

PODCAST # 7 JIM LAW/ FOUNDER & WINEMAKER LINDEN VINEYARDS

SPEAKERS

Fred Reno, Jim Law

Fred Reno

Jim, this is real delight. Thank you for welcoming me into your winery this afternoon.

Jim Law

Well, thank you, Fred. It's a pleasure. I'm glad you caught me right after harvest, and we're all starting to get a little relaxed. One thing, one point I might have to make is that we are not in the Middleburg AVA.

Fred Reno

Thank you for that correction. What puts you outside of it?

Jim Law

Me.

Fred Reno

Okay, I'm good with that.

Jim Law

Are we ready to start?

Fred Reno

Yeah, we are.

Jim Law

I was going to say that I think that AVA's are way too premature. And when Rachel wanted to start the AVA of Middleburg, I asked not to be in it. So, we're right in between Shenandoah, the Middleburg AVA, by design, I did not want to be in an AVA until we understand, right now they're just a marketing tool. They have nothing to do with what I do. I'm a viticulturist I winegrower. I'm not a marketing person. I see AVA's as simply marketing and nothing else. So, what's going to happen? What has happened is you've defined the borders of an AVA based purely on marketing random lines, so that when the next generation understands the true meaning of terroir, they're going to have a mess on their hands trying to change those lines to reflect our realities rather than just random.

Fred Reno

Well, obviously, it's a very good point. So let me take you back. We're both Midwest boys. I'm from Michigan, and you're from Ohio, as I understand it, correct. Yep. Northern Southern Ohio, I grew up in southern Ohio, Cincinnati. Okay, I just I grew up just south of Detroit. So how does someone from Ohio, end up in the Peace Corps, and then come back here and decide they're going to make wine? I mean, I'd love to understand that backstory?

Jim Law

Well, I think it was, I don't think I know it was, first of all, I grew up with wine on the table. We were as a family interested in wine and food. And that was mostly my father's doing. The story is that in 1961, he and my mother had an anniversary dinner at a seafood restaurant in Cincinnati, he ordered whatever it was probably lobster, a Budweiser, and the maître's owner, whatever his title was, he said, you know, you might want to try this, this wine, it's called Chablis. And the rest was history. He got hooked. And he started sharing with the rest of the family. I mean, I was only 12, young teenager at that time, and I sort of got fascinated by wine. And then he's an engineer, and he was transferred to a job in northern England. So, I went to school there. And while that wasn't about wine, it was about regional beers and cheeses. And all of a sudden, this whole new world, opened up. I then started traveling and studying in other countries. I was in Luxembourg. That's where I really started getting fascinated with the wine and things. Also, when I graduated, I was more interested in wine and farming than anything else. So, when I was back, I went to Miami University in Ohio. At that point, I was working on small farms just to make a few extra bucks. I found I just love that work. So, you take the agricultural, the desire to travel and so the Peace Corps sound great to me. I actually trained in Michigan State. It was a great. It was about a 10-week training period in Tropical Agriculture. I loved it I was like a kid in a candy store. So ended up in the Congo for two years teaching agriculture. No wine going on there. I became fascinated with perennial crops, coffee, and cocoa, because I just like the rhythm of planting and seeing that same crop from that same tree for the rest of your life. At that point, I thought, I really liked the idea of growing something. I like the idea of wine. So, it became evident to me that's what track I needed to follow when I got into back to the States.

Fred Reno

So, when you get back to the States, how'd you delve in this? I mean, you didn't go to Davis or any enology school, did you?

Jim Law

Know I think by that time, I realized that's not how I learned best sitting in a classroom was not exactly what I was interested in. I knew I liked the final product. I knew I liked the idea of it. But I needed to find out if I really liked the work, because that's what you spend your time around is

the work. So, I ended up getting a job in a small winery up in northern Ohio, Chalet Debonne, this was in 1980. And I loved the work. I love pruning all day by myself with the wind blowing in your face, I loved washing barrels. It was just good, honest physical work. And so that's where I wanted to go.

Fred Reno

I saw something here that said you have two job offers. In the early 80s? One was Oregon is that correct. And another one was down here in Virginia?

Jim Law

In Virginia, Yeah remember this is before the internet. So right, communication is a little tough. You remember those days? Yes, little classified ads and trade journals and you call them up. The one in Oregon was a fellow that had a vineyard management company. And he wanted to expand that into southern Oregon. He was up in the Willamette Valley.

Fred Reno

So, he wanted to go Rogue Valley?

Jim Law

Yeah, I was very interested in that. But the one in Virginia was, to me even more interesting, because first of all, Virginia was wide open. I didn't know anything about Virginia, and it also involved starting a winery. For a fella, an old Italian guy that had some acreage of grapes already planted. He wanted to expand that and put in a winery. Ultimately, I went with that

Fred Reno

does that winery exist today?

Jim Law

No, it doesn't exist. It was called Tri Mountain. The fella, he was 72 years old when he started the winery. He passed away maybe four or five years later. And his family was not interested. The building's still there, but that's about it.

Fred Reno

How did you find this site? I mean, this is this is not just off the byway here. This is quite a site; how did you end up here on this site?

Jim Law

Well, once I got to Virginia, I knew I wanted to stay here. It was wide open. And nobody was doing anything at that time, meaning that it was an open slate for a young guy in his 20s to be on the ground floor of figuring out a terroir for virgin area. That's like, that just doesn't happen. I

mean, think of how many possibilities one would have to do that. There's very few, right? So, I still had my Peace Corps sort of adventurism and thinking, wow, you know, I could really learn a lot by being here. The problem I found is that I grew up drinking European wines. And I found Virginia a little warm for what the style I wanted to make. What happened is I ended up saying, well, how can I make this work? I said, you go up in elevation, right away in my land search. I had a lot of parameters for a vineyard site. The first one was to be over 1000 feet in elevation. That was for a stylistic choice. My number one wine at that time was well, you'd mentioned white Burgundy, so Meursault's, and Puligny's, that's what drove me, especially with Chardonnay.

Fred Reno

Well, thank you, because that was a question, I was going to ask you, what was your model?

Jim Law

At that time, I was interested in reds, but it was really more about Chardonnay. And so that's why I chose this site. We're about 1300 feet, Eastern slope. So, that wasn't the hot West, the soils at that time, we didn't know enough to even start making that a factor. We knew we needed well-drained; we need what we call landscape form. We know that we needed the soil to drain, but as far as specific soil characteristics we just didn't understand enough.

Fred Reno

Do you have in this particular location because you're so close to the Shenandoah, do you have some limestone sub soils here?

Jim Law

No, there's no limestone.

Fred Reno

This is hardscrabble vineyard that we're taping this interview here at today. And there's two other vineyard you source at Avenius, yes, Latin. It's just north of here?

Jim Law

Yes. Avenius is owned by Shari Avenius, who happens to be the woman I was just talking to. She's been at Linden for 30 years now.

Fred Reno

What's the primary grape varietals that are growing at Hardscrabble versus Avenius and then we'll get to Boisseau here in a second.

Jim Law

they're pretty much the same, just different emphasis at Avenius. We have Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay those are the first two grapes to come in. And then with the reds, it's been changing. So, as we've learned the terroir. So, there we started with no Merlot and now it's predominantly Merlot and it does really well on that site and some significant amount of Cabernet Sauvignon and a lesser amount of Petit Verdot.

Fred Reno

And then here at Hardscrabble?

Jim Law

Well, we have mostly Chardonnay, but a fair amount of Cabernet Sauvignon. Cabernet does really well here.

Fred Reno

Boisseau, so that's a bit of a newer vineyard you've been working with.

Jim Law

Yeah, that was planted in the year 2000. And it's a totally different terroir. It's only five miles from here, but it's down in the Shenandoah Valley. So, it's a very different situation. Its much warmer soils are totally different facing West, so it's much hotter.

Fred Reno

What do they grow there then?

Jim Law

The white is Viognier. We only do a small amount of white from there, but the Viognier has done exceptionally well. Then the Bordeaux varieties. Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot usually are the two stars.

Fred Reno

I'm curious, were you the first or definitely one of the first here in Virginia to understand the significance of that and start designating your wine as vineyard designated?

Jim Law

Yes. What we talked about the Appalachian AVA's, I felt that was way ahead of where we needed to be because we didn't really understand. So, I thought how we could best understand our terroir that's really what drove me to come here, as I said, to understand the virgin terroir. At first, we were blending the sites together. This was 20 plus years ago, 25 years ago now. But then, when we would taste from the barrel, and somebody would just hand me a glass and I could smell it and know exactly what vineyard it came from. Not necessarily

what variety, but what vineyard it came from. At that point, I said, we need to follow through on this. The only way we can understand our terroir is to do single vineyard bottlings and see how they age because aging has become a very important part of our whole process.

Fred Reno

Well, I understand that. And that's been the frustrating thing for me being new to Virginia is I haven't had an opportunity to taste any number of older Virginia wines to see how they age, to see what the character is that will come with time. But you know, both of us with a European training, if you will, wine background it is so much easier to find older wines and go Okay, yeah, there's that vineyard imprint.

Jim Law

Yeah, and it is subtle, but that's how you learn. We've learned so much and what it's done is trickled back to everything we do from vineyard establishment to viticultural practices during the growing season, to picking decisions to winemaking decisions as we taste our library wines, which go back to 1987. For example, I used to think that the hot vintages hot dry, vintages were our best vintages. They're not when it comes to aging, they're showy at first, and it's like, wow/wow, but then they kind of fade away. It's more our what we call classic, which is a fancy word for saying average vintage is actually the best, which is perfect, because, as Mark Twain says, You climate is what you plan for, and weather is what you get, well, when we design a vineyard and how to plant it we're planting, we're designing that on climate, on what should be average so that when we get average, it's perfect.

Fred Reno

Have you noticed in the three different vineyards you work with and then planting? I know you have a replant program you've been working on for a number of years, I'd love to touch on that. Have you noticed a difference in vine orientation? And by that, I mean, are some North to South some East to West? Or is there a uniformity to vine orientation here in Virginia from what you're doing?

Jim Law

Well, what we found is that it does make a difference. And we've pulled out most of our east west blocks for just for that reason. I have one of Cabernet that is on a great site, and there are older vines, I don't want to pull it out. But if it was, it was east west. And if it was north south, I think the wines would be better. And those are the kind of decisions you have to make when pulling out old vine versus getting it right in your planting. But to answer your question, what we're finding on this site is that north south is the best as far as getting things ripe. We're unusual in the wine world in that we are growing different varieties on the same site. So, if you look at Cabernet Sauvignon, which is very late ripening, we have to put that on precisely the right soils with the right aspect, with the right row orientation to get ripeness whereas

Chardonnay, different soil called cooler soils, meaning more clay base. It doesn't have to be north south because it will ripen well, even without it. But mostly you have to take into account what kind of wine do you want to make with row orientation?

Fred Reno

Yeah, I believe you planted several hybrids when you first developed the vineyard, do you have any hybrids in cultivation?

Jim Law

We still have the original the Vidal vines. Oh, fascinating. Yeah, we've learned a lot about Vidal, I used to do different things with it along the way. But what I've learned with the Vidal is, first of all, you have to reduce the crop enormously. If you allow it to crop the way it would like to, you're going to have a very neutral wine. So, if you reduce the crop down, you have to hang it for a long time, in order to get the flavor profile, it can make a really nice wine. We used to do mostly late harvest with that, a sweet style wine. Now we're doing also, it depends on the vintage, but we're also starting to do some dry wines. It's part of a blend, but it's the basis for the blend.

Fred Reno

So, hybrids do have a future in general, in your opinion in Virginia.

Jim Law

Yeah, I've, I've gone back and forth with that a lot. I think as we're experiencing some of the downsides of climate change, I'm more accepting to really get off a traditional basis and start looking more at the hybrids. And there's so many new hybrids coming in from Europe, from Cornell, from UC Davis. I'm right now at my stage of life, I'm still just focused on what we do best, and what we know. But we do have an experimental vineyard, still thus far, it's only been vinifera, but I'm quite anxious to try some of the hybrids coming out.

Fred Reno

Well, you've clearly mentored some wonderful winemakers that have come through here now starting with I guess, Jeff White, originally from Glen Manor, and then Rutger de Vink and Josh Grainer is over at his place now. There's one other here I might be missing. Jim Delphine.

Jim Law

No Jim, he was a homemaker when I knew him, and I used to give him a little bit of a press juice and that sort of thing. He would come around quite a lot, but I wouldn't call it a mentor. Jim, of course, is retired now. He's in Florida.

Fred Reno

To me that's interesting only because, this is a side comment here, but one of the things that Robert Mondavi did that I don't think anybody really focused on or he gets much credit for anymore is the winemakers who came through his place early on whether it was Warren Winiarski or, Mike Grigch, or Zelma Long. I mean, you start thinking about the Robert Mondavi Academy of winemakers, that's really important. And you've obviously birth, some people who've made some incredibly high-quality wine in their own merits.

Jim Law

And what I was looking for was just that, I used to have an association with French university where they would bring every year, I'd have students come and they would learn from here not just in all aspects of the wine business, it was a short period of time, it was like 10 weeks during harvest. It was a pretty cool cultural exchange and that sort of thing. But I said, why am I putting my effort into the French? In other words, why if we're going to evolve as a region, I need to try to keep it closer to home. So, I started an apprentice program where people would come and work here. The deal was two years, it always didn't always work out that way, to learn the effect of the vineyard, by the soil, on the vines, and the vines on the grapes, and the grapes on the wine. The reason for two years is that the first year if you're coming in with no experience, you don't understand what's going on. But the second year, you start to see the rhythms and the cause and effect. So, that's what both Rutgers and Josh were very successful here. They caught on right away and they understood that relationship, but you can't understand that relationship from a book. And you can't I used to teach classes in winemaking and grape growing, and I understood that people just weren't getting it until they actually start working in and observing and tasting throughout the whole season.

Fred Reno

So, it's also said at one point you were the first to bring in a concrete egg fermenter into Virginia. Is that accurate?

Jim Law

Oh, I don't know if I was at first, probably. I brought one and here about 11 years ago.

Fred Reno

What do you find that produced as far as character in the wine versus stainless steel or an oak barrel itself was it like a convection oven?

Jim Law

Well, I learned two things. The first thing I learned was that we are wine growers and not wine makers. What I mean by that is the signature should always be from the vineyard and not from the winemaking practice. The concrete egg, we followed all the instructions, if you will, how to treat it and everything. But it tasted like it was from a concrete egg. In other words, all the

terroir was gone. It was obliterated, and it was all about the Egg, you can tell right away despite again, its aroma that was the one that was in the egg. So, I said, well, that's not what we're all about. That's why I haven't gotten one since Now, having said that, it took about, just like an oak barrel, and in this case, it took longer about 5,6,7 years. Finally, the impact of the egg started to reduce to the point now where for the first time in just the past few years, I've actually liked the wines coming from there. I felt that there was very little impact so, that I was tasting terroir and not a winemaking influence.

Fred Reno

So, it was finally getting seasoned essentially,

Jim Law

yeah, there's more neutrality to the vessel. And that's what we're looking for even an oak. We're not looking at a lot of new oak. We're trying to keep things fairly neutral.

Fred Reno

Well, it is clear to me that you're continuing to experiment like all wine growers classically do over a very long period of time. Is there a generational pass here at some point within your family?

Jim Law

Yeah, my daughter, Samantha and her new husband, Alex, have been out and starting to learn the vineyard. Unfortunately, with COVID. We couldn't get together as much, but they've helped some during the season, and some with harvest, a limited amount that hopefully will increase more.

Fred Reno

This site was originally an apple orchard.

Jim Law

Yeah, all this, everything around here was in apples at the turn of last century.

Fred Reno

Well, that's usually a pretty good sign for a place to grow Chardonnay.

Jim Law

Yeah, I mean, the apple industry was, was huge here. It was probably the biggest, I think, in the United States. And then it slowly as Washington State cranked up then with rail and transportation things diminished. Yeah, there's still some a few orchards left, but not many.

Fred Reno

I think I passed a couple coming through the more rural parts up to your winery here today. You've got close to 40 years now here of producing wine in Virginia, what would you say has been your biggest challenge through this process to achieve what you want to achieve?

Jim Law

I think it's probably the thing that I've learned the most. And it's a challenge because it requires some huge investment decisions is in understanding vine and soil relationship. Our original Cabernet Sauvignon planting is gone. But it's not gone because the vines didn't do well, the vines are healthy, and it's not gone because we didn't get a crop, we got consistent crops, it's gone because the wine quality wasn't that good. And it took me 15 plus years to even get an idea as to why that was the case and understand that it was because there's too much water available for Cabernet on that soil. And by moving it by, ripping it out, and replanting the wine quality really skyrocketed. And when I say skyrocketed, I mean I'm talking over the course of a couple of decades. That's fast.

Fred Reno

in the scheme of wine growing, you're right. That is fast. There's no question about that.

Jim Law

So, now I have Chardonnay where originally, I had Cabernet the Chardonnay does beautifully here. So only if I would have known that earlier?

Fred Reno

Well, that was going to be the next question, of course. So now you have challenges. What do you think, has been your most prideful, successful accomplishment on what you're doing here?

Jim Law

I think as, as our younger vineyards that have been replanted with more knowledge have come into bearing and I'm really excited. We've got some really nice vineyards coming in. And they're already showing in the wines. But as you know, and as we've talked about, the older the vine, the more intense the wine is. So, we've got all these, especially with the reds, we've got a lot of young vineyards, meaning less than 20 years old, that are balanced, and we're already seeing once they get about 12 to 15 years old, we start seeing that shift happen. And that's pretty exciting. What's the oldest wine you have you have from Planted in 1985? Chardonnay.

Fred Reno

So, you have some 35-year-old Chardonnay

Jim Law

Yeah, that's the base of Hardscrabble Chardonnay.

Fred Reno

If you could say, Hey, this is Lindens model, what is your model? What is your slogan, you know, that you can hand down to everybody to say, this is who we are?

Jim Law

We're, we're patient. We're trying to understand who we are in terms of the vineyard. And I think most people know that every year, it builds on more confidence, we kind of understand and it, it takes a lot of the stress out of it. So, that's the most important thing. We're not going to be showy; we're really trying to focus on people that want to understand the wines and want to learn more. And that's what we do.

Fred Reno

From your perspective. Because again, we talked about this prior to the interview itself. When I talked to people I know in the wine business around the country, and I started talking about Virginia wine, and I started getting excited they go, what are you crazy? What are you talking about? Then they taste these wines. They go, I had no idea these wines are that good. What is going to take for Virginia, do you think from your perspective, you've been here almost longer than anybody?

Jim Law

Well, you say, from my perspective. And the answer would be I have no idea. But one thing I've realized is that as you sort of went through my journey to get here, it hasn't changed at all. I'm a farmer and that's what I love most. So, when you talk about getting out in the world, that's for people like you. I tried to do a little bit of that, but I wasn't comfortable with it. I didn't like it. So, that's why we're just staying the size we are which is a sweet spot. We can sell our wine, we use a distributor, we used to sell a lot to restaurants. So that's kind of changed now. Unfortunately, I hope someday that will come back. Because that's a great way for us to get the word out. You have a high-end restaurant in Washington DC with the Sommelier pouring your wine raving about it. That's my marketing.

Fred Reno

Well, you got one of the best restaurants in the country right down the road here. Little Inn at Washington.

Jim Law

Yep. So, I kind of naively let the other people do the work for me. My job is just to grow the best grapes and make the best wine we can?

Fred Reno

Well, I have my opinion, but I'll keep them to myself right now, what I think Virginia could do in total. Getting the wine in people's mouths, is really what it's all about, ultimately, isn't it?

Jim Law

Yes. And that's why the restaurants were and hopefully will be important to me. I mean, we still depend on our good loyal customers, of course, that's what keeps us going. And we were doing really well with the restaurants. We had a nice, good following. Of course, that's fallen by the wayside right now. But hopefully, that will pick up.

Fred Reno

So, I'd like your opinion on something. Speaking to a vintner early on, they said to me something that stuck with me the whole time I drove home that day. And that was Fred, it's entirely possible some of the best vineyards in Virginia, haven't even been planted yet. What do you think?

Jim Law

That's absolutely true. When I drive through and look at the sites, there's so many sites, so many great sites that could be planted. We haven't even begun to scratch the surface. But it requires a commitment. And it's the intent that I worry about the most is that as you mentioned, Rutger de Vink or ourselves where we understand. But when you look at the cost of planting those vineyards, and the location that's not on, you know, where traffic is coming through steep slopes, poor rocky soils they're very expensive to plant. So, you have to really believe in that. And you can't believe in it until you go down deep and understand how that happens. Until we get to that point. It's going to be slow going. It's started. It's starting. I'm more encouraged now. But it's going to be a slow process.

Fred Reno

So, as Luca Paschina said to me, it's going to take time.

Jim Law

Yep, it's going to take time. But the one thing that I think most people don't understand, especially those coming from the west coast, is the relationship of water to wine quality. On the west coast, soils can have different water holding capacity. But it doesn't really matter because you just turn on the irrigation and give the vines exactly what they need. So, you've got that control. But in Europe and in Virginia, we don't have that control. We get water whenever the water decides to fall, so we have to depend more on the characteristics of the soil to drain that water to hold that water or not hold that water appropriately for each grape variety. For

example, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot have totally different requirements of water. But they can be planted on the same site if the soils are different.

Fred Reno

Well, you're up here at elevation, so that must help mitigate any potential frost issues.

Jim Law

Yeah, Frost is for us is not an issue. No, water is the main thing that we're trying to understand like this year 2020, we had a really dry July, the vines were shutting down, they're getting smaller, like, Oh my God, I've never seen that happen this early. This is great. You know, as long as the Merlot doesn't get overly stressed, and then we got a lot of rain in August, and it stimulated vine growth. And right away again, Rutger, Josh, and I were saying, Oh, my God, what have you seen? Are you having trouble with veraison? We said, yeah. Meaning that instead of all the grapes turning color at the same time, in August, which is what you want, they were very sporadic. And we knew that right then we would have problems with uneven ripening, because we weren't getting even veraison. And we weren't doing that because the vines were stimulated, and they were starting to grow again. That's the sort of thing we're looking at. Now, some of our better sites, meaning the soils were appropriate. That wasn't too bad, but other sites it was.

Fred Reno

Well, that's the next question. Of course, what's your early prognosis for your 2020 vintage

Jim Law

Right now, what we're looking at, we just tasted some of the Reds actually just a few hours ago. The reds are sort of meeting my expectations. We have a couple of gems in there. Mostly old vines, which can handle rain better. Most of them are going to be pretty wines. Nice balance, delicate but not powerhouse. A couple of exceptions there. Especially the Avenius vineyard, which has the oldest vines, red vines. The whites though are real gems. And this is what we found is that I learned this a lot in Burgundy, actually, is that you can't call a vintage across the board. 2013 I was there in Burgundy, and it rained, and it rained, and I thought this is just going to be an awful year and I wrote the vintage off. But the Chardonnays are beautiful. It took me a while to understand why but the pinots not so much, but the Chardonnay, they can handle a wetter cooler year.

Fred Reno

What's the congeniality like amongst the winemaking community here in Virginia, I mean, you're one of the veterans, so you must get people calling you all the time looking for advice. What's the congeniality if you will amongst the winemaker's here in Virginia.

Jim Law

There's a number of us that do get together. I'm not really active in that anymore. I've sort of backed off just because I enjoy being here and inside, so I don't travel that much anymore. But I think there's a core of us from RDV, Barboursville, and Linden we get together and taste. We've done some really interesting tastings of our wines trying to compare different varieties and or different sites and that sort of thing.

Fred Reno

Well, I opened a bottle of the 2017 Avenius Sauvignon Blanc this weekend. I hadn't had it before. And I opened it and had a glass and I looked at my wife, I said, that's a dead ringer for really top-quality Sancerre. So, the next day I went over Food OF All Nations bought a bottle of Sancerre. What I like to do with wines from Virginia is open them and have a glass, put the cork back in the bottle and put it in the refrigerator, don't gas it or anything, and then taste it over two, three, or four days to get my own education of what's happening with these wines. So, then I said to my wife, okay pour in these two glasses, don't tell me which ones which and I'm going to go out of the room, and I'll come back. And I came back and boom, boom, boom. So that's the Sancerre. She said, No, that's the Linden.

Jim Law

We've always the influence has been Old World on us that we do emulate that. And the best word is that stylistically, that's what we like. So, we try to understand our terroir, our style and we know, we can guide the wines, but we can't push them too far in any one direction.

Fred Reno

But you achieved it there. I can tell you that at least in that one vintage from what I tasted.

Jim Law

17 was a great vintage? Yeah, we just released our seventeens last weekend although that the Sauvignon Blanc we had released before. But all the Chardonnays, and the reds, and they're wonderful. I'm loving that vintage.

Fred Reno

Any other comments or thoughts you might have for me here as I go on this journey trying to discover for myself, what's going on here in Virginia, and how I can help this Virginia industry get that word out.

Jim Law

Yeah, I think what you said is comparative tastings are really good. As long as the wines are, as we say, boxing in their same weight class. And that's a term I kind of borrow from Bordeaux. Because in Bordeaux, you know, back in the 76, when they did the Paris tasting, the French

realized early on that they were being overblown by these bigger wines. And in just a quick tasting, they weren't showing as well as the sun kissed big California wines. And that's the same with us. You make a comparison more with wines from Europe. And we're right in the ballpark we do well, when you go to California, stylistically, they're very, different. They have that sweet fruit, that sun-kissed sense that just doing a blind tasting, and nothing else. And that's, that's not fair. But as soon as you sit down at the dinner table, then its fair.

Fred Reno

I hadn't thought about it from a purely stylistic vantage point, but if you taste blind I always say the brown bag never lies. What I try to achieve myself when I do, blind tastings are say okay, tell me which wine you like the best here, that's fine. And then also, let's rate them based on the wine quality, because I want to know what your thoughts are about wine quality. And that's what I've been doing with my Virginia blind tasting, but for just pure wine quality is the wine quality of the wine equal. And I think that there's a good 50 plus wineries who are making that level of quality. Now I reserve the term great for that one 10th of 1% of all the wines in the world, because I think that adjective is a bit overused. It's kind of hard in this world not to make good quality wines. So, if you're making above average quality wine, that's what I believe you're doing here, at Linden, and a lot of other people, that's a significant accomplishment that people need to pay attention to.

Jim Law

Yeah, that's one of the analogies I use. In the evolution of any emerging area, and we'll use Virginia, is that when it first starts out, a lot of the wines are flawed, and they're just not well made. And there's problems in in the cellar or in the vineyard. Okay, then you evolve past that stage. And we've certainly evolved. I mean, there's always exceptions, but we've evolved past that stage. The second stage is what I call the serviceable stage. It's the British term for good wine, but not inspiring wine. We're definitely in that stage where there's been so much the Virginia industry has grown so much. And there's relatively big players now that can hire technically competent winemakers to make technically good wines. So fortunately, we're at that hurdle. But then you go to the next one, which is what are called terroir wines. And that's where the same person or people have to be growing the same grapes at the same place for decades, to understand the nuances and understand the best style and winemaking. And that's where a few people are starting to break out.

Fred Reno

Well, I categorize that the challenge is to make interesting Wine. And you've just said it better than I could because its terroir based, and it is site specific. And yeah, once you start making interesting wine from one site over a period of time, then the potential for greatness might be there.

Jim Law

Sure, however you want to define that, but also for a wine to be great. You know, I grappled with this analogy, it was again European, it has to be able to age, because any wine when it's young to me, can be good, but can never be great, because you can say it has great potential. But the wine itself isn't great until it's had a chance to gather itself together to get the complexity of aging. So that's, that's something we will see.

Fred Reno

Well, Jim, I appreciate your time this afternoon. And this has been a real delight. My intellectual curiosity has been slightly satisfied, I just want to taste more of your wines over time, so I get better acquainted. Thank you. it's going to be a really good episode for my audience.

Jim Law

Oh, good, good.