

Gabriele Rausse Episode # 2/Part 2

SPEAKERS

Fred Reno, Gabriele

Gabriele

Eventually, I decided that for me it was better to leave, and Monticello offered me a job, right? Because they were interested in keeping going with the experiment. And they knew that my history started with propagation of plants when I was 18 years old. So that's why they offered me the job. And of course, I remember meeting with the president of Monticello, and he said, I'm fine to give you the job. But I don't know what will happen to your family because your salary would be one third the amount you are making now. And he was right. Because eventually my wife left me, she was going crazy. You know, she couldn't stand anymore not to have any money. The children were ready to go to college. We couldn't pay for college like this. So, she went crazy.

Fred Reno

Well on the Monticello theme, because I have been a big Thomas Jefferson fan since I was a kid. Why do you think? I mean, I understand Phylloxera okay, but why did he fail to be able to successfully grow grapes and make wine?

Gabriele

Okay, my feeling is, I want your opinion. my feeling is wildlife. And I will tell you why? While he was in France? 1789, I think is the year he writes a letter to Antonia Giannini who was the person in charge of the orchard and the vineyard and everything. So, do you think we will be able to make some wine this year? And Antonia Giannini answer, I will be happy to make some wine, to try to make some wine. But the grapes disappear year after year before they are ripe. So, you see, he sort of suggests that maybe the slave were stealing the grapes? Right. Okay, but why should they steal the grapes before they are ripe? The birds steal the grapes before they are ripe. Right? And actually, I can tell you this is a bit a joke. But I remember an interview where they were asking me how to check the chemistry of the grapes. You know, when to decide to harvest I said, I look at which animal is coming to steal the grape, if they are birds 17 brix, if I see a raccoon is probably 18 or 19 brix, if I see a fox, it is over 22 brix. So, if you see the fox, you know that it's time.

Fred Reno

Time to go a harvest.

Gabriele

I don't know if you have seen at Monticello that wooden trellis system. Yes. Yeah. Right. One day I remember there was a mother raccoon with five raccoons, behind all eating grapes, right? Because the post was allowing them to walk on the thing. Right? Okay, but they were all eating grapes. And so, they told me that they are eating all the grapes. Beautiful. Now it's really interesting to me how some people don't have much respect for animals, right. But for me, some animals know much more than people.

Fred Reno

Well, they've had to survive a lot haven't they. They had to learn and pass that wisdom on down. So eventually, you must have gotten, I don't know, maybe bored or something. You decide to start your own winery again in what, 1997?

Gabriele

Well, it was actually a person who was working for me. And now I forgot the name, right? That when I left. It was Jeff, he said you should start your vineyard, you should start your own winery, So, I asked my wife well I am not sure it makes sense, but maybe we could just start a vineyard, right? So, we started a little vineyard up here. And I remember that when we prepare the soil I realized, the depth of the soil was only four feet. I say, Well, you know, one acre would be all we do and see what happened. Because I don't want to spend money in planting a vineyard in a place where the roots cannot go down. But we started with the little vineyard. Also, we had people that I was consulting for which are starting vineyard and so I made an agreement with a vineyard that I could buy all their grapes. So that's how the thing started. Because in the beginning, I was getting grapes from Blenheim before David Matthews bought the place. When he bought the place. I couldn't get the grapes from Blenheim anymore. I remember that ABC came over and said that we want to be sure that you have a vineyard adjacent to your winery. Otherwise, you know, we give you one week to plant a vineyard. I can't plant a vineyard in a week.

Fred Reno

So how much vineyard land do you own yourself today?

Gabriele

I don't own anything because this is all by farm credit, the house is owned by Bank of America. But here I still have only one acre because they want to invest in the thing, then my son took over Redland Vineyard, which is two and a half miles from me, and he's living there. Right? Redland Vineyard is a vineyard that I planted in 1980 for Robert Carter, I don't know if you know, the family, Robert Carter, it was the Carter family who got 12,000 acres from the King of England. I don't remember what year, George the III, I think. And eventually, Robert Carter asked me to plant the vineyard in 1980. I planted that one. Eventually, when he died, the

children were not interested in taking care of the vineyard anymore, so it was abandoned. But the wife of one of the oldest of the children, what's her name, Carol Carter she asked my son if he was interested in taking over. My son said, It would be wonderful for us to take over. And so, he started to replant the old vineyard. She gave him a house there right. Is this the vineyard up at the orchard? No, this is two and a half miles just down here on the right. If you go all the way to the end of the road, and you turn left and right its Redland farm. If you read about Redland farm, you would find the story is very interesting. When Mr. Kluge came over to buy some land, he wanted to buy back the 12,000 acres that the King of England gave to the Carter family. He bought 10,000 acres and then he went to Robert Carter, and he said I am here with my checkbook to buy your 2000 acre. Robert Carter answer, I'd rather give it back to the Indians than sell it to you.

Fred Reno

That's great. That's fantastic. Speaking of vineyards, I had one vintner say something to me that stuck in my mind. And I would love your opinion on this. He was saying to me, with some exception, he said, Fred, I think some of the best vineyards in Virginia have not been planted yet.

Gabriele

It's an interesting statement, because when we came here, we look at Barboursville, the other place we look at the Shenandoah Valley, and we love the Shenandoah Valley because the rainfall, the average rainfall per year was 10 inches less than in Charlottesville. But then the temperature was a little bit lower. Right. So, Zonin said better we stay here then go to the Shenandoah Valley. Shenandoah Valley has a lot of loamy soil, which is very attractive. So, from the terroir without the climate point of view, right. Okay about the soil.

Fred Reno

And it's limestone sub soils. Correct.

Gabriele

Exactly, so that is very interesting. And that's what I love. My son works also in a winery up there. The name is Muse. Oh, yes. I have been to Muse Yeah. And he makes the wine there. And the wine is beautiful because the soil right.

Fred Reno

I was very impressed with their white blend, their Rhone blend when I had it.

Gabriele

Yeah. And so, we exchanged some grapes sometimes.

Fred Reno

Okay, how much wine if I might ask do you produce under your own brand these days

Gabriele

And I need to ask my son I think it is 6500 gallons or 7000.

Fred Reno

Gotcha. And what's your favorite varietals to grow and make wine?

Gabriele

You made me laugh I had so many discussions with, you know, my son when he was replanting at Redland. He says what should we plant, what should we plant? And I said, What about don't laugh now? Okay. What about Chasselas Dore? Why do you want plant Chasselas Dore? I said because I had a girlfriend from Switzerland for 10 years and there were drinking only Fendant. So, he planted an acre to do a favor to me. The wine is not great, but you have to do it sparkling right. And you know, sparkling wine cover all the problem, right? So, it's all right. There is a bottle here I will tell you what is my favorite variety which creates a bit of problem with my son. No, I don't see it. I don't see it.

Fred Reno

Gabrielle is now going to his cellar to get me a bottle of this wine. See what it looks like? This should be fascinating. OH WOW!

Gabriele

Here it is don't laugh. Wow. But no, the variety which really, I'm excited about? Is the Viognier and I tell you why? When Jefferson went to France, and he start to travel to see what was going on he stopped at this vineyard called Château Grillet. He said the wine is wonderful here is called Château Grillet is owned by Veuve Perouse, right. So, I love that he told us 200 years ago, how Viognier was a wonderful wine. And I assure you that I can't believe how he was figuring out things that nobody else could figure out. You know at a certain moment he said this, one day in Virginia, there will be too many people and not enough work. The solution is to plant vineyard, which keep everybody busy. I love it. How he could see, the future. But there are so many other things that he was able to, to see, I mean, sometime people laugh at Jefferson and say, he planted a flower garden at Monticello when people were starving, well yes, people were working all day on the farm. And they were trying to bring home something to eat. But he understood that in the future. The agriculture which makes money is flower. And so that why the main thing he was planting, American white flower in his garden. And they were sending the seeds to France, to tell the French gardener that there was something that America could give to them. And I love when he wrote to Madame deTesse, she was the aunt of Lafayette, right? He was corresponding with her. And he wrote to her, I'm looking forward to

draw a curtain between me and the political world. I want to be a florist. He even understood that when you get old, you cannot deal anymore with the craziness of the world.

Fred Reno

Well, you know, on the Jefferson subject, I stumbled on a book, I love used bookstores, and we have pretty good one in Charlottesville. I was in there and found this book, and it was about Philip Mazzei, okay. The title is Jefferson's Zealous Whig. I always associated with him as the one that came over here and help Jefferson start his vineyard. I didn't realize that he was a on the revolutionary side here, he was a Patriot. He was working to supply the US with arms from France and Italy, in the early days. In this book, which got translated back from Italian tells the whole history of how the colonies were established and everything and he has this huge history that goes beyond being the guy who was brought over, here to help Jefferson plant a vineyard. Fascinating. I had no idea.

Gabriele

Yeah, I assure you that when I think how at the time, you could deal with people there was only there was not even made, right. There was nothing right. But he was able, but he was able to coordinate all these things, and travel around, you know, the world and doing things because when he finished in one place, he went to the other one, he went to Poland, right, right. So, I can't believe it. But he was certainly a unique person, which had a lot to do with Jefferson, you know, knowledge and curiosity in finding out new things and more and more things, right. I assure you that when Jefferson went, decided to take a tour of France, right? He asked the money Washington and Washington, they told him, it doesn't make any sense that you spend money to go around France. Right. And so, he said, Well, you know, I want to see what's going on. I want to see what they're doing. So, because he was an ambassador, he was supposed to stay behind his desk, you know, and go to party. Right. He said he wanted to find out a little bit more about what was going on in the country which was, pretty unexpected in the world.

Fred Reno

Well, let me turn this back to you for a second If I could. This is fascinating, I could go on all day about Jefferson. How do you react internally when people say, well, Gabriele, he's the father of the modern day, birth of the Virginia wine industry? How does it make you feel? I mean, what do you think?

Gabriele

Well, you know, when somebody told me Congratulations, you are the father of your children, and they are wonderful children. My answer is well, there is not only the father involving the children, there is the mother. There are the grandparents. There is the environment, which is around, there is the school where they go, right? So, to be the father of Virginia, you know,

viticulture, or Virginia wine is an interesting title. But there were so many other little things which help the place to take off. One thing that nobody think about is money. If there is no money, right, it would have never started. And also, the fact that Virginia is not interested in industry and things like that. Virginia want to stay, you know, the way it is, was helping a lot. And I can tell you that. I was telling Michelle Obama how when I came to Virginia, USDA told me to stop it. Virginia Tech told me to go home and all this. Michelle Obama said, only Virginia would have treated you like that. Nobody else. So, Virginia is a very special place in a positive way for certain things, because there was the money, there was the space, and there was the land for agriculture. Of course, they tried to send me home because they thought I was doing a stupid thing. Right. But it was interesting that you could look at Virginia in many different directions. And Michelle Obama said, only Virginia would have...

Fred Reno

Well, I'll tell you what impressed me, what I saw here in Virginia a couple years ago, when I got gravitated here, it reminds me and feels like what Oregon was like 25 years ago. To me, that's, I remember when I was selling Oregon Pinot Noir, okay, 25,30 years ago as a distributor, and everybody says, What's that? What are you doing? Today, Oregon is the hottest wine growing region in the country, and most in demand. And that's where people are going. I'm not sure what it's going to take to get Virginia to break out so that the trade and the consumer on a national basis, understand.

Gabriele

Okay, I can give you the answer. I would love your opinion on that. But don't get offended for this. Okay. When Monroe asked Jefferson how can I get some good wine? Jefferson answered, stay away from the middlemen go straight to the manufacturer, to the guy who make the wine, you understand that? There are many kinds of middlemen that are wonderful people, there are people not so wonderful, and there are also people really bad. I love that Jefferson solved the problem in one second, stay away from the middleman.

Fred Reno

No, I've read that about him. And you're absolutely right. I mean, you've put your finger on the issue here. The distribution system in America is so broken now. It's, I mean, I navigated it myself on a lot of different levels. I know how broken it is. I'm trying to expose that myself and have for years. Yeah, you're right. It's a huge impediment.

Gabriele

Yeah. And you understand that people are now going the direction of using wine while 50 years ago, there were very few people into drinking wine. So, when something takes off at full speed, then is the problem.

Gabriele

I want a picture of that bottle. No, I will bring you another bottle of the wine. I remember In 1989 it was raining every day, right between four o'clock and six o'clock every day. And I remember I was at Jefferson Vineyard, Simeon Vineyards. And I walked into the vineyard of the Pinot Noir, and you could start to smell the rot I said my God let's bring everything in today. We were not ready. I said let's harvest all the Pinot Noir today. We brought the Pinot Noir in, right? I put it in the press squeeze it separated from the skin right away and so I don't know what we do. I will sell it to a distillery. We will blend it; I will sell it to somebody who doesn't know what wine is. At the end of fermentation. The wine was beautiful. I love that this craziness of Virginia because it never happened again that he was raining every day, from four to six, right? You know, I wasn't able to make Hay. I had 15 horses, I had cattle, at Simeon. And I wasn't able to make hay. I end up making Hay in November and December because then eventually the rain stop, but I couldn't harvest the grapes in November or December. So, I harvest them when they were not ripe and that made my first Vin Gris, and it was a great success because the following year. I didn't make Vin Gris; I made the Pinot Noir and so the people start to ask me why didn't you make the Vin Gris? Well, because the season was good. So, I made Pinot Noir. We want the Vin Gris. We want the Vin Gris. So that every year, I was making both because some people wanted a Vin Gris, they didn't want the Pinot Noir.

Fred Reno

And today of course, Rose is such a hot category. Yeah. And this is serious Rose.

Gabriele

In 1989, 1990. There was this French student who came over to spend the summer here he has a champagne company, Veuve Fournier is the company Okay, he came over and he suggested to call it Vin Gris. So, I said perfect Vin Gris if you like, because at Veuve Fournier was the name of the guy.

Fred Reno

Well, I guess fortuitously, you never went back to Australia,

Gabriele

Well, now that I'm getting older, I feel ready to go back now. I don't know what would have happened there because I would be at the university probably retiring and not knowing what to do. I don't know.

Fred Reno

You were starting to tell me before we started the interview, about your family now taking over and have been running the winery. You've got several, your daughter and your son involved. That must feel really good.

Gabriele

My Two son. Yeah. My daughter, she lives in Istanbul, but she's coming back in 10 days.

Fred Reno

Okay, but you got two sons, and everybody's involved? That must feel really good.

Gabriele

Yeah. And she might stay yet. I don't know. I tried to convince her to stay here because she speaks seven languages. So, for me if somebody doesn't speak the language, Italian, French, Russian, German, Spanish.

Fred Reno

So let me finish this by asking another question. You've been here in Virginia, 45 years, almost. You've seen everything in those 45 years. What do you think about the health of the Virginia wine industry? If you look down the road, where do you think, this is going to end up?

Gabriele

Well, in every part of the world where they grow grapes, and they make wine, there are people who are committed to their job, and they make wonderful wine. There are people who are committed to make money, which is different from making good wine. There are people who are committed to drive everybody crazy, right? So that's a different story. And I assure you that I think Virginia has a future, and I tell you what the last ABC inspection was like. After the man came, and we talked about different things, you know, and when we finish, I said, this doesn't look to me like a real inspection this one. And he said a beautiful thing. He said, If we are dealing with somebody who love what he is doing, this is the inspection. If we are dealing with somebody, who does it just to make money, totally different. I love it.

Fred Reno

No, that's well, that's well said

Gabriele

Very well. Yeah, no, I really found it very interesting. Because the inspection I had before that inspector, he was looking at all the paper, and my wife comes up stairs. And this is a good story that he knew her, because you know, he was coming to the festival. So, he said how our you Jennie and she said, I'm fine. Well, he said we have a lot of problems and a lot of stuff, which is not right. And she answers to him, I'm glad I have nothing to do with that trash. So, the inspector looked to me, and he said, Isn't she vice president of the company? I said, Yes, but I never told her. I made her to sign the paper. I never told her She's the vice-president

Fred Reno

Funny. Well, I'll just finish by saying, thank you for giving me your time. This has been fascinating. There's a lot of material here. I can't wait to tell the story going forward and how impactful you've been to this business.

Gabriele

should you wait until I die to do the thing.

Fred Reno

no, no, no, no. No, we don't want that. That's for sure. Well, thank you.