

EPISODE # 26 KIRK WILES/CEO: PARIDISE SPRINGS WINERY

SPEAKERS

Fred Reno, Kirk Wiles

Fred Reno

Kirk, welcome to my Podcast.

Kirk Wiles

Thank you appreciate being here.

Fred Reno

As I like to begin, I always say let's start at the beginning. How did this all come to be? As I understand it, this land has been in your family at some level since and was part of the original 1716 Lord Fairfax land grant, is that correct?

Kirk Wiles

Correct. Yes, our family has been here for a good long time in Clifton. And this property was part of a land grant from Lord Fairfax to our family in 1716, about 1000 acres. And still today, we've been able to hold on and keep about 330, still in the family here in Fairfax. And really, that's sort of what prompted us to start the winery here, you know, the farm's been in the family for nine generations. When my great Aunt passed away, in 2005, we almost lost the property to inheritance tax. We were able to save it, but it prompted us to ask ourselves the question of what are we going to do with this place? How do we continue to make the farm a working place that can be self-sustainable, so that it can be in the family for another nine generations? You know, with all the gentrification, everything happening in Fairfax pushing out and the way property taxes are, this is happening to so many farms across the country, and it came knocking on our doorstep. That prompted the question of what do we do. We were looking at sort of what the property rights were here and obviously, we could have developed it and build another suburban neighborhood and probably done well on that.

Fred Reno

Folks, there's a lot of them around here, because I drove through them.

Kirk Wiles

that would have been the easy way out. But we looked and saw that we had an agricultural right, an agricultural zoning of an A and F district here. One of the last remaining in Fairfax, and my mother was always a fan of Virginia wines. She used to drink, you know, Linden Chardonnay, and the Chardonnay's back in early 90s. We were here one night at the cabin, having a few too many glasses of wine, maybe a bourbon or two, had a fire with some friends over and sort of did this on a regular basis but one night I looked at her and said, what are we going to do with this place? Like? And she goes, Well, I know what I want to do. I just don't know how to do it. And the answer was a startup Virginia winery. I looked at her and I said I will help you. 23 years old out of college from the University of Miami, I was kind of on a fast track to Wall Street in construction finance corporate America and I was desperate to get out and do something more challenging and thrilling then having to sit at a desk and work on a computer every single day. And so, I woke up on Monday morning and got to work and went out and figured out how to make it happen. We ended up meeting the right people and the snowball effect started happening of you can do this. And here's how and we started jumping in and learning.

Fred Reno

That's fascinating I read something that you would refer to a consultant that you met in 2006 that helped you along the way who was that.

Kirk Wiles

Chris Pearmund. We met him through a mutual friend. And we were able to work with him for a few years doing some custom crush out of his facility. And that really helped sort of get the ball rolling to be able to make some good wine here in Virginia and learning that side of everything. You know, throughout that we ended up working with Philip Strother there as well, on the legal side of things.

Fred Reno

yeah, what was this challenge all about? I mean, Fairfax took you on. Taking on Fairfax County. That was high cotton You know, tall cotton as they say.

Kirk Wiles

It was. We were having looked at property rights and a right to agriculture and the farm winery act that was passed in 2007. Actually, with David Kings help and some others along with Philips's help that farm winery act passed in 2007 that specifically said in that code a farm winery was agriculture, and that localities were forbidden from regulating farm wineries.

Fred Reno

Oh, I didn't know that.

Kirk Wiles

This was the clause that helped us win because when we went to go do this, nowhere in Fairfax County's small 2000-page zoning manual do have anything about a farm winery, and they hung their hats on that this was a brand-new entity. That sort of broke the code, but they didn't have an answer for, and they didn't quite know how to deal with us. So, their answer was no. And quite frankly, I think what they thought was they could out litigate us and force a small business into spending so much money on litigation that we would just give up. Wouldn't be worth it. But little did they know they were dealing with me, right? I had the tenacity to make this happen. My mother always said that I was that way. And I wouldn't take no for an answer.

Fred Reno

Then here you are. So how did the ABC board get involved here? I see where the Virginia ABC, sort of brought the gauntlet down, said no, they have the right to do this.

Kirk Wiles

Sure. So, we, you know, we obviously put in for our ABC license, and Fairfax County challenged it. And some of the neighbors challenged it. And they linked up and came after us because they didn't want the winery here. You know, where there was a lot of supporters, there was a few that had a larger bark than bite. And those few teamed up with the county and came after us during the hearing. We had an 11-hour ABC hearing, and I heard everything from, you know, Kirk is the devil. You know, this place is goanna be a brothel. Just all sorts of crazy stories that were going to happen. At the end of the day, we had a right, a property right to agriculture. A farm winery is agriculture in Virginia. And the state doesn't allow localities to regulate farm wineries. And so those aspects, pushed this through, we won the ABC hearing. And actually, the head of ABC looked up my mother's phone number and called the house at 10 o'clock at night. And said, Just wanted to let you know, congratulations. I'm sending this over. And I'm so sorry, you had to go through all this. You can open tomorrow if you want to.

Fred Reno

That's fascinating. That's a terrific story. So, what was the first vintage?

Kirk Wiles

So, we had actually made our first wine in 2007. A Cabernet Sauvignon.

Fred Reno

Well, you didn't have a vineyard here.

Kirk Wiles

We didn't, we were sourcing some fruit for custom crush out of Silver Creek vineyards, which we still work with today. And then we actually made a full lineup in 2008, and a full lineup in 2009. You know, we sort of knew that we could win this thing, and that we were going to be able to open and so we were going down that path of making wine. And we know we got this. It's just a matter of time and getting it to the proper court. Because the law clear as day was on our side.

Fred Reno

Well, that's fascinating. So, you're behind the scenes, just going about your business, throwing caution to the wind, and making wine and going, we're going to win, we're going to win. So that must have been a hell of a celebration when you did win.

Kirk Wiles

It was, indeed, you know, the cup overflowed. It was emotional, but it was triumphant. You know it's not the way you want to start a small business. You work so hard and spend so much money on legal fees to get there. And then the real work starts, but it was this feeling of euphoria, like we had arrived, and we were allowed to do this now. Then the next day the real work started, and we never looked back.

Fred Reno

How many acres of vineyard land do you have bearing here now?

Kirk Wiles

On this immediate property, it's a little over two acres. It's a small vineyard by purpose. I think the fight with Fairfax County actually deterred us from planting more on this property. But since then, we have acquired property in Shenandoah, where we have a larger 68-acre vineyard. We have a 55 acres next door that we have purchased. We still work with some incredible growers like Silver Creek outside of Charlottesville, Williams Gap up in Round Hill, Jenny McLeod, we get Norton from the Chrysalis vineyard and then we have a newer project in the works that you may not even know about that I can break the news.

Fred Reno

Oh, that'd be great. Thank you.

Kirk Wiles

We have acquired a 288-acre parcel right next to King family vineyards outside of Charlottesville.

Fred Reno

Oh Fantastic

Kirk Wiles

We're going to put another 100 acres under vine and open a third Paradise Springs location down there.

Fred Reno

That is fantastic. So, your journey continues. It sure does. So, tell me a little bit about Rob Cox your winemaker and how he got involved here and how long he's been with you.

Kirk Wiles

Yeah, so Rob, actually, funny story, he was working at Pearmund with them making custom crush Rob had worked over at Pearmund and Lagrange since 2004 or five, I believe. And so, we came in to do custom crush, we just hit it off. I think when personalities click and then there's something about Rob that we really enjoyed, where he enjoyed teaching us and would take the time to teach us and we really enjoyed that and connected with that and it just so happened that in 2009, Rob ended up leaving the LaGrange and bounced around a couple other wineries looking for a new home and that coincided with when we needed a full time winemaker on site here in Clifton. And so, Rob came on board in February 2011 with us and he's been the only winemaker we've ever had here in Clifton.

Fred Reno

Well, I haven't had a lot of your wines yet. But I've had the Chardonnay, I've had the Sommet which is terrific. I mean, there's just a precision to the wines that you can just tell he really knows what he's doing.

Kirk Wiles

Absolutely. And we recognized that early on. A great winemaker in Virginia, has to look at the blank canvas every single year because of our vintage variation and weather challenges and things that can happen. If you follow the same methodology, recipe every single year, you're going to have very inconsistent wines and wines that are not made well and great in sort of off years when weather gives you those challenges. And what I love about Rob is, he's a great Virginia winemaker, he can look at that blank canvas differently every single year and adapt his style to what Mother Nature is giving us. And that's hard to do when you're taught a certain way. It's hard to break that mold of doing what you always have known because you've got something different from the vineyard.

Fred Reno

Let's step backwards just a little bit. Was wine part of your family when you were growing up? I'm just curious. I mean, how did you get into wine?

Kirk Wiles

My mother always enjoyed it. And once I turned 21, I learned to enjoy it too, I think with her and the journey for wine really started with me out of the necessity of saving a family property. And so, I think preserving that family history, but also a chance to break out of that corporate mold and do something unique and different and challenging, just called me and I found my calling and passion in it. And I'm excited I did.

Fred Reno

Well Kirk as you were going down this path was there some model of a wine that you said Okay, I want to be this type of a winery. These are the varietals or these types of wines. So, is there any kind of model that you had in your mind you wanted to fashion after? Or just?

Kirk Wiles

No, no, I'll be honest, for me, it was more about building a solid brand. And so, from day one, and what does that mean? From day one, we knew we had a great location for visitation, right, we didn't have to rely on huge weddings and the gimmicks to get people out to the property, we knew people were going to come because the drive time alone was half the time to get to the next closest winery. I knew that if I concentrated on making the

best possible wine that we can here and building a solid brand and not deviating from that, and doing what's right for Virginia, that we would be successful. And lo and behold, we have, and I think consistency has been that key over the 15 years that we've been making wine here. And so, when we really started, yeah, we made a Cabernet Sauvignon out the gate in '07 but that was sort of my being naive to what Virginia can do well, and I think I quickly learned that I wanted it to be the winery that can make the best wine that we possibly can. And if that meant having to change the varietals or explore the things that do well in Virginia, I wanted to do that. I wanted to be a part of the varietals that did well and create that story for Virginia. We weren't trying to be a winery in California or be a winery somewhere else. We wanted to be uniquely Virginia and if that meant doing wines like Petit Manseng, Tannat and Norton then so be it. We did a Petit Manseng as early as 2008. Our first full vintage.

Fred Reno

Well, that's what's so exciting to me is there's just so much more experimentation in wine growing going on here in Virginia. I always look at Virginia and I tell people think about it as France. They don't grow Pinot Noir in Bordeaux and they don't grow Cabernet Sauvignon in Burgundy. And Virginia is like that. There are just certain areas of Virginia that certain varietals shine and do better.

Kirk Wiles

Yeah. And I think we're still figuring that out. Right. That's what's exciting is we're writing the story of Virginia wine today. Through trial-and-error research, you know, where we land? Who knows, maybe we don't ever land somewhere, like a Napa with cab Sauv or Oregon with Pinot or you know, or burgundy. I mean, maybe we become known for a lot of different varietals that do well,

Fred Reno

but I'm curious about Shenandoah Valley what varietals do you have planted in that vineyard over there?

Kirk Wiles

So, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, Chardonnay, and Vidal Blanc are the four-work horse there all varietals that do a little bit better in cold weather Hardy, but that crop well and work with the soils that are there. You know, and that's by design. I mean, we're low in Tannat because you're flirting on that edge of cold weather hardiness out there. And so, I think those are varietals that we're going to concentrate planting on down in Charlottesville, where you've got two, to two and a half weeks more ripening days a little bit lower elevation at eight, 900 feet versus 1500 feet. So again, I think it's about planting the right thing in the right places.

Fred Reno

Well not to diverge from Virginia folks, but you have a winery in Santa Barbara, California. How did this journey take place to California? How did that manifest itself and transpire?

Kirk Wiles

Yeah, so I think, out the gate when we opened here, people resonated with our story, we made the front-page front fold of The Washington Post when we won our ABC case, and people resonated with that family story of trying to save and hold on to your property against government that wants to tax it. So, we opened with the pain and people came and wanted to support but we didn't have enough wine to sell. We were always struggling to keep up with being able to find quality fruit. And that meant planting it ourselves, working with existing growers, acquiring property that already existed. That takes time, you know, by the time you put a grapevine in the ground, it takes seven years to get a good product out of it. And so that was the challenge. So, in 2014, when we're running up against an industry, you know, there's those crunches, I'm sitting there going, I can't get any more quality fruit on the spot market. You had this explosion of wineries throughout Virginia, where we were the 156 Winery in the state. And I think today, we're just about double that with over 300 now to this explosion of wineries, but you didn't have an explosion of vineyards and just growers that were planting wineries were planting for

themselves. And then there was this fight for the quality fruit, outbidding of others and people trying to find that. And so, we realized that if we wanted to continue to grow here, we had to find more land and plant our own. But in the meantime, we knew that was going to take a long time. And so, I think I was out in Los Angeles with some really good friends. I've never been to Santa Barbara, and they were like, we should go up for a weekend and taste wine. It's really a great wine region. I sort of didn't know much about it. So, I had a mutual supplier actually set me up with some people. And we drove up. Our very first meeting in Santa Barbara was with Greg Brewer in Santa Rita Hills, he showed us around and then took us over to Brewer Clifton. I immediately fell in love with Pinot Noir out of the region. There was something special about these pinots and I had never realized but had that experience. So, the idea just came to me that day of what if we did another operation? What if we made wine in another region, it could help diversify our portfolio by doing things like Pinot Noir and Syrah, but also do some things that we do like Chardonnay, and some Bordeaux out of Happy Canyon to compare what we do here in Virginia. I felt it would help mitigate our quality fruit problem we were having in Virginia until vines could get up to speed, you know, and help that inventory control. So, that was the crazy idea. And it just started with us meeting the right people.

Fred Reno

You met the right people, that's for sure. I mean, Doug Margerum.

Kirk Wiles

yeah, so I had another guy we met that day at Brewer Clifton who had a vineyard for sale in Santa Rita. We were like, well, let's go see it just for fun. A guy named Tom Davidson. Tom is known all over the valley out there. He helped build Sea Smoke and Dierberg Star Lane and a whole bunch of places out there. So, we saw the vineyard, it wasn't the right thing. It was in bad shape. But Tom and I kept in touch. About six months later, he was like, Well, what do you want to do out here? I said, I'd love to just make some wine and see what happens and go from there. He goes, alright, I have two people that I want to introduce you to that could be right for you to do this. One of them was Doug Margerum, who we work with today. And to be honest I don't even remember who the second person was. I don't even think I talked to the second person because Doug and I just clicked. When we talked about philosophy, winemaking, and business, and you just know you have so many things in common with someone we just clicked on every level. That was let's do this and we'll make wine.

Fred Reno

Well, he's an institution there like a lot of people know.

Kirk Wiles

yeah, yeah, he's Mr. Santa Barbara, we call him, he knows everyone in that town. There's no question. 35 years he's been I think making wine out there. Yes. So, he's, he's a great guy, and I couldn't ask for a better consultant and introduction to the region.

Fred Reno

So, I'm curious then. What's the difference? What have you learned from your experience of making wine in California? Vs. making wine in Virginia? What do you see is the differences and what have you learned from that?

Kirk Wiles

A lot of different things from; grape growing is tougher in Virginia; vintage variation is much higher in Virginia than out there. I've learned things like cost of fruit is lower here, which is surprising because we have a tougher time spraying and putting vineyards in and taking care of them. And so is fruit undervalued in Virginia maybe. But prices also have to get there too, right? You know, you can buy a ton of Pinot Noir for \$5500 in Santa Rita, but you can sell that bottle for 45 to 100 bucks a bottle. You have to have an exceptional grape in Virginia,

exceptional site to do that. But no one's getting 5500 a ton in Virginia, different things like that, when it comes to how we market wines sell wines to consumers. There's a little bit, you know, there's more of a competition out there, I would say more variations, and more people dabble in the wholesale side of things than we do in Virginia. And so, I think if anything it opened my eyes to Virginia as still very much an emerging region, we have a long way to go. But that's a good thing. You know, I think that's exciting. And I think that what draws me back to Virginia is that we can write that story, create that narrative, and continue to grow to become a larger region. But even in the midst of all of this Santa Barbara still has this underdog story because it's not Napa, right? It's not Sonoma, in the world of wine is still not that upper echelon, sort of tiered region, even though we're making world class wines that are just getting discovered now. So that's what drew me to the area, but still, I feel there are those differences that exist between the two.

Fred Reno

Well, that's fascinating. Yeah, Santa Barbara, for as high a quality of wine and the personalities that have come through there. It's still a little bit off the radar screen.

Kirk Wiles

It is. It's interesting how that is. Especially Pinot Noir. I mean, Burgundian style you know, you go up north to Sonoma or Oregon and a lot of times you find sort of these over extracted high alcohol style pinots and they're not great food wines. Santa Barbara has that beautiful balance of acidity, alcohol ripeness flavor, where they're just amazing food wines like burgundy. And can age a long time.

Fred Reno

We touched on this Kirk, before we got in the interview. But just for the record for the audience. One of the things that I said earlier was, most people don't understand the difference in the Santa Barbara area for wine growing is the coastal ranges run east to west to the ocean. Yep. Whereas in Northern California, they run north to south. And so, it's just a completely different climatic condition and allows for growing more diverse grapes.

Kirk Wiles

I mean, everyone is shocked that you can grow cool weather climate pinots, Syrah, and chardonnay in Southern California. It just doesn't make a lot of sense to people. And it's that marine time influence and the only east to west corridor mountain range on the west coast. So, all that cool weather Pacific Air floats down California and then funnels right into that mountain range. And that's why you have brands called Sea Smoke. Sea Smoke is actually cloud cover and fog every morning that settles into the Santa Rita Hills. And then by noon, one o'clock, it burns off to this beautiful blue sky and warm day. And so, it's this amazing microclimate that exists only in that one little 10-mile corridor that can produce these wines. And it was really a vision of Dr. Richard Stanford, right, who first planted Sanford & Benedict.

Fred Reno

well, you make wine from that vineyard.

Kirk Wiles

That's why we wanted to be there. Yeah, I mean, he's one of the pioneers. And it's one of the best still and we're lucky that Doug was able to make that introduction to us. It's one of our most prized vineyards that we do work with. I like to think they like us so much there; we actually are the only other winery that gets fruit from their Founder's Block that was originally planted in 1972. And so, we're really lucky to have a great relationship with them and continue to do them proud by making great wine as well.

Fred Reno

Is Sanford and Benedict. I'm curious now. Are they still privately held?

Kirk Wiles

They're owned by the Terlato family? So, they are privately held, but a larger corporation.

Fred Reno

I couldn't remember who'd come in as an infusion of capital. So, this isn't necessarily a wine question. But I am curious because I'm a big believer in Virginia. mineral springs and baths. That's how I got started coming to Virginia because I got married at the Homestead. And so, I read some tidbits here that Paradise Springs was a real spring, somewhere here in Clifton. What's the background on that?

Kirk Wiles

So yeah, we were looking for a name here. We wanted to do something that was historical to the town and the land, and why people came to Clifton. But we wanted something that was also marketable beyond just the history here. We didn't want to call it our family named Kincheloe or Wiles, and we were reading through history books and Paradise Springs was the mineral springs on the other side of Clifton, that commercially produced some bottled water in 1910. The history and the lore of it was that past presidents and generals would come out to Clifton, ride the train out to spend a retreat, you know, evenings and drinking this water for its magical healing powers. And they would ship it into Washington in these hand-blown glass water bottles.

We actually have the last remaining four handblown, glass paradise water bottles in existence. And since we've opened, someone came forth with the original window in the original factory of 1910, and gave it to us

Fred Reno

Oh, fantastic.

Kirk Wiles

And so, while the original Paradise Springs were not on this property, we do have mineral springs on this property. So, we just thought, the correlation between the history of the town the artifacts and having springs on this property, and that name being marketable and historic town that had a greater sense that could get, you know, than just a historical name. Oh, it's good brand. And it was a good brand. And so, it just worked. And we happened to trademark it. It had just become available. Someone had let it go. And actually, I had learned that Gallo tried to obtain the name in 1994. They lost trying to obtain it because this other person who had it before fought and won, so I don't know the cards just were serendipitous. It was meant to be.

Fred Reno

Well, let me ask you a question, because I'm sure my audience would like to hear about this. You're the chair of what is the Virginia Wine Board? Yes. Talk a little bit about the history of the Virginia Wine Board, how it was formed and what it does.

Kirk Wiles

The Virginia wine board is a governor appointed board. So, it is a political position appointed for the betterment of the Virginia wine industry. And really at the core we have a budget. And what's amazing is years ago, the General Assembly passed a law that gave a percentage of the excise tax that we pay on alcohol from all Virginia wine sales, back to our board. So, for years when Virginia wine was small, there was no budget. We didn't have a lot of money to do things from what I you know, from the history that I've learned. But as Virginia wine has had this meteoric rise, in the last decade or two, our budget is skyrocketing. It's been amazing, because it's almost this exponential factor where we can take this money, and reappropriate it back into research, marketing, and educational grants to help further our industry from the research side, and marketing side. The more marketing, we do and the more research we do to make better Virginia wine, the more people are going to drink and buy,

which again, will give more budget back to our board. It's this circle, the cycle that continues to grow and grow over the years. Our job is really to disseminate where this money goes to the proper grants and to better the Virginia wine industry. Because of that, we've created things like the Virginia Wine Marketing Office, and we've created things like the Virginia Wineries Research Exchange, and there's been countless amount of grants that have gone to the Virginia Tech's, and the Tony Wolf's and Bruce Zoecklein's and all these people that have had a hand in Virginia wine, a lot of that has come from the Wine Board. And so, it's a great position, because often you sit on these boards that are politically appointed, and they don't have budgets, and you're just going through the motions of these things. But we actually can make a real difference on the front lines of Virginia wine. And we see that. I used to sit on the VDACS board, and I moved over to the Wine Board, because I wanted to make more of a difference. I've been on the board now six years. My mentor in the industry was David King. Him and I talked almost every day when we were going through our court battles on everything. And he was he was there for us every step of the way. Getting to sit on the Board with him when he was Chair was very special. Then getting voted to be Chairman to succeed David was even more special, which also brings it full circle now being able to buy a farm next to King Family, you know, and since David passed away two years ago, to be next door to them and their family, and what they've meant us in our wine journey is just extra special as well. So yeah, that's a little bit of the history of the Board. I was always very thankful for those who helped me get started and were there for me in early days. And so, you know, I want to pay, I need to pay it forward for the next generation and help others as well. We're not paid to be on the board. It's a volunteer position. It's volunteer time. But it's important work that we're doing. David always said, someone's got to do the work. Here we are trying to try to do good things. And my time will come because I can only sit on the board for eight years. I'll give it all I have for another few. And then I'll pass the torch to someone as well.

Fred Reno

Oh, that's great. I mean, that's just fantastic. That speaks to volumes to Virginia. And really what's going on?

Kirk Wiles

Yeah, you know, it was one of his sayings, and all ships rise or the rising tide. And I think it's a unique industry in that way, because it's not easy to make wine, and certainly not easy to make wine in Virginia. And for those of us who are doing it, or attempting to do it, we are all in that boat to help each other because we want to make the best wine we possibly can. If we can all help raise that bar of Virginia wine, we all stand to gain from that. And so, in the end, it's not about this customer, or that customer it's about, come and try great Virginia wine and then go try other great Virginia wine, let's all work together to make the best that we can.

Fred Reno

Well, there's that collegiality that I find so refreshing here in Virginia that has been lost. In my experience in California and other areas.

Kirk Wiles

Yeah, it does, it starts to get competitive. And you lose sight of that. And what's cool is I hear those stories in Santa Barbara from the Doug Margerum, with the Jim Clendenen's, and, and Greg Brewers and the early days of how all that was going on. And they were very much the same way. And it's changing or has changed and will probably continue to change over the years. But I think all great wine regions start that way. And it's cool that we're still in that phase, and that should be cherished and remembered.

Fred Reno

Well, part of the foundation you have here I see that keeps that, is the family-owned involvement. What's happened in California, other places, I don't want to say it's been corporatized because that's not necessarily the right word, but when families sell and there's not the generational pass, something's lost. Yeah, it just is lost. That's just what happens.

Kirk Wiles

I think what you see now, these days in Virginia, when something is sold, it's passed to someone who is passionate about Virginia wine. But it is something that's very important to us here is we haven't taken a single investor in Paradise Springs along the way, we've chosen to do it the harder way and the slower way. Because we want to keep it in the family. And we want to stay true to what we want to do and not what someone wants to come in and tell you.

Fred Reno

Well, you just got married. So, you're going to have a family someday, right? Curious, your viewpoint, vinifera versus hybrids? Where do you come down on this? I have become a big fan of certain hybrids. So, I'm curious, because it seems to me, there's a place for them futuristically in Virginia, What's your thoughts,

Kirk Wiles

Yeah, someday soon. So that's, that's the goal will hopefully pass it down. And hopefully they'll enjoy it as much as we have. I appreciate that hard work. And, you know, you don't put pressure on someone. But I think, if you create a good business and a solid plan, and it's sustainable over the years, someone's going to want to take that over because if it's profitable, and it's fun and makes a great product, it's worth keeping. I go right down the middle about Hybrids vs

Vinifera. I think if you took all outside influence and outside perception of something away, I think some of those hybrids do very well here in Virginia. Vidal Blanc crops very well and can make a beautiful white wine rival of any Sauvignon Blanc in the world, right here in Virginia. So, I think if you took the stigmatism of a hybrid versus a vinifera, and what that means in terms of quality away, I think there'd be less pressure on having to go the vinifera route. With that said, first impression is everything, fashion exists for a reason, you know, their perception means something. So, we can do luckily, both here in Virginia. But I think it's about choosing the right both to do and what your goals are, in the vineyard, and what style of wine you want to make. So, I go right down the middle. I can believe in both if they're well made, and they suit the style and direction that your winery wants to go.

Fred Reno

So, what would you say is the biggest challenge as you look forward for the Virginia wine industry?

Kirk Wiles

Scaling, growing more vineyards, growing more grapes. We haven't quite seen the explosion of growers that other regions have where you can buy fruit or you can buy rows of certain blocks of existing vineyards that are managed by vineyard management companies and not you know, the mom and pop with some clippers in the backyard. And so how do we grow? You know when our largest wineries in Virginia are tiny, right? In the world of wine comparatively, in other regions, I think scalability is how we will be able to continue to grow and get our wines out there. I mean, we can sell almost everything we make off of our properties right now. How do we continue to get Virginia wine outside of our winery properties into the hands of consumers, not just in Virginia, but on the East Coast, United States, and the world? And that takes a large amount of scalability on a quality level. And I think that'll be our biggest challenge is how do we get there?

Fred Reno

What is it you know now that you wish you would have known when you first started in this industry?

Kirk Wiles

Oh man, I probably would have built our place a little bit bigger. Space seems to be an issue. You, I guess you grow into it, right. And when we built it, we never dreamed we'd get to the size that we are this quickly. But if you

build it, they will come. And so, I think I wish I had a little more space and the way we built everything. In a way, when I went through our court battles with the county, I don't know that I would have that same fight in me today, knowing what I know. And so, I think it took a little bit of being naive and wanting something so badly to push through. So, it's interesting what my perspective was then to what it is today. And how I took on that fight and wouldn't take no for an answer. I think those things and then in hindsight, you know, I think now, especially as we're looking to do the Charlottesville property, I have an opportunity now to correct a lot of those mistakes we made on the first one here, planting the right thing, taking your time. We brought in Lucie Morton as a consultant and Bubba Beasley's digging pits out there and mapping out, so we are going to put the exact right thing in the ground at the right place in the right time. So that we can get the best start we can in the vineyard. And when we build production, we're going to correct those mistakes that we built the first time and have room to grow. And so, I think that's what's kind of cool is I almost get a do over in a way. Yeah, just two and a half hours down the road. So, it's going to be great.

Fred Reno

Well, what a great team Lucie, and Bubba Beasley I mean, that's a terrific team you got going there.

Kirk Wiles

Absolutely. I'm all about having great people. You know, this is not a business you can do alone. You have to rely on great people that starts with my mother as a business partner. Our winemaker, Rob our front of the house managers and are all the way down to our tasting room staff, property managers and vineyard workers. Everyone has to work cohesively, get along and be passionate about what they do, or the whole thing can fall apart. So, bringing on the right people with the right personalities with the right skills in the right positions, is such an important part of this industry. I think we're off to a good start with Lucie and Bubba and we'll see where we go with the rest of the team, but I know we've got a great team in place here at Paradise Springs to draw upon and build upon the foundation of what we started.

Fred Reno

So, you've got an opportunity to impress somebody who doesn't know anything about Paradise springs doesn't really know much about Virginia wine, let's say top press person or some personality. You got one wine from Paradise Springs to pull out to taste with them. What is it?

Kirk Wiles

I'm going to have to go with our PVT. What's the PVT? PVT is a wine that actually was Rob's brainchild when he first came on board here. It's a 50/50 blend of Petit Verdot and Tannat. He did this blend for another winery before he came here and believes in it. And while we believe in both varietals individually, we feel that those two varietals complement very well one another to make that sort of big style red here in Virginia. It's been something we've made since 2012 every year and really, it's taking our best few barrels from each of those varietals and making that blend. And it's done. It's got some tangibility to it, and we're excited it's been received well over the years scored well. Done well in the Governor's Cup. That's the wine I always sort of gravitate to as one of our higher end wines.

Fred Reno

All right well, I guess I have to buy a bottle before I leave today, folks, because that sounds really interesting. We can go try some after this. Well, Kirk, this has been terrific. This is going to make a great episode. I can't thank you enough for your time today.

Kirk Wiles

No thank you for coming and doing this and to all the listeners out there, keep supporting Virginia wine you guys are the reason why we can do what we do and how we keep the engine running. We have a long way to go, and we'll keep doing the best we can to push those boundaries. We're excited to do so.

Fred Reno

Well, hear that folks, buy Virginia absolutely.