experience and the people I work with my biggest pleasure is that a place like Chatham can a, sustain an historic property into the first second third generation. They have a sustainable business now. Yeah, they partner also with oyster growers. But one thing Leon always said, when we were working together, trying to promote the winegrowing east of the Rockies, was that you need all three markups to make it work. So, let me just say right at the outset, grape growing does not make money in Virginia. Well, maybe you could have,

Fred Reno

Nowhere really but yes,

Lucie Morton

yeah. So, so the wineries really are on the back of the growers, the growers, support the wineries and I'm a big advocate of tying, the bottle price to the price per ton. I still Yeah. \$100 wine. So, when people go, oh my god \$3,000 for a ton of Virginia fruit. I'm like, they're getting \$30 a bottle. They're getting 60 paying 6000. It's, you know, it's simple math. It's the Yeah, so I think that that is one of the few things that's kind of simple that's held up, is this paid by the wine if somebody's getting that money, and I also think it's the Value Added too that for the consumers to be able to come and it was Leon's dream come true. That you go to any one of my clients, for sure. The successful Virginia wineries, you're in the heart of vines, you know, they're talking about their vineyard, you look at Barboursville at their videos, they're all about them, planting vines or, you know, in the snow or dealing with the frost. But it's Leon's' dream to show Americans that wine isn't just something you pull off the shelf. It's something you pull off the vine. So I'm not just sure that we have very many places that we are adapted to a big player however if a really savvy big player did come in a you know and post COVID I think COVID has changed that dynamic a lot COVID actually thank goodness in our industry that we are small and are not dependent on restaurant sales so people whose business model dependent on restaurant sales are suffering today now fortunately that hopefully that won't last forever but what's saving my clients are having selling more wine now than they did the year before their wine clubs are growing.

Fred Reno

Two things that happen post COVID that I find interesting could help the Virginia wine industry specifically which is my goal and that is people are buying more wine online than they ever did but phenomenally they're buying it what I call sight unseen you know before people would buy wine online because they knew the wine they knew the player and everything now people are experimenting like I used to when I went into a wine shop they're now experimenting buying wine they never tasted before

Lucie Morton

Well, that's where I think Fred you could you have the understanding of marketing like in such depth that there could be opportunities of people getting together with an online sale would be awesome.

Fred Reno

because really what I'm trying to do what I'm trying to accomplish with this podcast and why I'm here is to get a broader audience for Virginia wine on a national basis so where people are when they're thinking about buying wine they're just not defaulting to California or defaulting the Oregon or defaulting to Washington state because that happens to be where they live and that's what they know but they're getting that intellectual curiosity that drove me all my career and drives people really get into wine.

Lucie Morton

well and it drove you to France too, Virginia's halfway to France so hey stop in Virginia you know I'm for all of the that's why I'm really against all these tariffs and things the whole fun of wine is that it's international how you can how do you appreciate an Oregon pinot if you don't have a French pinot to compare it with yeah and there's another thing Fred I wanted to get back when to the soil issue yes in Virginia and the reason my book came up was a Bermuda triangle for me and the root stock book was soil nutrition it just didn't make sense the soil test would say you were high in potassium the grape petioles and tissue would say you were low or vice versa in our case in Virginia we have many of our rock minerals are high in potassium that creates high ph in the wine so that's been something that I have looked at well I've worked with Bubba Beasley if you want to talk about soils Bubba Beasley is a hydrogeologist based right here in Charlottesville he and I won't do a new site anymore pretty much without having Bubba do electromagnetic imaging and then ground truthing with soil pits he's extremely knowledgeable about this and I have always refused to do it before he EM imaging and bubba came along I did soil pits and GPS them I've been doing that for since GPS first came out and a lot of people would only look at the top six or eight inches and I'm like that's not where the roots are going to be you got to do a pit you need to see where they're going anybody who thinks that soil doesn't make a difference to wine I have one place you can look and that is the Virginia wine research board research that bubba Beasley and I also with Dr Clifford Ambers who's a PhD geologist in Virginia and a grape breeder we worked with Pollock vineyard a specific project where we took a block b cabernet franc on 312 rootstock 312 clone I think it was on riparia rootstock either riparia or 101 but same rootstock same clone Benoit Pineau the winemaker there who's French and who like us knows soil does matter had noticed that certain vines had different qualities and he had Bubba, Bubba was doing EM mapping so we were able to get like this underground map of where the soil change happened so we flagged the vines they made different wines out of them for three years Fred I could hand you those the color was different the ph was different the flavors and this is in one block that to the naked eye looks flat and the only difference was the soil and we did Really good job, I'd say as a team of defining what those differences were rooting depth, water holding capacity, soil pH, and everything.

Fred Reno

That's fascinating. I mean, well, alright Lucie, Listen, this has been terrific and I'm serious, we're goanna have to have a series because there's, you've got so much knowledge and there's so much we could cover. But hey, thank you for your time today.

Lucie Morton

Well, thanks, Fred. Thanks for you being in Virginia. You know, I've never really left Virginia. And I'm very proud of our industry. And I think it's growing organically. And who what would happen if somebody came within unlimited money? I think this is one of those places where money can't buy you

happiness, it can buy you, hopefully the ability to put together a team to design a great vineyard and place it right in the

Fred Reno

it's a future, It's a future.

Lucie Morton

It's, it's Yeah, we'll see. All right. Thank you.