

EPIISODE # 10/ANDREW HODSON: VERITAS VINEYARDS OWNER & FOUNDER

SPEAKERS

Fred Reno, Andrew Hodson

Fred Reno

Andrew, let's start with why does a successful neurologist from England decide to move to Virginia, put a stake in the ground, grow grapes and produce wine?

Andrew Hodson

Good question, Fred. I still don't really know the answer. But it was and I am sure you've heard the term of Follie Adieu. So, it was my wife and I, we both we were working together, I owned a practice, which was, as you said, successful and she owned a billing company. And the both of us spent our lives working, right, we just worked. You know, the American Dream is the pursuit of happiness. So, we were pursuing happiness, but never really experiencing happiness. Here's the crunch. We were in Jacksonville, Florida. And I was working as a physician, she had her own business in medical billing, which is an art form unto itself. We built this house on the river. We had a house on the river, we had a house at the beach. Everything was hunky dory. And we looked at each other and thought, what are we going to do? Like, we reached the dream, okay, but it left us feeling sort of, umm. No big deal. You know, mea. Funnily enough, we went on a folk tour. We were in DC, and I was doing a medical conference. And as part of the medical conference, there was a film festival at Mount Vernon the home of George Washington., And we met a couple there that lived in San Francisco. One was an architect, and one was an accountant. They lived their lives frantically running the wheel of, you know, paying for the outrageous prices that you pay in San Francisco. And they said, we just got to give this up. So, they bought a small farm in Virginia. Where they have chickens and pigs and you know, a small holding. And they said they'd never been happier, they had two kids. They never enjoyed the kids so much. And we sort of looked at each other thinking we need to do that. We reached a point in our lives where we were in

quote, successful, you know, we'd achieved all the milestones, there were something more than we needed to do. But that couple said to us, we live in Virginia, and they grow wine in Virginia, we said what, I had no idea that there was a wine industry in Virginia. And this was back in 1999. And we came up on our wedding anniversary, I say wedding anniversary, because this is part of the fate of it all. We found a real estate agent who was based in Nellysford, which is 9 miles down the road. And they said, I've got this property, and there's a parcel on the property of 17 acres that is suitable for a vineyard. So, we came along with a real estate agent, and we went to what we now call the Top Meadow, which is a part of our whole property. And we absolutely fell in love with it, you know that as we got to the Top Meadow, the music started singing like in the Sound of Music and the hills are alive. All that stuff. Anyway, we found out that the whole farm was for sale, not just the 17 acres. You say it was Beginner's luck, or say it was cashed out or whatever you might say. We sort of looked at it and jumped. We said, Okay, this is what we'll do. And from there on, that was it. We put down a deposit that weekend. Wow, on the far left, and it took us two years to actually buy it. So, we came here in 1998. We bought the place, I avoid saying we bought the farm, because it's got another meeting all together. We bought the property in 1999. Our first harvest was 2001. And at that time, my first we had 12 acres of grapes. And now we were cultivating over 100 acres altogether.

Fred Reno

Well, the vineyard wasn't here when you bought it. Right? Correct.

Andrew Hodson

It was it was a cattle farm.

Fred Reno

So, what drove the decision about what varieties to planted initially? Did you have a consultant? Or did you just say, OH yeah, I'm going to do this?

Andrew Hodson

You know, remember I was in medicine? Right? In medicine, you surround yourself with people that are smarter than yourself. You know like Steve Jobs, I think, and I did just that. And we got a consultant, a guy called Chris Hill. Oh, Chris, I'm sure. Everybody you've spoken to Fred will say, Well, Chris Hill helped us. You know, it's like Gabriele Rausse. They were the two sort of founding people in Virginia viticulture. So, Chris Hill came along. We also consulted with Tony Wolf, who is the state viticulturist. And here's a story I love to tell we got up to the Top Meadow and we looked at the top bed. I said, I'm going to plant Sauvignon Blanc. He looked at me and said, What? And I guess it's like all advice. If you get it free you can ignore it. So, he said, don't plant Sauvignon Blanc but I remember that the first time I tasted a wine that really impacted me was a Cloudy Bay from New Zealand. And that was the first time I thought about God This stuff is so good, you know this Sauvignon Blanc, right? So, I had in my mind that I was going to grow Sauvignon Blanc. I ignored Tony Wolf. I ignored him and I'm going to say, Patricia and I you know, we're complicit in everything within this venture.

Fred Reno

I will tell you when I came to visit here last month, I hadn't had your Sauvignon Blanc and George gave me a glass and I said, this is fantastic. Classic Musque clone, but it was like fantastic I was wow, this is really good.

Andrew Hodson

Well at one time we planted two clones, as you said the Musque and UC Davis clone one. We made a reserve sauvignon Blanc with just the musque clone, and it was too much. It was it was like it really stank. You know, I mean, talk about cat pee. A characteristic often in really strong elements of Sauvignon Blanc. People liked it, but you have to be a fan of Sauvignon Blanc to drink it. So, then we found that if we blended the UC Davis clone with the Musque clone, we came up with a lovely sort of intermediary, which was like halfway between Sancerre in France. And sauvignon Blanc in New Zealand. Gotcha. And it was like some people said it's like halfway between the old world and the new world again, and that's a good place for us to be.

Fred Reno

As I understand it, you were the first winemaker, it must have been interesting. I mean, you hadn't made wine before. Right? Yeah. You didn't really have any formal training. Who did you rely on for advice as you started to dive into that?

Andrew Hodson

That's right. Again, consultants. So, we consulted with Brad. He was at Whitehall. Brad, I will think of his full name in a sec. Sorry. That's right. He was our winemaking consultant. But here's another thing for it. When I was in medicine, my biggest joy was chemistry. I was one of those weirdos that actually enjoyed organic chemistry. Everyone says that the big stumbling block to doing medicine is understanding organic chemistry. Well, I did well in organic chemistry. And, you know, the whole idea of fermentation chemistry was a challenge for me. I loved it. I got really deeply into it. Brad McCarthy was our consultant. Brand McCarthy, who was at Whitehall at the time. I loved it. I did an online course we took from UC Davis on winemaking and did lots of reading around lots of work with chemistry. And I made the wine myself for the first three years. The story I'd like to tell is that Chris Hill said, Why don't you plant Petit Verdot. I said okay, and never having heard of it, this Petit Verdot. So, we planted it. And the idea was, we were going to blend it with the Cabernet Franc and with the Merlot in because it's got so much color. Right? We'll give some Ump to the other varietals so in 2002, which was a very, very good year for us in 2002 was so hot in Charlottesville that they would serve food in the restaurants on paper plates with plastic knives and forks, because they didn't have enough water to wash the dishes. 2002 was like this superb growing year, we cultivated our Petit Verdot which was planted in 1999. So, it was like the third leaf, a young vine, third leaf and I made the single varietal Petit Verdot in a barrel obviously. And I loved it. I thought this stuff is fantastic. So, I made a single varietal Petit Verdot in 2002. And at the time, I'm not quite sure how he got the wine but one of the consultants with the Wine Advocate, a guy called Pierre Raovani he got a bottle of our Petit Verdot. And in the fall of 2003, there was an article in the Wine Advocate that was titled, gems from the boondocks. gems from the boondocks! and one of those gems from the boondocks was Veritas 2002 Petit Verdot and he gave it a score of 88. And at the time, you know, I was reading the manual of how to make wine as I was making it and it just a coincidence of factors, but it was the young vines, a very good year and, Petit Verdot. And so, we got this lovely wine in 2002

and I still got some of it and it still is lovely. And that launched us on using Petit Verdot as our sort of, I'm not going to say signature grape but it's one of what I would say, if you said to me what is the wine, you're most proud of? It would be either a Petit Verdot or Cabernet Franc.

Fred Reno

Well, and then it looks like your daughter decides I want to do this. she goes to school, learns how, you know, enology and she comes down here and becomes the winemaker. hat must be fantastic.

Andrew Hodson

Absolutely. And you know, totally, I want to say unintentional, I don't mean unintentional, it happened by circumstance. I never planned it. I never said like, Emily, we're going to plant a vineyard and you're going to come back and make wine, that was never in the cards. Emily, she always helped me. You know, even for the first couple of years. She was going to Virginia Tech, under Bruce Zoecklein. I must say that the fact that we've lost Bruce Zoecklein is a big sadness for me because he was a good influence on Virginia, enology. At the time, it was Tony Wolf and Bruce Zoecklein. Right. They were the two forces that helped us get off the ground. And they did a really good job. When we set up our license. Fred, we were the 53rd Winery in Virginia 53rd. And I think now it's almost 300.

Fred Reno

Right, exactly,

Andrew Hodson

yeah. So we were at the beginning, but not as early as Barboursville and not as early as Whitehall. Just one year behind the King Family. So, we were in that sort of cohort of people that started early on.

Fred Reno

What I would call those next beginnings of the modern day, Virginia wine industry growth. You were right in there in that sweet spot in the early 2000s.

Andrew Hodson

What I would say there, Fred, is that before we got here, people were planting vines in the wrong places, right? And they still persisted in making wine. And of course, the wine wasn't very good. So, at the beginning, Virginia had a very bad reputation for the wine quality. And all it took was the understanding that you have to put the vines in the right place. And you know, the wine is made in the vineyard.

Fred Reno

Well, I agree with you there. I've been associated with vineyards most my career. And I would ask you a question because I had one vintner say to me and it opened my eyes about a year ago; He said Fred, is good as the wine is being produced here in a lot of cases in Virginia. I still believe that some of the best vineyards in Virginia have not been planted yet.

Andrew Hodson

That's a good point.

Fred Reno

Do you think that's valid?

Andrew Hodson

Oh yeah, we've got on block that we haven't planted yet. And it's the most favorable place. It's absolutely you know, the right height, it is southeast facing. And it's so good that we've got the paralysis of the analysis. Like, what should we plant here because this is going to be our very, very best site? And I think we've gradually come around to realizing that because Petit Verdot has a sort of, I won't say gimmick because it's a sort of relatively unknown variety. I think Petit Verdot is the best choice for us. Because we've made it, we've refined making it and we should continue on that. What people are telling me to do is to plant cab sauv, and we don't have any Cabernet Sauvignon. You know, if there was a site for Cabernet Sauvignon, that's where I would put it. But you know, we've got 20 years of experience of growing Petit Verdot

Fred Reno

Well, it sounds like to me it's become a signature wine for you. And what I learned a long time ago in the wine business, the more focused you are, on what you do and the less spread you are, the better you become at it.

Andrew Hodson

That's right and Emily's perfected it. In 2013 we got a double gold in San Francisco. 2016 we got a gold in San Francisco.

Fred Reno

Is that block on his site here.

Andrew Hodson

Yes, sir. Yeah, but here's the thing Fred, if you believe in terroir in 2016 Afton Mountain got a gold with Petit Verdot in San Francisco. Veritas, I think we got a double gold and King family got a gold. Now if you believe in terroir, you know those vineyards are almost in a line. You know, nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Fred Reno

Well, Petit Verdot is you know, because you have the experience. I mean, it's the perfect red grape for the Virginia climate.

Andrew Hodson

Well, yeah, I mean, many people would disagree. And when we planted it, you know, if you read the books, you wouldn't even have planted it because in France it's the second best to Cabernet Sauvignon. If Cabernet Sauvignon doesn't ripen nor will Petit Verdot. So, it's not like it's a backup. And the French got very little regard for Petit Verdot and people who asked me, Why did we choose it? And I would, I would say the answer really is Beginner's luck. You know so many people get a bit of luck, and they make the best of it. If you look at how Bill Gates succeeded, he was given access to a mainline computer when he was still studying, you know, he had this opportunity that he made the best of it. And I'm not comparing myself to Bill Gates for a second. But it's realizing when you got a break.

Fred Reno

Let me switch the subject. So, all right, you're growing grapes to make wine, your daughter comes in? At some point, there's got to be a market strategy. How did you develop your market strategy? And around that? What does the brand stand for?

Andrew Hodson

Well, that's a very good question. I would say, Fred, though it sounds cliché, I think it was because we were so invested in what we're doing. We were just absolutely invested; people would come to our winery. And we'd have like a couple of barrels on a plank. And that was our tasting room. Okay, and they talk to us, and they'd smile. And they say, these poor people, they really are doing their best. I would say it's our authenticity. And I told you, before we started the interview, one of our best friends, Christine and Dennis Vrooman realized that we were making good wine, and they said, we're going to plant a vineyard and make wine. And Christine said, we're going to plant Pinot Noir.

I said, Christine, you must be crazy. You know, there are some grapes, there's red wine, there's white wine, and there's Pinot Noir. Pinot Noir is so capricious, it's so difficult to understand. And she said, I'm going to grow Pinot Noir. And she did. And she's done a very good job. And I would say that Christine's authenticity is similar to ours in the sense that we're completely invested in it to the point that people understand that, that commitment, that authenticity. I would say that if you looked at our advertising budget it is almost non-existent. Our success has been, I think, that we've grown slowly, with every step we've made, we've created a following of people that have stuck with us, so we've got this customer loyalty, we've got no inventory. And as we've grown, we've been able to sell our wines, we've never had a problem. There are other wineries that have suddenly popped up in Virginia. And they purchased huge amounts of wine, and guess what, doesn't sell, because they don't have a customer base. And we do have a customer base. The other thing that I will also mention, and I'm not trying to hawk anything, but we created the wine club concept. The wine club concept was, you come to Veritas, you have a good experience. The people that serve you are kind, explain the wines that don't make you feel like you're an idiot, you know, we cultivate that experience. But we haven't done very much in the way of

distribution. What we do is we say that, well, you can get the wine every three months if you join our wine club. And people, you know, they say, Well, yeah, let's do that. And we've got over, I think last count was three and a half thousand people in our wine club that every three months, buy three bottles of wine.

Fred Reno

And so, you have managed to maintain that without really significant attrition. That's remarkable.

Andrew Hodson

Yes, I mean, it's still growing. We could not be happier with our wine club members. Emily, my daughter makes wine every year for the wine club. So, we've always got a sort of a brand that's slightly different than the rest. Last week, we released our 2015 sparkling wine called Scintilla, that we kept on the lees for over three years. And that was for wine club members only. Okay, so that they get their sense of, of having some degree of privilege, exclusivity.

Fred Reno

So, then the rest of your family joins in. George, how did you talk George into coming here from Florida, and becoming a CEO and running the place?

Andrew Hodson

Well, the funny thing is, George is a reluctant hero in a way. He was very reluctant to sort of as it were, join the family business. He was very successful in his own right. He went to Emory University got a degree in Neuroscience. I used to be a Neurologist. So, I've got two kids that are both Neuroscientists. Neither of them have used that in any thing, other than the fact prove that they can get a degree in anything you like. It's like getting a degree in marine biology. Nobody wants you to do marine biology. But it's just a marker of your intelligence. And George had a degree in neuroscience and was working for, I think, Biogen in the bio industry. He was living a life where he was on the road, five days a week. And they wanted to promote him. And he was going to go to Boston, to be at Boston to carry on a life that he wasn't that much invested in. But his reluctance in joining, I think, was the fact that he didn't want to be seen, as you know, coming in on the coattails of his parents. But I can honestly say, I can look

George in the eye right now and say he's done such a good job. You know, Emily and George, have been the backbone of the company. We've started them off, and they've pulled the ball and run with it.

Fred Reno

They've just grown into position. Well, that's got to be really gratifying. It is. When did your other daughter Chloe get involved?

Andrew Hodson

Yeah, Chloe got involved in about 2010 or just before George. Yeah. And she came in on the entertainment side of things. So, she was running weddings, and running the events. And then she got married, went to New York, came back, and worked with us for a couple of years. But then she remarried, had two children. she happened to marry a friend of ours who was from England. And he had gone to, there's a school in England called Plumpton college, which is the only enology college in the UK. So, Elliot had gone to Plumpton. And he had contacted us because we're friends with his family and said, you know, can he come over and do an internship from the UK, we said sure we love to have that happen. Chloe & Elliot, and the rest is history. You know, they've had a very lovely relationship. We've just launched a company called Virginia Sparkling Company and Elliott is going to be our sparkling wine manager. He is in charge entirely of making sparkling wine. Having worked with us, this is his eighth harvest, having worked with us all along and of course, he's happy as a clam. Because he can be in charge of, his shtick, you know, that he's working with. We're really hoping that the sparkling wine is going to be a big part of our future business.

Fred Reno

Well, that that's a great segue, because I was going to go there next with a different question. It's like all enterprises, they have to find a way to grow, or they become stagnant. So, what's behind the decision first to buy Flying Fox? Yeah. How did that develop?

Andrew Hodson

Well, Flying Fox was contiguous in terms of the vineyard, and it's about 10 acres. The guy who owned is Richard Evans. And he started the vineyard at the same time, as we did, we were like, you know, buddies in combat. And we have a very good relationship with Rich Evans. And Rich Evans got the Seven Year Itch in the sense that he realized that growing grapes and making wine was, you know, hard work. It took seven years for the dream to sort of evaporate. He came to us and said, you know, of all the people I'd like to have run my vineyard it would be you guys. And we were able to with a bit of financial skullduggery, get Chloe, George, and Emily to buy the vineyard and buy the brand. So, they actually own Flying Fox. Oh, I see. So, it is a subsidiary, but it's not part of Veritas. It's a standalone operation. So, we've got Flying Fox, we have Virginia sparkling wine and George is also now working with a group of investors on a brand that we're calling True Heritage.

Fred Reno

Well, I was going to go there because I've had several of those wines and quite honestly, they're really good. I looked at that and thought, here's a branding opportunity. I thought this was interesting, but the wines are terrific. In fact, I had the Chardonnay just last week and I sent Georgia message and I said what's the clones in your Chardonnay because there's a salinity in this Chardonnay that I've never seen in Virginia Chardonnay before. And it's got to be the site to some degree clearly. But I was curious about what the clones were too because it's a really terrific wine. This is a very interesting project from what I understand and what he had described initially. There's a lot there, potential.

Andrew Hodson

We've got two Chardonnay's. We got a stainless-steel Chardonnay and a barrel fermented Chardonnay. The barrel fermented Chardonnay. One is called Saddleback and the other one's called Veritas Chardonnay Reserve.

Fred Reno

I believe it's Saddleback.

Andrew Hodson

Saddleback, that's our stainless steel. That's our, you know, Chablis style, right, Chablis style. So, it's got that minerality.

Fred Reno

I was talking about, I'm sorry about the True Heritage.

Andrew Hodson

The True Heritage. Okay. Yeah, that would be the stainless steel, a different site. That is not our wine in the sense that it is from the Keswick region. That's right. Yeah. And they do have a different soil there altogether. And that's where you got that salinity from? Yeah, because it's not the same as it is here. But that's a lovely wine. I totally agree with you. The Viognier is lovely, and the Petit Verdot is lovely.

Fred Reno

It's fascinating to me. I mean, it's just like, okay, let's keep building on what we did. So how did you decide to get into the restaurant, B&B hotel business? That's to me that looks thankless to me. I'm sorry. But it'll just look like a lot of work.

Andrew Hodson

It is true, isn't it that like 80% of bankruptcies are restaurants. And frankly, I would say that we've never had an overarching single business plan. I like to compare our business strategy with, there's a video game called Frogger. In Frogger, you've got a frog on one side of the bank of the river. And you've got to get that frog to the other side of the river. And going up and down the river are these logs that go in different ways at different speeds, and you got to get the frog to land on the log that's going that way, then he's going to jump this way. And he's going to jump that way. And the skill that we've done, is to jump on every opportunity. There was a time in 2007 when seven years after starting, it was looking pretty grim. You know, we were growing grapes. We were selling grapes. But we weren't making very much money. You know, the line about Virginia wine industry? How to make a small fortune? Start with a large one? That's,

Fred Reno

that's a lot of those vineyards.

Andrew Hodson

We started with a small fortune. And the wedding business, the restaurant business, have all been opportunities that we've jumped on, to keep us going. Yeah, that's right. And there was a point when, at the height of the wedding industry, I'd say probably 2015 when at least 50% of our income was wedding. But that's changed. That's changed a lot. The wedding industry, precipitated by the COVID crisis was waning anyway, so that the number of people looking to have weddings at wineries was decreasing.

Fred Reno

Well, you know, you just touched on something prior to that, that I always used to tell people there's no there's a magic here. In the wine industry, people always look at it like this romance and all that. I always used to say to the consumer, it's farming. Yeah, it's absolutely farming. And the old adage is, you know, when the farmer makes his money, when he sells the farm, and other than that, it's just hard work. Right?

Andrew Hodson

Yeah. You know, people come to me and say, I've got a little bit of land, and I think I'm going to plant some grapes. And I say, do you really want to do that? Are you doing it because you really want to or doing it because you think can make money? And if they say because we want to make money, I say forget it. You're not going to make money it is something you have to want to do?

Fred Reno

Well, it's generational too. That's the whole thing when you look at the old-world model and that was going be my next question. That's generational. Well, where I was headed with that was you were getting into the wine business, but obviously you and your wife love wine. So, what was your model? You know what got you into wine loving wine yourself personally, prior to deciding to grow grapes, make wine. What was it? What was the model? What was the wine? There's always one wine that and I remember mine. Yeah, there's always one wine. Fred, what was your wine? Well, unbelievably, I've been a Burgundian lover ever since and,

the very first bottle of Burgundy I ever had was a bottle of 1969 vintage Clos Vougeot from Rene Engle one of the top producers in Burgundy. Prior to that all I was drinking Bordeaux and classify growths and I tried a Burgundy one night, and I was like, oh my god. Yeah, this is a different league. This is complete and it just sold me, and I became Burgundy focused, ever since. It just turned my head. I mean '69 vintage. How could I start having better wine from a better producer? I

Andrew Hodson

I've been there. I love that wine.

Fred Reno

So, what was yours?

Andrew Hodson

Well, I said, you know, the first time I tasted Cloudy Bay. You know, like, suddenly went off in my head and then I started getting into Bordeaux's. So, when I was rich and famous, what I mean by that was when I was practicing medicine, because I was rich compared to being a farmer, and I had quite a collection of Bordeaux's. Nice 1982 Latour, you know, that would be my sort of, yeah, I would often say to people, you got 24 hours to live, what are you going to open? And if they say, a full body red they didn't get the job. If they said a 1982 Latour, they got the job for me, Fred, it was, it was just the absolute abject enjoyment of mine, it was, it opens up so many interesting intellectual opportunities. And it's so fascinating. You know, I just love wine... And it's not just me, for sure. It's not just me, it's been the two of us that have done it. And my wife still loves the fact that I come up with a nice bottle of wine, usually a red wine that she's going to enjoy. That's still part of our happiness together, having a good bottle of wine and having a nice day. I can't imagine having a decent meal without wine. I just can't.

Fred Reno

Oh, it's against my religion. to have lunch or dinner without a glass of wine. I mean, sincerely.

Andrew Hodson

You know, I think it's inherent in you that you either really love it, or and it goes sparks off as we know, people in the industry, we know, several people that they'd rather have a bourbon than have a glass of wine. If you if you're in that situation, I don't think you can have that sort of inherent level of love for what you are doing.

Fred Reno

So final \$64,000 question, your opinion. What is it? And we touched on this a little bit prior to the interview? Why hasn't Virginia with the quality of what we've seen in wine growing and what's been happening? Why are the Cognoscenti in the industry around the country nationally? not really aware of this? Why hasn't Virginia broken out? There's been good press as you said the incredible people writing about it like Spurrier, Oz Clark, and others. What is it in your opinion held VA back? I have my own opinion, but what is your opinion?

Andrew Hodson

To be quite frank with you? I would say I don't know. But when I first met you, and I said to you Fred, if you're setting out in this business, what would you say is the most important factor? Why would you sell a bottle of Virginia wine to anybody, and you looked at me in the eyes and you said quality? That was your response? And I think we make the wine of quality; I think it's a hidden gem in a way. But there just isn't enough Virginia wine. writers are not going to write about wine if people can't get hold of it. And if you look at the total production of Virginia wine 600,000 cases, Kendall Jackson made 600,000 cases of reserve Chardonnay. make 2.5

Fred Reno

They make 2.5 million.

Andrew Hodson

Okay, but at one point Kendall Jackson made as much reserve Chardonnay as the whole of the Virginia wine industry. Exactly. And I think it's because writers are reluctant to put their energy behind anything that people don't get hold of.

Fred Reno

Okay, so here's if you want my opinion, it's the broken distribution system we have in America. That is the impediment to Virginia wine, becoming a national item in those corners that would really appreciate the quality, the authenticity and the story that's happening here. And there's no Robert Mondavi. Napa Valley would not be what it is today had Robert Mondavi not existed.

Andrew Hodson

Yeah, champion the cause.

Fred Reno

Somebody who was just tireless, both nationally and internationally. Talking about the wine quality and putting it out there and tasting against it the best wines of the world. He was tireless, and he brought a whole industry along with him. That's what I see from my vantage point 40 years in his business. There's yet that Oracle to stand up and get in front of people and say, pay attention. This is unbelievable the quality or the flavor interest. Especially because of the natural acidity, natural lower alcohols, everything else that is going on. I mean, California is struggling with this, as you know, getting those alcohols under control. It really is climate change in this regard. And I learned this when I was involved in vineyards in California. It's very difficult to get physiological rightness of the grape, right? At 24 Brix even in California. I mean it might be sugar ripe. But the physiological ripeness of the grape itself? Totally not there. Totally. And so, what most consumers don't understand, they're now picking at up to 26 degree of sugar brix. And then they're dealcoholizing the wine. And by dealcoholizing, you're taking the soul right out of the wine. Yeah. And that's what Virginia has; they have soul in their wine still. And I think that's a message that needs to be tied to this authenticity, there is soul in these wines, there's a core spine that hasn't been stripped out of them, right, to just bring alcohol levels down. That makes sense.

Andrew Hodson

Absolutely. I think that's a very, very good point. Because you're, as you're taking away the authenticity, by de alcohol lies the wine, you're manipulating what

Virginia wines are, as we said, at the beginning, were authentic. We don't use reverse osmosis. You know, they say that you'll never get a bad vintage, in Bordeaux now, because they use reverse osmosis. And they can manipulate, if you like, the wine in whatever way they want. I would say that we have this degree of authenticity. What's the name of the guy in California who everyone regards is crazy and had a wine Graham? Yeah, Randall Graham. He talked about terroir wines. He loved the word, the term terroir. And you know, in many people's minds that that's sort of a confusing thing. But I think what he meant by terroir wine was authentic wine that is, you know, is from a place that you can recognize where it's from, without manipulation without adding enzymes without doing all this garbage that people are doing to make generic wine. There's a lot of generic wine that you can get gallons of it, you can get Jacob's Creek for five bucks a bottle, and it's generic. And what we've got is something that's not generic. And in a way you said that at the beginning, you said, the fact that we're not a big industry is a good thing. Because people say, Well, I don't want big industry. I don't want generic wine. I want a wine that's got some authenticity. I think everybody I know in Virginia that I respect, agrees with those principles. I don't know if you'll ever get around to talking to Jim Law.

Fred Reno

He is definitely on my list.

Andrew Hodson

Yes. He'll preach the gospel according to Virginia terroir, and he's a great guy. Great guy. We learned a lot from him at the very beginning.

Fred Reno

Andrew, I know you're busy and I really appreciate your time today. This has been fun.

Andrew Hodson

Good. I've enjoyed it.