

EPISODE # 20: KESWICK VINEYARDS/STEPHEN BARNARD, WINEMAKER & VINEYARD MANAGER

SPEAKERS

Stephen Barnard, Fred Reno

Fred Reno

Stephen, this is a pleasure. Thank you for giving me the time this morning.

Stephen

No thank you Fred. Appreciate your time and what you're doing really excited to hear about it and really happy to be here so thank you.

Fred Reno

Well, let's start at the beginning. So, you're in South Africa you learn to make wine, was wine part of your family? How did you pursue all of this?

Stephen

know if wine being part of the family was something we enjoyed? Yeah, it was a big part of the family. But no, we have sort of ties in with agriculture. I'd say my mother grew up on a sheep farm farming community in the middle of South Africa. My dad worked on farms, but no certainly certainly didn't come from a family winery, per se. You know, I sort of haphazardly fell into it. It started fortuitously. You look back on it, and it almost seemed like it was meant to be so some sort of farming, you know, kind of ties but certainly not with grapes and viticulture.

Fred Reno

It said you were a tour guide or something when you first started, really one of the more famous and oldest wineries in South Africa.

Stephen

Yeah, I started with a winery Groot Constantia they were established in 1685. And they're the oldest winery in South Africa and established by the Dutch Kirtan, Dutch it was great. I was doing a lot of other things. I think everyone grows up wanting to be 100 different things. I have a brother who grew up and since he was in diapers, says he wants to be a doctor. That's all he ever wanted to be, and he is I grew up wanting to do a bunch of different things. But I got a job just pouring wine not really understanding what goes into it. But I enjoyed customers I got a good discount, I got access to wine. So, there was there was value there, but I learned to appreciate the farming aspect which really is the the hospitality

aspect which is really important the business aspect and it all started off with giving tours and pouring wines at Groot Constantia in Cape Town South Africa.

Fred Reno

Well then you get your degree enology you go on to Flagstone Winery, correct?

Stephen

I finished up with Flagstone yeah, so Flagstone was really interesting. Bruce Jack was the owner and subsequently has been sold to Constellation but what I loved about Flagstone is they sourced grapes from all over South Africa. So, there is really an opportunity to learn from Bruce, who was just and is I think, a maverick within the wine industry in South Africa, but actually have access to fruit grown in Walker Bay and Elgin and you know, so it was it was really learning and then with the intention of moving on, I really wanted to travel back then travel was let's travel and come back home. Obviously the come back home part didn't quite come to fruition. But what I'd like to believe is Charlottesville in Virginia is home. You know, I grew up in South Africa, but home is Virginia now.

Fred Reno

Well, if I read it correctly, you had an opportunity to go to California and make wine for a winery you alluded to was somewhat prominent, but you didn't really flag it.

Stephen

Yeah, we didn't we didn't end up going the opportunity existed. And and obviously when you think of American wine and history, you think California, Washington, Oregon, you think West Coast, obviously. And I was working through the Ohio State internship program, and they tossed out the possibility of coming to Virginia. And I think I'd be I'd be amiss if I knew much about Virginia. You know, I knew Finger Lakes. I knew some of the East Coast wineries but certainly not the potential of Virginia so and the other thing that was really great was Keswick had never made wines before Keswick had planted vines in 2000. But the first vintage was in 2002. So, I was very fortunate to come to a winery that had had sort of a blank slate so to speak. We didn't know about our terroir we didn't know you know, so you could come in and I could actually make wine. I think as a winemaker if you go to these other places, you might be doing a very small part of the process you might be you know that how much wine making do you do? How much learning Do you do so I took a chance to come to Virginia and I'm so glad I did? And that was back in 2002, which was the first vintage straight off the plane. Got here in August started making wine and and yeah, Keswick has been making wine for almost 20 years now.

Fred Reno

was Chris Hill, the one that the Schoenberg's, Schoenberg's brought in to be their consultant to plant the vineyard originally?

Stephen

not initially originally, we had a gentleman by the name of Mike Little who was from California as well. Mike was the person I met who actually picked me up from the airport. Michael Shaps was the consultant at that point. And Chris came on board a few years later, we you know, Jake Bushing was here, you know, so I had the pleasure of working obviously with Jake, I learned a lot from Michael who

is has an incredible reputation incredible winemaker in Virginia as well. And then, you know, I'm not exactly sure when Chris came on board, but Chris has been involved for quite a few years and what a plethora of knowledge what a what a gentleman and I certainly believe that a lot of the sort of the success of the winery is really attributed to the vineyard and ultimately attributed to Chris's guidance, how much acreage is cultivated here now. Sure. So, the estates 400 acres of which just under 70 is planted to vines. A great deal of that was planted in 2000. A little bit went in in 2000 and five, and then we didn't expand until 2016. And then the following three years, we put in almost another 20 acres going against what most people, Cab Franc obviously I think is a good bet for Virginia. I think Virginia makes incredible Cab Franc. But we planted a lot of Cabernet Sauvignon, which is a varietal that you don't really associate with Virginia, Petit Verdot and then one acre of Petit Manseng those vines are, I think, planted on the best part of our, our estate. And I think the best grapes are still to be made, hopefully, from what I could see here, you left Keswick? Yeah. And went over there. Rappahannock Cellars. Yeah, Rappahannock Cellars. So, prompted that move, and then you came back. Sure, um, you know, to be honest, I think the owner said I needed to go. And, you know, I was I was young and silly and had a lot of growing up to do I mean, you got to call a spade a spade, and it was the best thing. Honestly, I went and worked for John and Marialisa Delmare for two years up in Rappahannock. They're a little bit older than Keswick. I got stuck in there. And I grew up a lot. And in 2006, I was able I was given the opportunity to come back, and I think I I brought a different skill set and maturity or winemaking and some experience and thankfully, I'm still employed by Keswick 15 years after the fact. So, it was great. It was a great life learning experience. It was it was good. It was good to knock you down a peg. I think when you're young and you think you know, everything, you're a little bit arrogant, and you a little bit. And life has a great way of sort of kind of opening your eyes a little bit. So, it was it was great. wasn't great at the time. But you look back on it and say what a great experience and what an opportunity and it's really held me in good stead.

Fred Reno

Now. Correct me if I'm wrong, Keswick as a wine growing operation. You work with vinifera? Yep. You work with hybrids. And you work with the Native American grape in this case, Norton. Correct. That's unbelievable. You have that full salad bowl if you will, yeah. opportunity to work with. So, tell me what you think some of the differences are in growing these, sure, different, you know, basically breeds.

Stephen

sure, so I mean, obviously, the world of wine is centered around vinifera right so you know, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Merlot, I think the world of wine can almost be kind of categorized into those three. But Virginia is not the easiest place in which to grow grapes. So, for us, it's firstly learning about the condition the environment, the terroir the soil how to grow grapes in in a season that is really not sometimes conducive to growing the kind of quality fruit that'll allow you to make the quality of wine we people forget that. We say we're winemakers and I really think I'm just a farmer. The winery really is the amplification of what the vineyard does. So, we found that certain vinifera do really well, certain vinifera are challenging something like Viognier is incredible, you know, you look at the northern Rhone and Condrieu it makes some of the most incredible wines in the world. It struggles a little bit in Virginia, susceptible to frost, you know, the style, the consumerism aspect to it as well. There's value to hybrids. If you think of Chambourcin and the Vidal, they produce a secondary crop, there's positives for planting,

they produce a fair amount of fruit. So, if your livelihood is dependent on tonnage, you know, those grapes offer something else.

Fred Reno

Well, if I could stop you here, I have become a big fan of several hybrids. My career was primarily on the west coast, although I started in retail wine in Washington, DC over 40 years ago, before I moved to California, I've come here and become a big fan of Chambourcin, you know, to those who handle it correctly, in my opinion, take that little back edge off of it, and to me, it resembles a really good high quality Cru Beaujolais Okay, and that's Cru Beaujolais is one of my go to wines has been I mean my wife that what we drink cru Beaujolais or Virginia wine every night so Chambourcin I've really become a fan of and Seyval Blanc

Stephen

Yeah, so I worked a little bit with Seyval up at Rappahannock it's, it's not a varietal we have here, but Chambourcin, especially if you if you allude to Chris Hill, I think he's one of the biggest supporters of Chambourcin in terms of it's easy to grow. It's thick skinned, its loose clustered. You can pick it when you need to get to it. It makes these really dark, inky kind of wines. And it's interesting that you related Beaujolais and Gamay if you look at Fleurie or Brouilly or Morgon those Crus' there are some similarities that has that slightly grapyness and that foxiness to it as well. And I think that's really, it's in the in the hands of a winemaker who knows how to express the grape but do it in a way that's not offensive. I think there's and that's what I love about Virginia is there's so many varied examples of quality wine and differences of varietals that are produced in Virginia, which is.

Fred Reno

well, that is what is exciting to me about Virginia. I think there's much more experimentation going on here than anywhere in the country today as far as winegrowing, So you said Norton is your love hate grape.

Stephen

Yeah, it's hard because personally speaking and just to be hardly Honestly, it's not my favorite grape. It's a difficult grape to grow and it has its challenges. And I certainly feel that there are other varietals that we could do better that would express in a glass more of our character than Norton does. I think that's the kindest way to put it. But you know Norton is very distinctive. It is what it is. And that's a positive. I mean, it's, it's, it's unabashedly Norton, it's grapey. It's got this tartness and acidity to it, but I think most people in the industry, if not everyone knows, I feel very strongly about certain varietals, and I don't feel as strongly about Norton.

Fred Reno

On that note then that's a good segue, what is your favorite varietal, let's just say red wine to work with?

Stephen

Well, firstly, yeah, I think Cabernet Sauvignon is one that it's really near and dear to my heart, because it's not a varietal that really is suited to our climate, our short growing season. I've fallen in love with Cabernet Franc, to be honest with you, it's a again, back in South Africa, it was really a blending

component. You know, you don't find a lot of the single varietals. If you think of Cabernet Franc, I always think Loire if you think of Touraine, Anjou Saumur, you know, those are the finest examples, but they have that leafiness and that herbaceousness, which in the new world is almost taken as a negative. I think Virginia has and continues to produce world world world class Cabernet francs. And it's a varietal that I've I've really come to love and adore. And it's more so a vineyard grape for me than a winery, grape. But Cabernet as well, along with Cabernet Franc are two that I'm very sort of protective over. And we work very hard not as not any harder than any other grape that we produce. But I'm really excited to pour our cab franc and cab Sauv to consumers and say there you go; this is what we can do.

Fred Reno

Well, that is interesting to me to hear a Virginia vintner waxing eloquently about Cabernet Sauvignon. Because it is difficult to grow here

Stephen

it is. And we know that we can't produce it every year, and years like 2018 and 2020 & '11. We're not going to produce a varietal; I think we have to give transparency and credence to the fact that if we put a reserve or a Cabernet on it has to build upon vintages of the past. So, we're not going to be able to do it every single year. But I think those that we've put out there had been well received, and we're very proud of it. You can't compare them to the west coast cabs, can't compare them to Bordeaux. What's great is they're, they're Virginian, whatever that definition is, they're different. But I think they're they're quality wines, they meet the quality parameters and standards of which we have, but it is a it is a tough grape to grow. And you certainly can't do it every year.

Fred Reno

Well, that takes me to that conversation we were having just before we got into this interview, and that is the conversation about terroir. You've seen 20 years of wine coming from this particular estate. What is that signature?

Stephen

Gosh, I think it's rainfall. I mean, if you think of if you go back to viticulturally, a vine needs, you know, water, sunlight, nutrients, and heat, you know, we get an abundance of heat, we get really, really hot days we're humid, our growing season is somewhat short. But if you think of the one thing that really impacts the grapes, from a disease pressure to picking parameters to flowering, I think it's rainfall and mitigating and managing that Firstly, by planting the correct grapes on the right sites and thinking of a vineyard and how it's planted to manage water either through slopes or good soils. I think the one key problem that we have is rain, you know, and we get 42 to 45 inches of rain a year. a vineyard only needs around 16 inches of rain a year to ripen. So, we deal with almost 300% more available water. And then you throw in yours like 3,11 and 18 where you're almost in the 70, 80,90-inch range. That becomes really difficult to work with.

Fred Reno

Well, that's fascinating because there's all this high-quality wine coming out of Virginia despite that particular dilemma of rain.

Stephen

Correct, which again, you know, I think more credit to the people that grow the grapes. And people we've got incredible growers and winemakers. But if you think about the process, it starts with the farming right and starts with I think your rootstock and your clone and then where do you plant it. And there's so many folks who know what they're doing, who have done it for a while and who have access to folks like Chris Hill who have been here for 30, 40 years who can say this works and this doesn't work. So better vineyards are being planted on better sites on soils that mitigate the effects of water. And then ultimately, you know, these incredible winemakers, men and women are making really varietally correct expressions of the soil of the growing season, the climates, and the vintage in which we grow grapes.

Fred Reno

Well, you just touched on something that is stuck with me. I had a vintner say to me several years ago when I first got here. He said, Fred, I think that potentially some of the best vineyards in Virginia, haven't even been planted yet. What do you think of that comment?

Stephen

I agree 100% I agree 100% because it pertains to what we've done. Yeah. You know, so our vineyards went in, and they're planted on very heavy clay and certain varietals and less densely planted. Now we're looking at better rootstocks, we're looking at better clones, we're going more high-density planting, we're looking at soils that would allow those grapes to do well in even adverse conditions. So, for us and others better vineyards are being planted and better plant materials being put in the ground. That's just before better folks are growing it and making wine.

Fred Reno

Is everything you produce your estate bottled, or do you augment?

Stephen

No, No, we'd like that to be the facts. But again, we're very transparent in that we source grapes within the state and even out of state. If it goes into a Keswick label. It is 100% Virginian. If it goes with a reserve label, it's 100% estate but we source fruit out of California out of Washington, I think the important part there is to explain why and what we did. And last year, for instance, we got frosted May 13 and 14th. We got down to 26 degrees and we lost 90% 95% of our vineyard. I think people are forgiving if they know why you did it. And if you're open and honest about it. So, we have sourced fruit within the state and out of states as well.

Fred Reno

The advent of the adjunct label, the Les Vent d'Ange's Yeah, what was the I mean, there was something there that's a commemorative or in honor off. Oh, yeah. of the owner's sister, I guess.

Stephen

it was it was Al's sister Genevieve and the Les d'Ange's label is, you know, it's a hard one because people think it's a secondary label, so it's a throwaway, less quality. It really isn't. They make these just high quality almost overdeliver, deliver in value for the price point but the label is a tribute in

remembrance of Genevieve that passed away. Way too young. She was the youngest of the five kids I met her very briefly but the label there's a lot of sorts of things on the label that allude to their family the fleur-de-lys her mother was French les d "Angeles which means the wind of angels vendange is the harvest, there's swans on the label because her husband had swans on the necklaces, and they mate for life. And if you drive into the property there's swans on the right, the brooch and the hair is the caduceus. She was a doctor. So, it is a secondary label, but it probably has a lot of emotional tie in. Yeah, that's

Fred Reno

well, I've had several of them and the wine quality is superlative. I never saw it as a second label. I mean, initially, I thought, well, what is this? Yep, then I had my first I believe it was the Rhone, red, Rhone Blend if I'm not mistaken, or what was the red blend?

Stephen

We've done a few things we done Pinot Gris and Chard and we've done Syrah Rhone inspired varietals and Cabernet.

Fred Reno

that's the one I had and boy, it was damn good. And I said, Wow, this is really good. In fact, I just had the recent Viognier this week.

Stephen

Oh, fantastic. Yeah, under the Les d'Angeles. 2019 Yeah, it's uh, you know, the wines under those labels are really drinkable wines, enjoyment wines. Yes. That's what we do. We make wines that you can drink. If you try to make wines that are expensive and need 10 years in the bottle. I think sometimes you miss the point. I think the value of not only Virginia wine and wine in general is to share to celebrate because there's always another bottle is always another vintage.

Fred Reno

Is this a 2019? Chardonnay that I am enjoying here.

Stephen

Yeah, what you have is our estate 19 Chardonnay. And we have very little planted, and we we've only got about one and a half acres on the estates. And our estate is wonderful for a lot of reasons. But when we have frost, of which we do Viognier and Chardonnay are really going to be severely impacted. And that's almost 20 acres of the 75. So, it represents a large part. So yeah, it's planted on really cool schisty and shale soil. It's certainly not we're talking about it's not a Burgundian, but it's not Californian. And, you know, it has the sort of minerality has this brightness to it. I think one of the key components that we really need to focus on Virginia is acidity. I think it's a part of wine that we sometimes overlook. I think that has it, the oak is there, but it's really in the background. You hardly taste it. And again, it's a wine you can drink. You can drink it on its own, which is another thing we think about. We don't want you to have to pair it with something to drink. Sometimes you just want to go home and drink wine.

Fred Reno

Question. You're going to impress somebody, some major press guy or some sommelier or something. You got one wine of Keswick to pull out, what's the line you pull out? I mean, it's a tough question, but what's the wine you say? Okay, this is us.

Stephen

You know, I think Firstly, yes, we want to we want to promote Keswick, but I think what's also important is to promote Virginia. So, the first thing I'm going to do is put it in a brown bag, and not let him know that it's Virginian. And I'm probably going to pull out a Cabernet Franc, because I truly believe that Virginia and Keswick make world class Cabernet francs. And we're going to challenge the status quo and say here's a wine that you know nothing about, but judge it on its quality, not where it's from. Yeah, you'd want to pour your Chardonnay or your Cabernet but if there's one wine that I would do, I would do our block 2, 2019 Cabernet Franc, because I think it's indicative of what Virginia is doing of which we are part of, I think, yeah, we want to be, you know, kind of promoting ourselves as well. But I think it's really important to promote the state and the fact that the state produces world class wines.

Fred Reno

I learned a long time ago; the brown bag never lies.

Stephen

No, it's, it's, it's fun to do. It's fun, you know, from from your point of view to do palate training. But I think if you if you take out that consumerism bias out of it, I think a lot more Virginia wines would gain prominence and recognition because of how good they really are. I think the label kind of, you know, messes with what people think or expect.

Fred Reno

Well, that has been my experience. And that's why I'm here. I want to change that because my job is to change that, both nationally and internationally and get people to recognize, I mean, I'm sorry, but I get really excited. Virginia is in my opinion, the most exciting wine growing region in America today. Yeah, just more going on here.

Stephen

No, I would 100% agree. I mean, if you look at the people, we're attracting in the vineyards that are going in and the writers that are starting to, to kind of, you know, focus and research a little bit of what the state does. We're certainly not there and there's still more work to be done. There's we can't rest on whatever laurels we have. But what I also love about it is such a collaborative, you know, there's a shared information, there's the Winemakers Research Exchange is something that I think talks to that spirit of kind of trying to build everybody, you know, the rising tides raise all ships analogy. It's very communitive, you know, winemakers and vineyard managers are talking to each other. And there's that sense of gotta do this together, first and foremost, because at the end of the day, we are all different. You know, we're down the street from Barboursville, you know, Barboursville, incredibly iconic, but they do Vermentino, Fiano, Sangiovese, Nebbiolo, none of which we do, if you think of Ankita Ridge, the Vrooman's are incredible. They do Pinot Noir, I think of Jim Law's Sauvignon Blanc you can do Lemberger from Ox Eye, you can do Riesling, none of which we do doesn't mean that we they're not

Virginian. And that's the point is that we want to celebrate diversity. We want to celebrate the Virginia industry. Because within that we're all individually,

Fred Reno

you just touched on a number of my favorite wines and wineries. That's remarkable. Okay, the next question. What's that one wine? Because I remember mine. What's that one wine you had? At one time early in your career when you went? Ahh, that's it. That was like the Epiphany, the wow wine that said that's it.

Stephen

That's interesting. You know, it had to be I don't remember specifically, I can tell you the best wine I've ever had. The best wine I ever had was a \$20 bottle of Australian Shiraz, sitting in a empty house. The day before my wedding. We had just closed on the house. Our first house bought together we were getting married the next day. We were sitting on camping chairs eating pizza in a house with no AC or heat. Drinking a bottle. It was called The Watcher, the Fetish Shiraz; the best wine I've ever had. Wow, wine is emotional it's romantic. It's experiential. I've had Ch Petrus, which is mind blowingly good. I had a drop and the taste of the 1791 wine in Crook Constantia but the best wine I've ever had was with my fiancé soon to be wife sitting in an empty house on a camping chair eating Domino's. So, I think you know now what gets you going. I love the Monticello AVA Obviously, I'm a big fan of King family vineyards and Jefferson and Barboursville and Pollock and Veritas. And I love what Glen Manor and Jeff White's doing with Sauvignon Blanc and I think Jim Law and Rutger de Vink at RDV and Rappahannock and Delaplane. And these are, these are wines that continue to inspire you. There's so different but they're all so good. I drink probably way too much wine anyway. But I drink a hell of a lot of Virginia wine because I really and as are others. People are very passionate about this. And they're just fantastic to drink. They're really wonderfully, wonderfully well-made characterful, storyful wines.

Fred Reno

Well, isn't that the case with wine? What is the story behind it? Who are the people behind it? Again, that's what drives my passion for, Virginia. there's the story. There are the people. There's a real authenticity Yeah, to what's happening. That seems to have been lost, primarily on West Coast, I'm sorry to say, but it's here. It's alive. I love what you touched on about the collaboration, Virginia because I see that and feel that and boy that feels like the 1980s in California.

Stephen

Yeah. Yeah, look, I mean, you know, we are we're in the hospitality industry. If you think about it, we are predicated on people. We have to work very, very hard to attract people, to get people to buy our wine to get people to come back. So, I think we work as do others a lot on on marketing and customer experience and we feel the wine once they try it. Will, will speak volumes. But I do find that you go into the wineries, you see the owners and you see the winemakers and you see the personalities behind it. And that is important. And I hope Virginia doesn't lose that spirit of community and that spirit of humble beginnings, hope that we reach and attain the heights that I think we could. But we don't lose that sort of gentlemen farming, attitude, humble, the men and women in this industry, they are just so down to earth and so passionate, driven, this is not like tech, were we all going to be billionaires and millionaires. I mean, there's, it's a lifestyle product, right? And who better to share it with than than each

other? You know, I still am very positive about people. And we will take a bit of a hit sometimes. And then wine just really is that sort of vessel in which we can communicate and share and find common ground and differences. And I think that's, that's why we're Yeah,

Fred Reno

well, I would have to agree with that. from a standpoint of selling the wine. You have wonderful tasting room here, obviously, I'm sure you have a really strong following. What kind of distribution Do you have outside of the area?

Stephen

Yeah, incredibly little to be honestly less than 5%. It's something that we are looking at distribution, I think for Virginia wine is difficult, just in terms of volume and price points and sku's and wines. So, 95 even maybe touch higher than that is all done DTC through our tasting room through our wine club and through our weddings.

Fred Reno

offline, I have some ideas how you might improve that.

Stephen

we would we would love to we would love to obviously, you know, being able to distribute sort of, in state and out of state is also an important part of the marketing and the far reach of what Virginia could do.

Fred Reno

Well, long term. It's important in my opinion to Virginia to have a footprint some because all the great wines in the world have a footprint that's International.

Stephen

No, you're 100% correct. And you know, we spoke about it earlier about, you know, wine writers who have a following if you think it started with Steven Spurrier and Oz Clark and Ray Isle and you know, James Molesworth and James Suckling, they've all come out and they've all started writing, Jancis Jancis Robinson has been out to Virginia. And they've all been really enthusiastic about and if those personalities who have a far-reaching audience, you know, can start talking about Virginia and the quality and why as a consumer and a lover of wine, you should actually explore Virginia, that's a that's a good start being able for them to get the wine is the next step. And as you say, you know, some of the greatest wines in the world are made in minute quantities, but yet the reputation and that that doesn't sort of harm the fact that they can they can find those wines anyway.

Fred Reno

I'm curious Al Schoenberg and Cindy. They're Michigan natives. I's a Michigan native, So displaced Michiganders. How involved? Are they these days? I mean, they must be really proud, obviously.

Stephen

I think so they're involved. They live on the property. They're involved in day-to-day operations. But I think what they also do is they allow people to do their jobs. So, he started off his background is in technology. And he had a fortune 500 company. And they went through a life event and made them pause and say, What do we want to do? And his dream was always to open up a winery. And he looked, he looked in Texas, in New York, in Virginia and California, and bought this property and planted vines. And, you know, we've all learnt that's got it really is. And I think that that story is quite common throughout the industry. You know, we've learned we've made mistakes. We've sort of learned from those mistakes, you still feel we have a lot to do, but they're involved. Cindy, on the hospitality side, Al sort of oversees everything. You know, at the end of the day, it's their winery, it's their vision, that's their passion. It's, you know, their dream that we're trying to kind of come to fruition.

Fred Reno

Well, there's a lot of history going back on this property isn't there?

Stephen

Yeah, the house was built in 1911 by Sir Barkley Reeves, and there's been artifacts that have been discovered from the Revolutionary War. The Battle of Trevilian was a cavalry war that happened over there. We had some interesting owners Art Garfunkel once owned this place. Hugh Wilson were the previous owners. He was a producer out of California. And I'm sure if the walls could talk, there were stories that we would see. But yeah, it was it was you know; it was wooded in the back, and it was all pasture out front. There wasn't a single vine on so what is today Keswick vineyards was really started off with an idea and a passion from Al who obviously it had ties into Provence and he's family. And I think 20 years later, I think he could look back with pride at saying this was a dream. Maybe it's maybe we've surpassed where we thought we would be but how do we continue how do we get better? How do we keep promoting but they're heavily involved? In the day to day

Fred Reno

you touched on the fact that this is all about wine growing. That's really what this is about 20 years here in Virginia, what have you seen, if anything, the impact of climate change?

Stephen

Yeah, you know, There have been environmental conditions that are a little bit on the extreme last year to get to get frosted on Mother's Day, I've never seen frost that severe that late in the year, the amount of rainfall that we got in 2018. I've never seen that. But the seasons are changing. I think it's still too early to see what impact it has. They have been noticeable environmental events and conditions that are far more extreme than what I've experienced. In my very short time that I've been here. I've only been here for 18 years. And yes, we get frost. But the last frost we had was April 6th, and 9th in 2016. So now we're talking a month, month, and a half almost down the line. What does the data suggest? is climate change a thing? Yeah, I think it really is, I think we need to pay attention to it and still more data to collect before we can really answer that.

Fred Reno

Looks like you've really adapted well here to the conditions that COVID has presented as far as hospitality, greeting. What has been the impact at COVID on your business? Now we're looking here almost a year later.

Stephen

it's been later, it comes back to the fact that our business is predicated on people getting people out here and spending time with people face to face. You know, if you think of what a tasting last 30 minutes they come in, they know nothing about them. That's a lot of information to try and extrapolate where you from what do you like to drink this at the end of the day, you're not in the business of selling wine, you're selling an experience, you're selling a memory, right? So, you want to make sure they have a wine that they enjoy not a wine that they were sold. It's been hard to kind of have that sort of relationship, face to face. Now we have looked at our business and we can still create those relationships but virtually. So, we do a lot of online tastings. We do an event every Tuesday at seven o'clock. It's live, it's on Facebook, it's unscripted, and we talk about our wine. And we've spoken about food vendors. Because at the end of the day, we got to also remember that breweries, cideries distilleries, restaurants, they're all struggling. So, we've partnered not only with we've done Horton, Veritas, Barboursville King family, Bluestone, Early Mountain Vineyards, talking with the winemakers and saying, you know, these are wineries you need to get but we've also partnered with Gearharts Chocolate and Mona Lisa Pasta and Bowerbird Bakery, trying to say, listen, folks, if we're going to spend money on anything, let's spend it on local, local businesses, local, local, local. And then at the end of the day, you realize that yes, it's a business, but we have a responsibility to protect the staff to make sure that we do it safely, and then protect the customers. So, we shut down very quickly and early. We took a while to really figure out how we could create that elevated experience but do it in a in an environment that's been safe. So, I would say that we haven't let anyone go. We're still open. Although we're not conducting business as per normal or in a manner in which we would like we have a lot to be grateful for. We have Yeah, I don't think we were struggling that badly in the context of people don't know where their paychecks coming from, and people don't know how to pay their mortgage. So, we've been grateful, and we've been very lucky.

Fred Reno

Have you had much contact or support? Or have you needed from, like Virginia Tech or PVCC?

Stephen

Absolutely. Yeah, those resources exist. And they they've been incredible, as have others in terms of assistance and application. So yeah, we've been, we've been lucky to lean on and get the support of many organizations in industry. So

Fred Reno

yeah, I'm looking forward. I have an interview coming up next month with Tony Wolf.

Stephen

Ah, Tony's incredible with Virginia Tech and the extension office yea.

Fred Reno

in the other fascinating other than Chris Hill, who's also been great, as I just did a Podcast interview hasn't been published yet with Lucie Morton.

Stephen

Oh God you talk about an incredible not only personality and passionate but the knowledge and these resources that we have, and I don't know, I know very little about growing grapes and making wine you feel you know a lot because you you've made some decent wine. But I mean, what a resource to be able to pick up the phone and talk to Lucie or to talk to Chris or to Tony or to talk to other winemakers or Luca Paschina at Barboursville he's been Yeah, for 20 odd years and made incredible wines. And the great thing is they're willing to share it with you they're willing to tell you and I think that is that is incredible about this industry that there's young, talented winemakers and growers and yet we have access to folks have been Yeah, who've gone through the experience of good years, bad years, who can really impart knowledge that we're still developing. But yeah, what incredible characters of this wonderful industry.

Fred Reno

Just listening to you talking about this. fuels my passion, good. It fuels my passion for Virginia. I just feel the energy. It's like, folks you got to pay attention to what's going on in Virginia.

Stephen

Absolutely if you love wine, why not give Virginia a chance, I think our wines incredible. I think there's value there, stories there, you might find your new favorite.

Fred Reno

And I in this day and age with the fact that the consumer is starting to buy a lot more wine online, they could just call Keswick and get wine shipped to them.

Stephen

Yeah, we ship to more states than we don't. And we would love to send you, our wines. You want to do a virtual tasting, we'll do that for you, too. We'll deliver sometimes we want you to drink wine, and we want you to drink local. And I think you know, we're confident in our products as of others that once you do. If you've never tried our wines before Virginia wines, I think if you go in there going let me just judge it as it is purely qualitatively. Not as this is a Cabernet. So how do I judge it against a California cab? You can't if you judge it in terms of quality, yeah, I think your eyes will open a little bit and you might sort of want to explore as a lover of Virginia wine what Virginia has to offer. Here's the great thing is we don't offer one or two or three things. We offer various things, various styles, all I think exceptional quality,

Fred Reno

well listen to you talk earlier, and I don't want to put words in your mouth. But it sounds like to me, you would indicate that Cabernet Franc is and could be a signature grape for Virginia.

Stephen

I think it could be I think it has been spoken about. I think there's a couple of things that you could throw into that. But if you think of consistently high-quality production, even in the weaker of years, I think Cabernet Franc would be right up there in terms of a varietal that you could perhaps hang your hats on the flip side to that is, do we want to hang our hats on one varietal? What happens if you don't grow Cab Franc? What happens if you're Ankida and you grow exceptional Chardonnay and Pinot Noir? We can't give all the marketing efforts to cab franc, cab franc, cab franc. So, while I think Cab Franc there's a lot of good data and good credence for perhaps saying that this is a varietal that Virginia has and will and continue to do well. There are other varietals that belong in the in the conversation if you want to base it on quality against world class benchmarks.

Fred Reno

Well, I have to confess I'm a big fan of Petit Manseng.

Stephen

Yes, it's a varietal I'm really excited about we planted one acre in 2018 I have my favorites Michael Shaps is certainly his one I think what Ben Jordan and Maya Hood are doing at early mountain with Petit Manseng that Intention that they think their new normal could Petit Manseng I will take a little liberty here could Petit Manseng be to Virginia what Chenin Blanc, Steen if you will to South Africa where you can make it sweet you can make it dry you can make it all kinds of different ways the expression could be so different i think i think it has those qualities which again some people feel as a negative not being able to say exactly what a great does think of Viognier back in years Viognier had to be apricotty before you could add oak or tank or dry or sweet? I think Petit Manseng can do that. I've tasted exceptionally well-made balanced oak driven dry styles. I appreciate oak with a little bit of residual. So yeah, Petit Manseng does that, it adds kind of a dimension as a blending component. Because it's high sugar high acid, it does incredibly well with something like Viognier for instance, could it be to Virginia, what Chenin is to South Africa, the thing about Chenin is South Africa grows more chenin than the rest of the world combined. How many people I don't know the data, but how many people grow Petit Manseng. But I think it's one of those varietals that you would be excited to have in your ground and you'd be excited to have access to quality fruit. I think it could really give you a blank palette from which to create and that's exciting as a winemaker. So yeah, I think there's I think there's value there.

Fred Reno

Well, you touched us on something is Petit Manseng transparent in the sense that like Chardonnay is transparent. You can craft it.

Stephen

I think so. And again, I'm coming from a I'm not coming from 20 years of experience with that. I mean Chardonnay is a neutral varietal. It's not like an aromatic, varietal like Sauvignon Blanc, or Torrontes or Riesling. So, Chardonnay expression of site and using oak, or ML and stuff you almost sort of shaping Chardonnay, so to speak. I think Petit Manseng can be done that, but it is a difficult grape from a chemistry point of view. But I don't come from a any level of experience with it as well. I think that there are other winemakers who are far more sort of have a mastery of this grape and have proven with what

they put in the bottle. But I'm certainly excited about having it and being able to get some fruit from our property this year.

Fred Reno

This has been delightful. It's been great. I just this is you covered the ground I was hoping to cover. You've explained things so succinctly. I just want to say thank you for your time,

Stephen

you know and thank you. It's folks like you who really help you know, for us to reach our goal and you know, I think part of it is spreading, and the word of mouth and really kind of having people who are just as passionate and knowledgeable and being excited about our state, our industry, and our wine. So, thank you, Fred for what you're doing and continued success. And I've listened to some of your podcasts and they they're incredible and I'm sure it'll go from strength to strength and thank you for the opportunity. You know, we greatly appreciate it.

Fred Reno

Well, Thank You.