

EPISODE # 24 JAKE BUSCHING/JAKE BUSCHING WINES & HARK VINEYARDS

SPEAKERS

Fred Reno, Jake Busching

Fred Reno

Jake, welcome to my Podcast.

Jake Busching

Thank you very much. This is exciting. And I don't often get the chance to go through the whole backlog. This will be pretty interesting.

Fred Reno

Well, wonderful. That's what I'm hoping for. So, as I like to start in the beginning, What's your story? I understand you're from Minnesota.

Jake Busching

Yeah sure. I grew up in Minnesota on a cattle farm. We're doing beef cows, and, you know, 160 acres of swamp land and some and some Herefords, and that was sort of my childhood was tractors and dirt. And, you know, I ran away from that, as farm boys will do, and found myself getting into tech, fiber optics, and then music technology. And that sort of led me on a trail of becoming musician was in band and I was in Minnesota, and it was cold and dark. And we decided to throw a dart and ended up in Richmond, Virginia. Oh my god, what did you play in the band? I was singing at the time. And it was a just a punk band lost in the world, you know, as you do as youth. But I got to Virginia and spent some time in Richmond, and I got into the food industry. So, I started bartending and, and that's where I sort of bumped into wine. Initially, I met a girl, we ended up in Charlottesville, so she could get a Masters, you know, up at Staunton and Charlottesville seemed like a good town to be in. There is where I met Stanley Woodward, who owns Jefferson vineyards. And I was working in a rug shop. And Stanley used to come in every afternoon to have tea with the owner. And I got to know Stanley, just one day said, hey, I really like the way you work. Are you interested in working on a farm? And I was like, I got those skills. Sure. And that's kind of how I ended up out of Jefferson. And that was 1997.

Fred Reno

Wow, let me think about that. doing the math. That's 24 years ago.

Jake Busching

Yeah, my knees. My knees will tell the story. So, what did you do at Jefferson? I assume Michael Shaps was there. At that time, he was. I got hired on to be the estate manager. So, we had 400 acres

of property. And I was cutting hay and taking care of cows and buildings and painting. And the fun part about this story for me is that Chris Hill was there. So, Chris glommed on to me very quickly because he knew I could fix a tractor. And he's like, hey, you know, I need to get you on the vineyard side of this property. So, I started managing all the equipment, and working with Chris, on the vineyard side of things. And so, my introduction into Virginia wine was truly through the dirt, not through the wine so much.

Fred Reno

Got it? So, then you how'd you go over the Horton at that time?

Jake Busching

Well, I was at Jefferson for four years with Chris and Michael. And so that's where the wine industry really bit me, and I've been back, and I can kind of see the trajectory of where things were going and talking with Michael and talking with Chris about all this development that was happening, you know, things were starting to pop up in the industry. And there were some, some big, big estates coming online. And then I had the opportunity to go, I got a call from Horton. And it was an opportunity to go to a big operation and really get totally immersed in wine. And because at that time at Jefferson, I was still the estate manager. So, I was still doing a billion different things. And I really wanted to focus. And Horton was a great place to bring that focus to bear.

Fred Reno

Well, I was thinking about that yesterday, when I was going through your history a bit more and realize, man, that must have been interesting with Dennis Horton there and kind of the, not the beginning days. But yeah, kind of the beginning days.

Jake Busching

It was, you know at that time I lucked into the industry, when quality started to become a focus. So, at that time, you'd say, well, who were the best winemakers in Virginia and there was five. You know, there was it was a shortlist and you've already talked to all of them. But working with the Hortons, I shifted into the vineyard immediately. I met Dennis one time, and then I was out in the field with Sharon and working the 100 acres with Sharon was fantastic. She taught me a lot really fast, and I was only there briefly. But that's also the first time I got my feet on Honah Lee Vineyards, when they had it and they planted that whole thing and I got to manage it for a winter before I got the call from Keswick vineyards. And that was an opportunity that because it was new. They were just planting I got in on the ground floor of a brand-new operation that looked like it was going to be something pretty serious. So, I jumped over to Keswick, and that was a Chris Hill project as well. Was it not? Yeah, beginning back then and in Albemarle everything was a Chris Hill/ Michael Shaps project. Yeah, okay, so that, you know, there I was the tractor guy. So, you know, it was like we were the triumvirate for a while they were like, Alright, well, let's, you know, we need someone to do this call Jake. So, I bounced around a little bit, and it was with them. You know, Chris brought me into Keswick and then I brought Michael into Keswick. And so, Michael started teaching me winemaking really, you know, back in the Keswick days, but vineyard was still definitely my focus. And we put in a lot of 25, 30 acres of vines for Al at Keswick at that time. And I was there from 2000 to 2003.

Fred Reno

Interesting, so, then you jump to Pollock, which is another Chris Hill project.

Jake Busching

That was you know, as a vineyard guy, I was learning so much about the state and the potential for wine in Virginia and finding out where wine was being grown. What was you know, what was the terroir that, you know, these people were looking forward to making great wine? And it was an opportunity for me to jump up 500 feet in elevation on to, you know, the Blue Ridge and take a crack at making some serious reds and in a different terroir. And Pollack was unplanted, it was just an open field when I took it over and in '03, and we started planting and, and I was there from '03 to 2010. So, that's where I learned the breadth of the industry from the dirt, planting all the vineyards, bringing the crop online, building a winery, managing a winery, becoming a general manager, that whole thing happened under Dave and Margo, at Pollack, and it was an experience that I just couldn't replace with anything. Dave was fantastic. He had knowledge right back in Carneros and he knew what he wanted to accomplish. And, and they were great. They supported me and just kind of let it let me roll with it. Michael was there for that too. He was our wine consultant, and he got the winery open. And Chris was our vineyard consultant until I kind of ran the vineyard. You know; he was just showing up to go fishing in the pond.

Fred Reno

Well yeah. And then you went to Grace Estate, which to be honest with you, I'm not familiar with it at all, where is that?

Jake Busching

Grace estate is, well actually it's the winery portion on top of an of an estate called Mount Juliet. Oh, so out in Whitehall next to Crozet. Jose Morejon planted that vineyard for Dennis Horton back in '98. And it was 50 acres. It was a big, big production vineyard. Chris was involved with that vineyard from the first day. And that vineyard has probably produced more gold medal wines in Virginia than any other vineyard out there. Just because it was a large commercial vineyard that was well managed for years that sold great grapes to everybody. Okay, and so when Jose sold it, John Grace, bought it out of New York and just kind of kept, kept running it. And then they offered me that position in 2010. And again, that was going from a 25-acre wine estate to a 50, 60-acre development. So, it was moving from small production to something more commercial. And again, an opportunity for me to deep dive on a new terroir and new varietals. It was a real expansion for my career to be there, too.

Fred Reno

Oh, that sounds interesting. Really interesting. So ultimately, you connect back with Michael Shaps in 2015.

Jake Busching

Yeah, I think he, I think it was '14 when he called me and said, hey, my winemaker is leaving, and he was just kind of calling to grumble about it. Cause We're, you know, we've been tight forever. And he's like, I don't know what's going to happen. And that was Ben Jordan. Yeah, it was Ben Jordan. And, you know, and I've helped Michael bring Ben Jordan back to Virginia. And it was one of those moments where I was like, well, how about me and Michael's like, really? So, we started talking about and then

just at the time it really fit what I was trying to do. And so, I went from this commercial vineyard operation with a small winery, to Michael Shaps Wineworks and becoming head winemaker for Michael. I instantly had 20 clients. We had three, 400 acres of vines across the state. And it was, you know, constant fireballs of activity in the winery. Making 380 different wines for all these different people and trying to craft wines in a way that represent the dirt they came from. Michael has an amazing business there and what he's able to pull off is incredible.

Fred Reno

Yeah, no question about that. So, you also started your first vintage of your own wine at that time, too?

Jake Busching

Yeah, Michael allowed me to make some wine on my own just as a you know, as an expression. And I never really thought about having my own label until he's like, hey, we'll do what you want. And I said, Okay, and we had a vineyard that produce some amazing cab franc that year and I was able to get my hands on it. Yeah, where is Grape Lawn vineyard. Where is that? It's South Charlottesville, about 25 minutes. It's on a little bluff above the Rockfish River, right where highway 6 crosses or crosses on to route 29. In Nelson County. Does it exist today? Oh, yeah. It was planted by Phil Ponton and Carl Tinder. Okay, Phil used to be at Oakencroft, and it was planted for use at Oakencroft originally. So that vineyard has been there since the early 2000s. It was well produced. It was a good year. '15 was a great growing season. So, I just started building a vintage from there. And that was also the first year I was able to get some grapes from Honah Lee. Man. That place is just amazing as a vineyard. It's one of my favorite vineyard sites in the state.

Fred Reno

Well, I always here Michael Shaps waxing poetically about that vineyard, that, you know, everybody understands how significant that vineyard is the quality of the grapes coming from it, right?

Jake Busching

Oh, yeah. And as a vineyard person, if you drive into that place, and you drive in at 400 feet, and then you drive up to 1000. Then there's just vineyard from 500 feet up. I think they're up to about 40 acres now. And it's just a beautiful sight. And so, when Dennis Horton planted that place, he tried planting every varietal he could get his hands on. That's where he brought Viognier in, and he brought, he had everything in there. And so, when Michael got the lease on it, it was when I was with Michael, I was his lead winemaker in 2015. And then we kind of identified a problem with sourcing, a lot of the grapes that were coming in, just weren't up to quality. And so, Michael, and I got our heads together and said, well, why don't we start consulting back to these clients and help them with their vineyards, so that they're bringing us good fruit, so that we're making better wine. And so, I transitioned outdoor into the field, because that's my expertise. And then that's when Joy Ting followed me as lead winemaker for Michael, and Joy and I were, you know, we were working together to make all these wines, but I was the vineyard guy, and so that's how I got to know all these crazy vineyards. But we went into Honah Lee with that lease, and we pulled out a bunch of stuff that just wasn't working and started replacing it with things that were tried and true. And we knew we could do well there. Tannat? it had Tannat and we put in more, we pulled out a lot of a lot of the Italian varietals that people try here that just don't seem to hang well. We pulled those out and replaced them with things like Merlot, because we knew

we have a shortage of merlot in Virginia. It's a great varietal for Virginia. And so, we were trying to build that up, we put some cab franc in there, things that Michael uses for his own label as well. Right, exactly. Tannat and Petit Verdot, at Honah Lee are those are special creatures.

Fred Reno

So, were you involved initially at Hark when they bought the property, and were you part of the whole development from the beginning?

Jake Busching

I was at the time, Chris Hill was the sort of the viticulture teacher at Piedmont Community College here in Charlottesville, okay. And he got sick of doing it. And he called me one day, his back had blown out. He's like, Jake, I need you to go teach this class and I never taught class. So, I rolled in there and taught a class on Saturday. And then he just asked me to take it over. I started teaching basic viticulture for the community college. And that's how I began meeting all these different people in the industry outside of Michael and the Harks were students of mine. I met them at the college and Aaron Hark and I totally hit it off. We had a very mutual respect and I kind of knew where he was going with his project. So, I was on the ground for that right after they purchased it and development from day one.

Fred Reno

So, I was accurate, you manage the vineyard you make the wine for them as well as producing your own wine there as well.

Jake Busching

Absolutely. We planted that vineyard, and its first leaf was 2016. They relied on me and my knowledge to put the vineyard in the way it needed be to develop the property the way that it needed to be. They've been absolutely fantastic. The wines are great. And we are just now getting to the phase where we're building a big tasting room and going for it.

Fred Reno

Well, that sounds exciting. Okay, you're the right guy to ask this question, given all your background in the vineyard and everything, what varietal do you like to not only grow, but also that you enjoy making wine from. Is there one that you think yeah, that's the one I always want to make wine from?

Jake Busching

You've got a bottle right in front of you there, Cabernet Franc; Cabernet Franc is the grape for Virginia, I once you understand it in the vineyard. It is the most reliable red grape we have year to year. It's predictable. I can predict what's it's going to do in the vineyard. I know how the vines are going to grow. I know what I'm going to get in the winery, as long as my brain is in the vineyard with it. We know how to grow cab franc here to get us past the issues we've had with it in the past.

Fred Reno

So, I'm curious then because I've been myself going and buying a lot more Chinon these days trying to get an understanding. What do you see are the differences from franc that's being made? Let's just say in Central Virginia, Monticello AVA, and the wines up in the Shenandoah Valley.

Jake Busching

I should have brought you my 2017 vintage of Cab Franc because it was from the Shenandoah Valley.

Fred Reno

So, what is the character if there are differences? I'm curious.

Jake Busching

Oh, absolutely, if you think about the differences in climate, but also the differences in soil down here, we're on top of blue stone and green stone, and it's this deep red clay, you get up in the valley, you're on top of limestone. It's a totally different creature. And not only that, but you've got a shorter growing season up there. It's cooler, totally different world for grapes, and everything up there from you know, when I'm describing the wine, the tightness of those wines, down here, it's hotter, we get typically more rainfall than the valley gets. But it's that heat and water where you get this big, lush canopy and all this energy in the vine and balancing vines down here is harder than it is in the valley. Different root systems. It's all about water. Because Chris would tell you And, so in the valley, at that elevation, you've got a shorter ripening window, and you have a different ripening intensity. So, you're phenolics are all different and your skins your tannins are different, the rate of development is totally different. So, if you can get a cab franc ripe in the Shenandoah Valley, you get this Bing cherry, really, you know, tight, full of energy wine that needs some time to release. Whereas, down here in the Piedmont, it's a little more sort of open structurally you get deeper tannins. It's granola and, and strawberry. It's not necessarily this tight like the Bing cherry thing you get in the valley.

Fred Reno

So, I'm curious about your take and your thoughts about the future of hybrids here in Virginia. Admittedly, as I told people, I had very little understanding what they were. I was probably as ignorant as anybody about them, because being from the west coast, in this business. But when I came here and tasted some of these wines, especially Seyval Blanc, which I have become a real big fan of when correctly made, it's like hold on here a second, why are hybrids getting such a knock?

Jake Busching

I think it's partly due to the wine geek that's out there knocking on hybrids like these are American made grapes that do well in swamps and lowlands. And the reality is, in the past, the hybrids have become workhorse grapes for wineries that need to produce table wine. And so, they don't give them their due in the vineyard, they over crop them. They don't ripen them the way they need to. And then they make big tanks of ineffectual wine in the winery because they're trying to cut costs with that grape. They're trying to produce a table wine for 15 bucks instead of a \$25. You know, varietal wine. I think hybrids are a key to the future of our industry in Virginia. I've plugged them in wherever they should be. And so, as a consultant now, when I talk to somebody, and if they have a site where they're dead set on planting Chardonnay, and I know it's not going to grow there, I must have something to say. Let's put this white grape in there and pay attention to it, and make something great, Chardone1 for instance. Great grape for Virginia in the right spot. You know, sitting down with a well-made bottle of Chardone1, Ben Jordan makes the wines with some oysters, it's just one of the best things ever.

Fred Reno

Well, thank you for saying that because I'm still trying to get a bottle of Chardone. I'm so excited so interested in fact my interview Jay Youmans, he told me about Chardone he said Fred, I've had some Chardones that are as good as premier cru Chablis.

Jake Busching

Yeah, absolutely. The acidity there is bracing. I love growing it. It's having big, great big cluster, but it comes in a little early. It's fairly resistant to a lot of the stuff that versus growing Chardonnay in Virginia that just wants to have all the problems. We're fighting it constantly in the vineyard. Whereas Chardone is a little more resistant wineries like the Hauge out on the eastern shore, 53rd right here in Fluvanna, they've got Chardone. And I'm pretty sure we started making Chardone for the Hauge at Shaps and I tweaked it with some lee's addition. So, we're doing Chardone in barrel with some Chardonnay lees.

Fred Reno

sounds interesting.

Jake Busching

Gives it a little more volume in the mid palate. So, it's not quite so severe, beautiful wines, really beautiful wines.

Fred Reno

Hmm. Well, I'm going to have to check out the 53rd. Because that's close enough that I probably can get my hands on some. Absolutely. I mean, most of the producers I've seen like Rosemont or other producers who have Chardone, they reserve it for their wine club members. And you know, I have a resistance to become wine club member. I really want to try a good Chardone. I'm curious about something here that I just recently picked up on. People have mentioned to me, I'm talking about the wine makers research exchange. People have mentioned, but it kind of went over my head until recently, and then I suddenly said hold on a second. This is a big deal. Can you talk to me a little bit more about what's behind that? And are you involved at all?

Jake Busching

I am involved in that I was at the table at the original conversation with Matthieu and Emily and Kirsty. And I think that was maybe before there was somebody else there. And we started talking about the history of collaboration. Virginia Tech, Bruce Zoecklein at Virginia Tech used to do roundtables for all the regions through the state. So, he'd say, hey, I'm going to be in your region, we're going to meet at Whitehall vineyards, everybody brings some wine blind that you're having trouble with, or that you want to talk about. We're going to blind it, everyone's going to talk, you know, there's going to be 15 winemakers sitting around the table, we're going to taste this stuff and learn something. And when we lost that it was crucial to my development of my palette, but also as a winemaker to I mean, you're out working every day by yourself and in the field in the middle of nowhere. How do you get this information and to have your colleagues just sitting around a table talking about what you're doing? It's just this collective energy that I learned so much from and I think is important to an industry to grow together. And we lost that when we lost Bruce when he retired from Virginia Tech. It just went away. And so, we were we were discussing it as the Monticello Wine Trail. How do we, how do we do this ourselves?

That's how that conversation started. Okay, great. And so, then we're like, well, we can do this, but what's the goal? What's the end point? It's like, well, we all want to do these trials and things. But how do we make it legit? That's when Kirsty and Emily and then eventually Joy Ting came on board. They were the science geeks; I was just a dirt guy. And they're like, well everything needs to be justified. And we need to have a process and I was like, Okay, let's do that. And then I went back to work, and they all put this thing together. What has really become a wonderful part of the industry. We started it at the Monticello Wine Trail. We did so well with it as a trail that the state stepped in and said, hey, we'd like to have that. So, we just moved it statewide. And now it's run by Joy Ting and the Virginia Wine Board.

Fred Reno

Well, that's fantastic. I mean, that points to something I've noticed here, there just seems to be real collegiality and a lot of collaboration going on here in Virginia, for the most part between all the vintners.

Jake Busching

Absolutely. One of my favorite things is collaborating with my colleagues back in 2009, Matthieu Finot at King family, Emily over at Veritas and myself when I was at Pollack. We started one of the first collaborations in Virginia wine and we had a product called three, three winemakers, three wines. We would each bring a barrel of something, and we did a blend, and it was usually Merlot, Cab Franc, and Petit Verdot. We did that for about five years. And when I left Grace Estate, I sort of lost the ability to do that wine anymore. It kind of stayed with the estate. And so, it just ended there. But doing these collaborations, again, it's a learning thing, but it's also the kind of thing that that puts us politically in touch with what's going on in the state. You know, the governor would show up to these releases of our three wines because it was making a statement about this new industry and how everyone was working together. I absolutely love doing stuff like that.

Fred Reno

That sounds fantastic. All right. Question. I always like to ask everybody, what was that one wine that you had in your lifetime? at whatever juncture, you said, Ah, that's it. And that was that one wine? You always remember?

Jake Busching

My answer is I haven't had it yet. Okay. However, I got a bottle in my cellar that might change that. But go ahead. Okay. Well, no. And that's my problem. Like, every wine that I have that that tells me something about itself in a unique way. I find it thrilling. Like I really, I love wine. And I love I think coming at wine from the production side and I talked to my enology friends who are just oenophiles that drink wine and believe all the magic and the unicorn stuff. coming at it from the other perspective of tasting, you know, what's behind the wine, whether it's the hand of the winemaker or a specific barrel or the dirt. It changes your relationship with wine. But really answering that question. It was a bottle of some weird Chianti that I bought at a 7/11 in like 1993, okay, and I grew up around alcohol, there was always whiskey in my house, there was beer, there was never wine. And so, I didn't know wine until I got into the restaurant world. And then I was sort of like, what is this stuff? I never liked beer. I think whiskey is great. But the first time I had a bottle of wine, I was just thirsty. I bought it at 7/11. And I pulled the cork, and I was like, this makes sense to me. There was something about it. And from that moment on, I was more interested in wine and that led me to focus a little harder on it when I was

bartending and when I was working in restaurants, and then it just eventually, you know, leading up to the point where I found myself on an estate that grew it, and I was hooked.

Fred Reno

Well, that's a great story. Come on, Jake. That's a great story. I like that story a lot. It reminds me and I won't digress, but it reminds me how I got introduced to wine. You know, and I will say this. To your point. It wasn't the most stellar bottle of wine. It was a bottle of '69 vintage Sichel shipper Haut Medoc off the shelf at Jewel Osco in Western Michigan. And I was like, to your point. Wow, this does make sense, with dinner this is all different.

Jake Busching

Yeah, that's a big deal. When you're when you're thinking about food, and you find something that pairs with it, instead of just washes it down. That you know, just expands the meal out. It's much more interesting experience.

Fred Reno

You brought up something I wanted to touch on too, because the importance of Bruce Zoecklein I can understand. So, let's fold Tony Wolf into this now as well. What type of support Have you enjoyed over the years from Tony, the Extension Services, that whole group?

Jake Busching

It's taught me most of what I know about the technical side of what I do. And I have Tony's cell number, we talk a lot. I'm involved with a lot of projects with Virginia Tech, and I always will be and always have been. I think that what they do for our industry is invaluable. They have changed grape growing, and they listened to us they you know, I serve on a committee for the Wine Board where we review trials and project and push out the money for extension. We were the people that decide what you know, where should we put this money and all the projects coming out of Virginia Tech, you know, we fund all that and seeing all the stuff being involved in that. It's changed our industry completely. What we knew about growing grapes when I started was pretty limited. And I like to just point this out to people like, hey, Napa Valley gets 16 to 19 inches of rain year in the winter. We get 40 all summer and so growing grapes here rain is the problem for the industry. It's hard to do and it's hard to do well, because our climate is so vintage driven. You know, did the Hurricanes hit? Did we get frosted, was there a drought? You know, all these questions, but Tech has been there to answer those questions. And to guide us through all this craziness that we that we face all the time. We have new insects that roll in here about every five years that we've got to deal with and figure out and it's been an amazing, amazing part of the industry to be a part of.

Fred Reno

I was doing some research the other day looking specifically for something like this, and I stumbled on something, I believe I understand why it never got legs. But I'd love your take on this because you were here at the time. It was called the Commonwealth quality Alliance program, which was a program to taste wine and give it a quality assurance from the state. To me, it was a laudable approach to trying to give Virginia a stamp as a new wine region back in what 2012, 2011. Were you sort of around at that time? And do you remember what happened? I'm curious,

Jake Busching

not only it was around at the time, but I was also on that committee. Emily and I were on that committee. And Ben Jordan. I forget who else was there; there was a bunch of us on that committee. And we tried hard to make that a go. And the thing we bumped into is ego, right? You're still in cowboy country, really. I mean, you talk about California and cowboy country, but it's the same here. It's just a different hat. You have all these estate owners and the folks that come in with the money, they do not want to be told what to do. And a lot of the smaller producers either can't afford that kind of lab work and that you know, all the labeling that goes with something like this. It's an expense. It's a bit of a hurdle for a lot of people to include it in their program when you start talking about the business model that is Virginia wine and who's making money and who isn't. And so, if you're essentially adding a tax for quality, there's an immediate kickback like, nope, no, thank you. My wines. Good. My mom said they were good.

Fred Reno

Okay, I understand. I've seen this movie. Yeah, yeah. And I understand. But boy, what a great idea. I mean, exactly for lifting everybody's boat in this situation. You know, I have my own opinion about why Virginia is not recognized on a national level for all the progress in quality wine that is going on here. And I'm trying to change it. That's been my goal. But I'm curious from your perspective now. What do you think needs to happen next for Virginia to finally where the consumer starts to understand on a national basis? I want to see Virginia wine just like I they default to Oregon wine, California Wine, or even Washington State wine?

Jake Busching

Sure, I think some of it is just scalability, and availability. If you think about, I think California, the industry in California, contributes about 30% of alcohol sales in the state. Here in Virginia, it's less than 5%. So, our local constituency is drinking all the wine we can produce. And so, it's hard for us to say, well, let's put a whole bunch of money behind a wholesale deal where you're not going to make as much money on this wine, we're going to wholesale it out to somebody in Oklahoma, when I can have a full retail dollar from somebody who drives up my driveway. And I think it we don't have the large estates; we don't have the terroir where we can just plant a whole valley full of grapes. Because of our problems with cold and water. There're small blocks, it's 20 acres and 10 acres and five, I'm planting a vineyard next spring. That's two acres. But it is a perfect vineyard site that I've been looking for, for years. It's that kind of dynamic on the business side of things where I think we're a long way off from having a large national footprint,

Fred Reno

well, the one thing that could change that as we move forward, the consumers learned suddenly because of COVID to buy a great deal of wine online where they didn't before. And the other phenomena that I've watched happen is something I never thought would happen. People are buying wine, what I call sight untasted online, whereas before they wouldn't. Before it was like they bought wine online because they had been to the winery, or they know the wine, or it's their favorite brand. Now they're really experimenting. And I think that's an opportunity marketed correctly. I have my own ideas on how to do that. It's a great opportunity for Virginia because every time I get a trade person

around the country or consumer to try a bottle of Virginia Cabernet Franc or Petit Manseng they're like, wow, I had no idea and then this idea that somehow Virginia wine is too expensive goes away. Because visa v quality it is not too expensive.

Jake Busching

It's not, it's right there and I totally agree with you Fred, I think, you know, the online sales mechanism that kicked in for all of us sort of changed our perspective on marketing and the use of social media and websites and, you know, get it out there, talk to people and we are selling Virginia wine outside of Virginia. And that's how we're doing it. People, you know, I ship wine to Minnesota, I ship wine to Texas, there's wine going out the door to people who know. So how do you promote that and get some more sales outside of the state? I think you're absolutely right. There's an avenue there where we can tap into the oenophiles that want to find these great wines in Virginia that they're the same people that live in Mississippi that want to drink Oregon Pinot and they're ordering it from somebody, how do we get into the wine shops that are going to hand sell it to somebody at a tasting, that's the tough part and, having the volume to back that is not as hard as having a wholesaler out selling for you, because wholesalers, you know, they have their place in the market. But for Virginia wine, it just doesn't work for us financially to have if you finally make 3000 cases of wine a year. It's so hard to give that margin percentage up.

Fred Reno

Yeah, no, I can totally understand. Let's talk about your brand. So, talk to me about the label the packaging, I'm curious, I look at this going okay, what does this represent?

Jake Busching

I like to have people guess, but I'll just tell you, that is an iPhone picture of a Petit Verdot wine running down the side of the press barrel,

Fred Reno

oh,

Jake Busching

I was pressing the wine and the wine in the barrel is rotating on the press. And I was just standing there taking pictures of this amazing series of rivulets of Petit Verdot coming down the side of this press. And then I handed that off to a designer and she did all the artwork, right? We changed the tone, but that's just a photograph of wine as a as an independent producer who doesn't have an estate. So, let's back up one step. My label is about sourcing grapes from great vineyards and wineries that I know and work with, that I want to make wine from. So, if I can roll into somebody's vineyard and say, hey, I really love this vineyard site. I know you're a good operator, or I work with them as a consultant. And I'd say I just want one ton of that block right there. To make my wine from that's what I'm doing. And so, I don't have an estate. So, I didn't have a picture of a building or a mountain. an artful expression of wine seemed apt.

Fred Reno

So, the branding on this wine F8, F8. What's that all about?

Jake Busching

That's a field designation. Field eight, at Honah Lee is where those grapes came from. Oh, and me being my practical farmer dirt self-guy. I went to Darcy who's doing the label. And I said, I want to call this F8. It's a field designation. And she said, oh, FATE is brilliant. That's a really good idea. And I was like, Okay, thank you.

Fred Reno

That's good.

Jake Busching

But that wine, those grapes grow side by side in field eight at Honah Lee, I produced several vintages. I had the '15 '16 and '17. And it all came off that was the same grapes each year. A really fun project.

Fred Reno

F8 is FATE, folks. You got to call it FATE. And now I understand. Well, no, now I understand. There's a story behind every label. And it's important to understand it. That's the beautiful thing about wine. It's the intellectual curiosity that drives people wanting to know what's behind this package who's behind this wine. That's what makes it special.

Jake Busching

It's fun to share that story with people and to have people and I've experienced this as head winemaker for a bunch of places especially at Pollack is where I learned it initially was how customers love to be included. To take ownership of a part of the process like being involved and they feel like suddenly you've got a community of whether it's the wine club or not. You have a community of customers that are super loyal, who know everything about you and your wine. And you know and you become friends with these people and it's absolutely fantastic. I love it, it's a nice social network.

Fred Reno

Is your wine served at Hark in the tasting room as well or is it just Hark?

Jake Busching

So, my labels are available on the website and in the tasting room at Hark and there's a few restaurants in town that carry my label as well. Pretty good friends with Will Richie and so his he likes to have that Cab Franc for instance in his establishments in town. Okay, so it's leaked out a little bit. I only make between five and 700 cases a year if we get a good vintage. So, there's not a lot of it. And I'm kind of camped on it because I want it to age a little bit in bottle before I release it. So primarily, it's available at Hark, in the tasting room there.

Fred Reno

Well, Jake this is fascinating. Thank you. It's important to have your story. You've been here in the middle of all this as we see this modern-day growth of quality, and wine growing. And you understand that, as I always tell people it's farming folks.

Jake Busching

It's absolute farming, I still have the calluses to prove it.

Fred Reno

it is just farming. At the end of the day, the farmer, the way he makes his money is when he sells the farm, and that's the wine business itself for the most part, you know, when they sell the brand, that's when the money comes home. Absolutely. So well, I want to thank you for your time.

Jake Busching

Oh, great. Thanks for having me. This is wonderful. I love the history of Virginia wine. I've been an advocate Virginia wine for a long time. And it's been wonderful to be able to work with an entire state and be involved in an industry like this. All right.