

EPISODE # 19 KING FAMILY VINEYARDS: MATTHIEU FINOT.

SPEAKERS

Fred Reno, Matthieu Finot

Fred Reno

Matthieu, welcome to my Podcast and thank you for taking the time today.

Matthieu Finot

Thank you for having me.

Fred Reno

I like to start at the beginning How does a winemaker from Crozes Hermitage who apparently has made wine in all parts of the world end up in Virginia give me a little bit about your background and how you got into winemaking in France and what started it.

Matthieu Finot

you know, short and long story so I'm going to get you something in between not too long not too short. So, I'm coming from a Crozes Hermitage where my family you know, was growing up pretty cards and vines and you know, making their own wine but also bringing a lot of grapes to the company cellars and such on my mother's side and my father was a big wine lover. So, you know, like when you grow up, you know if I mean that is that you, you really get involved with wine and drinking wine. When I turned older and when it was time for me to decide what career I wanted to do in life, I felt that I really wanted to go to my in some way to my farming roots. So, I wanted to get back to farming. But I did find that wine making a shine into the farming that I was really looking for. So that's the reason why I even if directly My parents are not farmers and I've got no reason to be involved into winemaking, I decided to get back in winemaking. And that happened in 94. So, it's been a while now. the rest of it is me working in different place learning I studied in both in Burgundy from Northern Rome. So, my two favorite red varietals I will say is Syrah and Pinot Noir two varietals that I do not do here and for the price you pay when you go in some other places. And I decided to travel because I like to travel. And I wanted to, you know, enjoy my youth, and go in different places to learn different techniques to see different terroir to you know, just explore having fun. I arrive her in 2003. And before then I've been in different places, you know, all the main places in France except champagne. But I worked in Burgundy or working in Bordeaux area. I work in the Provence area; I work in the Jura even worked in Italy and South Africa. And my goal was to keep traveling and I wanted to go to New Zealand I wanted to me didn't speak I still don't speak Spanish. I was really wanting to go to Argentina or Chile, and I arrived here in 2003 just for because I was looking to a place to work between South Africa and New Zealand. I was supposed to stay six months. And I'm still here.

Fred Reno

So, you came the King Family in 2003. I came to Virginia in 2003. I came to Afton Mountain, I arrived at Afton Mountain in 2003. Again, it was supposed to be just a one harvest contract and then I was supposed to keep going with my life. To be honest, being French: First I didn't know much about United States. I mean I know that the United States, but I didn't know even know where was Virginia on the map. And I didn't know anything about Virginia wine also. So, it was really you know, I had no expectation about what to find here. So then how did this transition happened in 2007 when Michael Shaps moved on and established Central Virginia Wineworks at that time and then you succeeded him at King Family. You know I've been working for three years by then at Afton Mountain they were very I mean that again they were the one convinced me to stay another year after 2003 was my worst vintage not as a winemaker but it was like a very bad vintage in Virginia. A lot of rain a lot of Hurricane so I arrived here, and I get I get told like you know, I've got a hurricane during our season. It's raining almost every day you try to harvest based on like when it's not goanna be raining. So that was my initial challenge and my initial like, welcome Virginia. so, then you stayed still so how masochist or something like that. But no, I think what I really like with Virginia is initially it was a challenge. It's really a place that challenge me like no other places. You know, I've been working a lot of places in the world where and places are also well known and well define wine culture. So, it's fairly easy because you don't think too much you don't. You're going to keep doing what's been done when you go to a vineyard in Europe. You know, how it's been planted, you know, what varietals been grown, you know how it's been managed, there's nothing to really change. It's been done like that for decades, or sometimes centuries, and you just goanna keep doing it. You know how to make the fermentation, you know, just like, you don't have to rethink who you are in most places that I've worked before. And here I am in a place where with a with a very specific with a soil that is very specific with seeing an industry that is, I will say, at that time was more a teenager, and then, not a baby, but that's still not fully grown-up person. That for me was the most interesting part about that place is like the challenge.

Matthieu Finot

the challenge, and how can I in some way participate to make to make Virginia and it's not only me, it's like, as a group, how can we make Virginia better? Right? And that's for me was like, initially was the reason why stay another year was just to prove that I can make better wine than what I've done, but ultimately was also to be able to, to be a part of this growing industry.

Fred Reno

So, King Family, the property here is grown to a little bit over 30 acres, is that correct? Yes. Do you source grapes from other growers as well? Or to augment your production?

Matthieu Finot

Yes, yes. And no, when I arrived in 2007, and when I did arrive, it's because David and Ellen use what they started the winery here, made their wine on the first year, maybe the first two years Afton Mountain. So, they were working with Afton Mountain, and they knew Afton Mountain wine, and they were fully aware about what they were doing over there. I think they really liked the job that I've done while I was working there, they appreciate, like, you know, the direction that I was doing, when Michael was on his way out because he was starting Wineworks. And they asked me if I would be interested

into you know, helping them in, in the winery. And for me, I was, you know, in this transition phase anyway, at that time and that was a perfect time for me to start here. And you know, I was very happy to start here because when we started again, things were done right from the beginning, there's a very specific focus about what to grow. And how to grow it thanks to well Chris Hill, Chris thanks to Chris Hill thanks to Michael. So, there were only like very well-defined objective into the wine that was quality. And so, for me, it was very easy to succeed to that because I didn't have anything to change. You know, I was like very happy was the way, the wine were tasting with the with winery was functioning and the process from the beginning and still to these days. And we don't make any compromises when it comes to quality and has been very clear, like what we want to do the it's the premium winery and we do what we think is good, we don't do wine just because maybe it's goanna sell that was making things very comfortable with me and arrive in 2007 do my first vintage and the transition, when you transition into a winery, you all have to keep the idea of who was with before you. Because you want to make the side evolve into what you want to do. But at the same time, you have to keep the identity of the place succeeding Michael was very easy because like his wine are always good, always very solid. So that was very good for me to transition to that. After my first vintage in 2007. I won the Governor's Cup with my Meritage in 2007. Not that it means anything, although it makes David and Ellen being very comfortable about my skills. And that was helped me a lot for the rest of my career up to this point now because I didn't trust what I do. And I've got almost complete freedom about what I'm doing in the winery site.

Fred Reno

Did you, were you part and did you oversee the building of the new winery in 2013? Yes, so that again, we when I when I started here, we were making like less than 4000 cases. And we were only at the time 15 acres were planted. And we even had at the time the luxury to sell grapes to another winery. But I guess King Family in some ways that was a good reflection about the state of the Virginia wine industry since I started and maybe since they started in 2002 having their own winery, we keep increasing the production we keep chasing our tail. I guess it's a good problem to have. But we keep going and saying like oh we're never goanna get bigger from that. And the job that we've got here is when they built the winery in 2002. David and Ellen were like, Oh, we never goanna fill up this winery completely. And like, and we're never goanna do more than 5000 cases, Five, Six years later, we're already over 5000 cases. And 10 years after we, we need to build a new building because we are out capacity. Again, it's a good problem to have. We we've got a tremendous growth. And I think a big part of our success, not especially King success of the building a success is how good we are in agrotourism. Most of the wine that we sell here, it's direct to customers. It's a direct people come to the winery, taste, and the taste of wine here and buy it here and consume immediately. It's great. I don't know, so many wine regions that sells more than 90% of their production directly to the customers. Well, that is true. That is interesting. I want to touch on David King and Ellen here, the founders for a second. So, he was involved in some very forward-thinking innovative stuff in Virginia. As I understand it, he pretty much was the one who pushed the Virginia wholesaler idea where wineries here in Virginia, we're able to sell through this organization, to trade accounts, you don't have to go through the traditional three-tiered distribution system that existed with all the franchise problems and everything else. So, David was behind that, wasn't he?

Matthieu Finot

Yeah. But it's also the fact that compared to the rest of the wine industry, we are very small business. And most of time it at the time when we did that was, I think 2006, or maybe 2005, I can't remember when the Virginia Wine distribution company started, most people wanted to be able to sell their case of wine to the wine shop down the road. And none of them because we're such a small business, most of the distributor, didn't want to carry your Virginia wine. But at the same time, we wanted our wine to be in the restaurant, we wanted our wines to be into the wine shop. So, to be able to do that we needed to be able to do this direct distribution. We do not use it much now for King Family because of our size. But it's still being used by a lot of small wineries. And it's still very useful.

Fred Reno

It's a great idea and having been as a distributor for 15 years, and at one time, believe it or not the largest independent distributor in America, operating in eight states. I understand the dilemma. Because in California, of course, if you're a producer such as yourself, you don't have to use a distributor, you can go direct to the accounts. Yes. So, this was brilliant of David to come up with a solution for the small family winery so that they can get their wine into the better shops into the better restaurants and not have to go through all the other machinations.

Matthieu Finot

/Yes, you know, I mean, again, marketing the wine outside the winery is very difficult and very challenging, as we know, and having a distributor is very, very valuable for us. But for a lot of people, they will the distributor will not want to work with them because they are too small. So

Fred Reno

so, when I was interviewing Chris Hill for his Podcast, and this sticks in my mind, because I was doing my final editing yesterday, and he made a comment in there and I'd love you to expand upon it. He mentioned you and we were talking about what grows best here in Virginia and how to deal with weather conditions and things of that nature. And he said well, thanks to Matthieu Finot we developed a really strong business for rose and I see, of course you were in Provence, so I get the connection King family has this CROSE which is so talk about where that how that all developed because it's been a huge success has it not?

Matthieu Finot

so yeah, the CROSE is it's the wine that we sell the most and the wine we produce the most, so I guess that's a good success. How did we get there? That's very interesting when I start working here, the way the CROSE was made previously was with possibly Rose so when we're bleeding the tanks, we were using the bleed to do a rose that you know classic try to use what we don't want for the red that as a single product. But because I worked in Bandol, I worked at Domaine Tempier.

Fred Reno

you worked at Tempier?

Matthieu Finot

so yeah, Lulu passed away not so long ago but because of the of my background I'm like how we should try to make it a regular rose not bleeding not bleed but an intentional Rose. Then when I

decided to start harvesting grapes, red grapes, red Merlot, like a white wine based on the acidity with low brix to make something That's like 11% alcohol/ 11 and half percent alcohol with high acid where we do a direct press on it and be fully intentional Rose. And again, we start doing it and year after year, people were showing more interest, interest to this wine also, it's not only because of me it's also the International market that was craving for Provence style Rose just a small comment when I when I start working here, I'm like, oh, let's make it dry Rose, one of the comments that I had from somebody is like oh, here we are the sauce. And the Rose here is like all tea, sweet. So that was in 2003 things have changed since and obviously people understand that the dry rose is very good and very refreshing. It's also very trendy so you know, I'm not gonna complain about that. But that's the way we realized that you know, if you don't if you don't have ripened grapes make a rose with it. It's better to make a good rose and not a bad red. So again, I didn't invent the rose in Virginia.

Fred Reno

You know, he was talking about what he was saying was because you understood what to do with Merlot wasn't getting ripe and yet making high quality wine from it. That was what his point was. Right.

Matthieu Finot

But again, so that's the story behind the rose and we've been like, increasing the production. Luckily also, I mean the fact that where in a place called Crozet and then you know, we do the play on the word with you know, calling ROSIE/Crozet with this kind of very simple packaging, easily recognizable help to marketing of this wine.

Fred Reno

It's great branding.

Matthieu Finot

So, and but weirdly enough, we've done nothing really to. I mean We didn't push it, just grow organically. I guess the Polo might help to sell also a lot of it.

Fred Reno

well, that's what happens with all good brands. They just happen. Yes. And it's because the quality is there. The idea is there and timing, right? Yes, it's timing. So, what's your overall philosophy on winemaking in general? How do you like to approach it? Obviously, it's in the vineyard, its wine growing, but every winemaker has their own philosophy about what their hand is going to do here?

Matthieu Finot

It's for, for me has been it's a very difficult question. I mean, like, because I've been asked this question quite often, and I still have trouble to really, I'm trying to remind myself every time I was keeping my mind the same direction. Let me try to develop a little bit more about that. When my background when I worked in the in Burgundy. I mean, when I worked in Tempier, when I worked in, you know, all the vineyards that I've worked before, I mean, a lot of them, most of them, most of the ones that I really learned a lot were organic vineyards or mostly organic vineyards that work very close to, to the ground, to the terroir to the soil to make wine with grapes. I mean, you know, could be weird, but like, getting back to, to expressing the terroir as best as possible. And when I arrived here, I arrived here with all my

youth, I would say uncertainty about, about how wine is supposed to be made. And again, that's why I'm telling you. It was challenging, because now I have to rethink the way I was doing things, especially in the winemaking I have to slightly change my initial style. Because initially what I wanted to produce is wine that were I hope above drinkable, but maybe saying world class wine would have been maybe a little bit pretentious, but I wanted to make good wine. So, to make good wine I had to back up the limit on my intention of being natural. I produce a bit more by the analytical tools. But since then, since I've been here, King, and since I've started having a very good understanding of all vineyards of what comes how to make it work. I've been moving more and more to express the terroir and to make wines that are terroir driven, instead of like winemaker driven. Of course, Rose is a technological wine. So, I'm not going to talk about the roses because the rose I want it to be like, you know, fresh and but the other one my Meritage all the wines as I want them to, you have to be a good reflection of what we can do here was no press.

Fred Reno

of your portfolio which I'm going to have the wonderful opportunity to taste shortly after this interview. If there's one wine, you have a wine critic, you have a trade person you have somebody want to impress what's the one wine out of your portfolio. Say here you got to have this.

Matthieu Finot

Yeah, that's always a question about like, which one is your favorite kid.

Fred Reno

Well, it's a difficult question. But what is the one wine if you're like, Okay, this is going to be the one that impresses?

Matthieu Finot

what? Like, if you talk to people about what's King Family, maybe a lot of people are going to tell you the Crose. And it's not it's not a wrong answer. But like what we're presenting King Family if I have to highlight King Family of, it's always going to be Meritage, okay? Why is always going to be the Meritage maybe because it's always a wine where we've been the most consistent into recognition. It's also because it's a wine where, even if it's a Bordeaux blend, we can debate about what Bordeaux blend means. But, you know, it's still wine where I can still highlight the terroir. It's a wine, because it's a blend, I can also not erase the vintage effect. But I can adjust the vintage effect just with the with slightly changing my blend.

Fred Reno

so, said in a different way what you're telling me what I'm hearing is, this is the wine that reflects year in and year out what King Family stands for from qualitative standpoint and a terroir and expression of the fruit of our vineyard.

Matthieu Finot

And, and also in some, maybe more the winemaker side, that's also a wine where a real blending, a real blending. So that's also in some way, highlight a bit my style too, into this blend. And that for me, it's we've got the Mountain plain, that's like, you're going to base your blend on the Meritage. But it's

more of a smaller batch. I think that the Meritage for me, it's the red wine that we use the most of it. And yet, for me, it's also what represents the most King Family vineyards. And in some way, you know what we can do in Central Virginia?

Fred Reno

Are their folks, the King Family, Ellen and David's family, children? Are they involved at all in winery?

Matthieu Finot

Yes, they involve a lot. I mean, we they all work here on the farm. The winemaking part. That's me, that's my area. I mean, we'll make the decision together about what we're going to produce, where we're going to produce it and all these kinds of things. But it's that is more my area, Carrington of working in the vineyard side. So, they are taking care of the vineyards. James is all into the marketing and office side. And Ellen is still very involved a lot with all the tasting room area and all this kind of thing so

Fred Reno

and the Polo field, David was a big polo player, apparently.

Matthieu Finot

So, the Polo, initially, I mean, the reason why King Family here is because of the Polo is what they were looking at is a place where you had a flat land that was on low land to be able to get a polo field on it. So, the reason why is we bought a farm initially. And then after a while they like we need to do something else with this farm. I'm just like, growing alfalfa and, and adding a polo field. So that's when they started to plant grapes.

Fred Reno

But we're still at an elevation here of close to 800 feet. So, you have a plateau that's flat. We were not on low lying ground.

Matthieu Finot

So, we see that good drainage naturally. And so, it was perfect for Polo field, the Polo field is fairly big, I think it's almost 15 acres or something like that. So anyway, like the Polo was something for David and not something that never thought to be other than something that he wanted to do, but ultimately become a big part of all of, of the winery. And because it's sells, some, you know, we do the events on weekend which drive a lot of people out here, we see still have Ali, Stuart's wife that still plays Polo so, we still have some of the family that play Polo, and the Roseland club is fairly active.

Fred Reno

Well, the King family must obviously have an awful lot of trust in you because they also let you do side projects. Who Yes, so tell me a little bit about some of the consulting or some of the other wines you produce and things you're involved in both here in Virginia and as I understand back in France as well?

Matthieu Finot

So, coming from a from a farming winery, we so, my mother had a bit of land, you know in Crozes-Hermitage that was being managed by cousin with my brother and that also been younger than me but also follow some winemaking school. We decided we wanted to start a winery and we find some place in in the Alps. So, on the eastern side not so vulnerable and we find some vineyard over there that we're starting to make wine with available varietals and forgotten varietals and so that we started out in 2008. So, it's mainly my brother's doing all the work you know I'm more of a support side. And so, we were started Domain Pinot In 2014, my crew team that was managing the vineyard that we had in Crozes-Hermitage decided to give it back to us, he had to leave, he decided to give it back to us. So now since 2014, we've got our vineyard in Crozes-Hermitage back. So now we in France, we've got two sides of production. Even if you're a very small winery, we've got two sides of production, one and a one in Alps, so in the Alps, and the other one in the Crozes-Hermitage in Northern Rhone. And since I arrived here, I met one of my good friends. And now Gilbert Tallard who is a French guy, whose got a small vineyard near Afton Mountain.

Fred Reno

is that Turk Mountain?

Matthieu Finot

Yes, let's talk about it. So, and a couple of years ago, he was like, you know, I'm starting to want to not to retire, but like to step back a little bit. And so, you know, for me to help him manage his vineyard. And things that we've done, I have been managing his vineyard for a while now. He's still making some wine for himself on the side. But because now I had access to some grapes that initially we were using at King Family, I started to make my small batch on the side. And that's also a part of things that I've been exploring whether it was with King Family vineyards or with my own label,

Fred Reno

what varietals are planted at Turk mountain?

Matthieu Finot

He's got Petit Verdot, Tannat, Cabernet Franc and Merlot, and Malbec sorry, okay, so it's a five-acre vineyard kind of small with all these varietals on it. And it's a very nice Hill, hillside vineyard very steep. So, it's the kind of site difficult to, to walk and to play with. So, you know, if I'm not enough busy and go spend my weekend over there, like taking care of the vineyard. But it helped me also on my, on my personal quest of finding who I am, at 40 years old, you can still feel like a teenager sometimes. But it helps me to, to explore more like my concept of more natural winemaking. And so, all the wines, because that's also limited but the way we are in with a wine in France, we so we are organic vineyard in France, we do wine in very natural way. We don't use any, it's all-natural yeast or you know, very low level, sulfur. All these kinds of things that I wanted to try to do that here was all the challenge that it takes. But you know, after a while I was able to after a couple of failure, I won't say because sometimes you do fail, I was able to finally get where I wanted to be with this wine and this wine that I'm going to do like the whole cluster fermentation. No, no sulfur, natural yeast fermentation. That's been a fun project. And since 2019, I feel like there's a couple of wines that I feel like, of a quality now that I can bottle.

Fred Reno

since you've been here in Virginia, have you seen, or have you pursued any place you'd say now there's a great site to plant some Pinot Noir. I know it's difficult here, I understand the reasons. But

Matthieu Finot

Ankida when they when they when they started their vineyard asked me to come help them to start the program with a Pinot Noir. So, I work with them. I mean, I still work with them, especially even more at the beginning, where I help them do to work with Pinot Noir. Because they do, they did understand that I had some background in in Burgundy, and they wanted to understand better how to make Pinot Noir.

Fred Reno

Well, I'm very impressed with them. In fact, Ankita Ridge was one of the wines when I would have skeptics back in California, about Virginia wine, I pulled all that and pour it for them, and they would go that's from Virginia. And I go Yeah, that's from Virginia.

Matthieu Finot

So, I'm not goanna say you cannot go Pinot Noir in Virginia. But you really need to have a specific site. And I think very often that's a bit the problem was with the challenge that we had with Virginia wine; we have 10 people wanting to plant grapes that are not suitable for terroir that are not suitable for all climates. And the problem is like when you really understand that everything comes from, from the grapes, like the site selection and the grapes that you grow is so important about the outcome of the wine. Again, when you've got good grapes with the right chemistry, you've got nothing to do on the wine. The wine is going to do on, do it on its own. It's very easy to make wine. As soon as you start working with varietals that are not suited for the site. You can still make wine, but you're going to struggle, every step of the winemaking to make something drinkable.

Fred Reno

Well, I'm curious about that because. What's your thoughts? And have you worked with any hybrids yourself here?

Matthieu Finot

I did. Not for me personally, Not for King Family. But your but I did work with hybrids.

Fred Reno

What do you think about hybrids? In the right situation here for Virginia?

Matthieu Finot

Yes, but no.

Fred Reno

No for you. But yes, in general. I

Matthieu Finot

I mean, yes, you can plant hybrid. Yes, we can make fun wine with hybrids. Again,

Fred Reno

I just want your opinion.

Matthieu Finot

No, no, no, I'm trying to see the bigger picture also is like, again, we were talking about, in some way, lack of recognition of Virginia. And unfortunately, if you don't the market right now, except if you go to New York and sell to a specific wine shop that is into organic wine, they might be interested in your Hybrid. But if you go in anywhere in the world and say I've got some very good hybrid peoples goanna laugh at you. And right now, we, because we're still, in the quest to being recognized for what we do. I think the way to do that in some ways you have to produce some premium vinifera. But for us in Central Virginia, there's no point of trying to grow Cabernet Sauvignon. Because it's not going to do anything good. We know that we've got a clay soil. If you don't have a clay soil you could do good, like this place in Keswick, that will do very good Cabernet Sauvignon, because of the kind of soils that they've have. But most places will are not suitable for Cabernet Sauvignon, let's not grow it. It doesn't do any good for us, yes you will be able to make wine. Yes, a year out of ten, maybe it's going to be outstanding. But then you've got nine years that you will need to struggle every year to try to make a good one. So, I think we need to fully understand what we are and stop trying to pretend what we're not. And that's a limit where all my challenge right now is evolution. I'm not against hybrid because I think there's a good chance for us to find hybrids with the new the new kind of hybrids that could really help us to get even more natural in the vineyard. Because right now it's one of the biggest challenges, it's almost impossible to have organic vineyard. I'm not sure like going Chambourcin or Vidal is the way we're going to get international recognition, we can make very good wine very good entry level wine, and that's there's room for that. But that's maybe not what like real wine critics will be looking for.

Fred Reno

Understood. I got to be honest with you, I have taken a liking to really well made Seyval Blanc It surprised me because I in my career, I hadn't really drank any hybrids, I wasn't really for me, obviously California where I spent 30 years and, but I've been enticed by it. Well, this is an interesting everyday drink.

Matthieu Finot

But yes, and but I will always have a challenge in some way because also you know, talking with other winemakers you know we always challenge about again let's let;s make good wines and what's how do we work with and for me, it was my background hybrid that you know, obviously French I cannot hide that you know, when you go to school in France your being taught to not like hybrids, hybrids don't make quality wine, is so similar challenges, slightly changing now because of the global warming by the fact that there's more disease pressure on some varietals and people are trying to make wines that are more natural sense. There's maybe a new look now to hybrid I truly think that the future of hybrid in Virginia, but maybe not for the current grapes, not the current varietals, but I think we will most likely see more and more hybrids being grown. Once you start going that way, you also do also have to be very sure of who you are, and how you're going to do it and how you're going about it.

Fred Reno

Yeah, how are you going to market it? Because you're going to have to explain it first and then sell it second.

Matthieu Finot

So yes, if your ideas like to go full organic, can we play this market? So yes, that will work perfectly fine.

Fred Reno

that makes sense.

Matthieu Finot

But if you keep like having a traditional viticulture and spraying as much as you can, then you defeat the whole purpose of these varietals. So, it's really like what approach you get into your vineyard, and ultimately how you make the wine.

Fred Reno

So, here's a thought I had a vintner say to me early on, when I first got here, something that stuck with me for some time. He said, Fred, it's entirely possible that some of the best vineyards in Virginia have not even been planted yet.

Matthieu Finot

Yes.

Fred Reno

And what do you think about that? I mean,

Matthieu Finot

I think it is most likely true I mean look, there's still a lot of wooded area where like a lot of different kind of soil lot of things on same land is very, very expensive here also.

Fred Reno

will not in relationship to West Coast.

Matthieu Finot

Well Albemarle in Albemarle try to find a piece of land in Albemarle, it's very, very expensive.

Fred Reno

Shenandoah Valley though, yes.

Matthieu Finot

Yes, And but so depending on where you are in Virginia, it is possible to find some land and a lot of land that are not being recognized yet or even worked and, and a lot of us always try to find these places. Because I think that's really outstanding terroir, when you see Ananda does that what they've done with a small piece of land, that's, again, a good example of like, yeah, you can, you can get out of like the regular path and still find a best specific terroir. But I don't think even if I wish, it will be more like

that, I still don't think like most of the winery owner or people that want to start a winery, they would want to start a winery first, because of the site for retail, not because of the site for grape quality. And again, it's always going to be dependent. Different if you if you talk to me, if you talk to Ben Jordan if you talk to Benoit Pineau, there's a couple of, like, I mean, there's more than these three that I just named, but like, a lot of people is going to be focused on more about the site for great grapes than a site for selling it. But these winemakers, they cannot buy the land that they need to grow their own grapes, exactly. Gonna have to rely on what somebody wants to invest into.

Fred Reno

You don't produce yourself here, do you? Petit Manseng,

Matthieu Finot

we do. But pretty much like is one of these very specific grapes, that is very interesting, but very challenging in the wine making, so it grows very well in the vineyard make very, very easy to grow very disease resistant, great for us, and not a hybrid. But when you have to make wine with it, and you end up having something with very high levels of potential very high level of alcohol, and very low pH, so very acid, like something that I've never worked before. And so how do you manage that, if you try to do dry wine, then your goanna have to obviously, not overripe, and then your pH will be like three or sometimes below three. So, you get this wine with high alcohol, very high acid, that could be very challenging to be doing here. Or you can do some very good, half dry wines also that are very pleasant. But that's not usually where I'm trying to go. So, the Petit Manseng that I'm working now it's either as a as a blender. So, I'm blending it with other varietals to bring acidity and freshness, or what I've been doing lately, I've been working more as an oxidized wine. So, I'm trying to do a larger one style with a Petit Manseng.

Fred Reno

Well, I look at Petit Manseng from a marketing sales perspective. It almost is like that could be to Virginia, what Chenin Blanc is to South Africa.

Matthieu Finot

Yes, but Chenin Blanc still going to taste more like white wine yet. I mean, and again, I'm not I'm not saying it's not possible to tell you right to do it. But it is it's a I mean, I love chenin, whether it's from Loire or South Africa, but I think it's even if there's a high acidity, it doesn't get such a high brix And that's a bit the challenge we have to have to fight. it's a very good example of balance between high alcohol and acid, and then potentially your residual sugar, you know, got a tendency to say that Petit Manseng does better in bad sites for us.

Fred Reno

Interesting.

Matthieu Finot

And it's almost better to have Petit Manseng just after rain. When it's fully diluted. It's a grape that you again, like when I keep talking about with thinking and re trying to sometimes get out of what we're

seeing is best for us to make wine and try to think it differently. Petit Manseng is one of these grapes. Because it's as a traditional white grape making for traditional white wine. It will be too challenging.

Fred Reno

That's a really fascinating viewpoint. It hadn't been explained as well as you just explained it. That's really interesting. What's the young is this is a young industry here in Virginia. What's the collegiality? Like? What's the cooperation like amongst yourselves.

Matthieu Finot

We again? I mean, a big part of who we are here in at least in Central Virginia. I'm going to talk for what I know sure we get along very well. We all know each other very well. There's one thing that you have to understand is there's no competition between us. So, the winemaking job is as I see it, it's not about the recipe it's not about because I didn't invent anything like wines been made for centuries. You like everything has been already done. So, I don't need to reinvent what's already been invented. So, everything is out there. You just have to decide what works best for you. Our job is an artistic job, always what I say what I do most was what we're doing is we have to be farmers. And because again, like, never gonna emphasize that enough, the wine is being made outside, not inside the winery, you have to be a farmer. So, you have to understand weather you have to understand the site to understand what you grow. But then you have also to be a scientist, because you have to understand a bit numbers, you have to understand chemistry, you have to understand biology of things. And ultimately, you also have to be an artist. I mean, that's the thing that I really like, because when you blend these three components together, it's super exciting. But because there's so many variables in the wine, and I think one of the most important variables is a human factor, you cannot change that my perception my feeling, I think I'm the only one who have it. And I can tell exactly my recipe and a quote recipe to another winemaker is gonna have different feelings, it's got different interpretation of what he's tasting, when he's tasting it is also might not be looking at harvesting the grapes exactly at the same time that I will be harvesting, it might not use exactly the same process. So, all these small details make everything that we do very unique. You can give the same grapes to different winemakers; they will come with two different products because the sensitivity will make the wine their own. Therefore, there's no secret. And for us because we're young industry, the more we share, the more we communicate, the better we'll be as an industry. It took centuries for burgundy to be what is burgundy. And because there are people that were sharing things and recording everything and taking note on terroir and like how to make wine and all these kinds of things. It was a long process for burgundy to be burgundy. I'm not gonna say we're going to be burgundy anytime soon. But if we share our knowledge, if we share what works for us and what didn't if we share our feelings about varietals and saying like you should try this via at all, I think do very well for us. As an industry, we'll get better. And then you also avoid to make the same mistakes that other people did before you. And this idea I don't know if you heard of the winemakers' research exchange, but that's something that we've created here on the Monticello side with a bunch of other winemakers Emily, Kirsty, Ben Jordan, and Stephen Bernard they all been a part of the creating the winemaker Research Exchange. And this idea to get together as a group taste our experimentation, talk about what we do how we do it, to try to help not only helps but everybody to have access to that.

Fred Reno

Oh, that's fantastic.

Matthieu Finot

We've got bigger wineries, like us included that can afford to make small experimentation. But there's a lot of other wineries when they've got only a couple of barrels of wine, they cannot experiment, because it would be too much of a challenge. But if we're already worked together, we're sharing your point of view about what to do and not specially how to do it. But the different way of doing it, then everybody can take what they want out of it. It's not we're not even trying to say is that the way to do it, or it's like yesterday found a way of doing things, the one that you like the most. So, it's really sharing, communicating was what we do to help the industry to grow together by sharing knowledge.

Fred Reno

Well, this is fantastic, because this is what I get excited about. This young, growing quality wine industry reminds me of what Oregon was, like 25 years ago. That's what I felt like when I came here, it's like I see the same type of collegiality, the same type of information, sharing the same type of everybody supporting everybody.

Matthieu Finot

we have to work together; we are too small otherwise. And we don't have, we also don't have the resources. Now the Winemaker Exchange Research started in 2014 or 2015. And I'm losing track of time now. Now it's something that we run statewide. So now we run that statewide, it helped us we've got Joy Ting I'm sure you've heard about Joy Ting. Joy Ting she's an enologist that takes care of the whole thing that helped us to, so we know we've got a great support group that helped us to develop this product. And it's super interesting. I mean, for me, it's like sharing knowledge is what I feel like that's what I like, I like to talk to people I like to communicate with the challenges and what worked and what didn't.

Fred Reno

Well, on that note, all this talk about wine has gotten me thirsty, I want to taste some of these wonderful wines. So, I'll end the formal part of this interview by just saying Matthieu this has been fascinating. I really appreciate your time today this is going to be great episode. And thank you.

Matthieu Finot

Thank you very much.