

## **EPISODE # 35 BILL CURTIS, OWNER TASTINGS RESTAURANT, WINE BAR, AND WINE MERCHANT: IN CHARLOTTESVILLE**

### **SPEAKERS**

Fred Reno, Bill Curtis

#### **Fred Reno**

Bill, welcome to my Podcast and I really appreciate you taking the time to sit for this interview.

#### **Bill Curtis**

It's a great thing to be here Fred, believe me.

#### **Fred Reno**

Thank you. So, as I like to start, I always start at the beginning. What's your story? Was it wine first? Was it being a chef first how'd you dive into this? What drove this?

#### **Bill Curtis**

Well, the passion was always wine. I think I fell in wine while I was an acolyte in the Episcopal Church, despite the fact that the blood of Christ turned out to be Taylor's Lake Country Catawba. I wound up hooked shortly thereafter when I got into other things. I believe back then it was Mateus, Lancers, and Blue Nun. But then had an epiphany later on when I moved down to Virginia, and that would have been around 1972, going into a Safeway in Woodstock, Virginia and buying two bottles side by side. One was Blue Nun Liebfraumilch, and one was called Kallstader Saumagen Riesling Spatlese from the Prince Rupert Urban, my God. They were 10 cent difference in the price. And you know what? The Liebfraumilch was 10 cents more expensive, and the quality when I open them both up was light years different. So, I was hooked right there. Did you go to culinary school? No. came down to Virginia and went to undergraduate school in upstate New York. And then I came down to Virginia to attend graduate school in history. And you know, like so many other graduate students or law students or Darden students stayed.

#### **Fred Reno**

Before you open Tastings, were you involved in other restaurants?

#### **Bill Curtis**

Oh, yeah, I started the Court Square Tavern in 1976. It was actually the old Monticello Hotel, dining room and the cocktail lounge that Clarke Mann had started back in 1976. Through various means I had partners, but I bought them out. The thing sort of fell in my lap because

nobody else wanted it. And I decided to take the downstairs and turn it into a Beer Emporium. That's what sold. Court Square Tavern in 1977 was selling 127 Different imported bottled beers. I had to go up to Northern Virginia twice a month with my van to pick up all those imported beers from a place called Northern Virginia Beverage, something like that distributing. I mean, it was a very, very popular place. Very, very popular.

**Fred Reno**

What was Virginia like, as far as Virginia wine scene in the late 70s and early 80s?

**Bill Curtis**

Well, the first thing that happened when Virginia wines first hit the marketplace, despite the fact that you know, I thought what they ought to do was red, white, and rose for a couple of years. They decided they were just going to go full thrust with varietals trust me the varietals in no way held up to what was available from California at that time. And everybody had capital costs, you know if you own vineyards, they owned a small vineyard. So, there was no efficiency of production. So, they were more money than California Vineyards. Wine, Chardonnays, or Merlots or whatever. And the quality was much less. So, for the first 10 years of its existence. The Virginia wine industry wound up having to live down that reputation.

**Fred Reno**

Oh, I see. Well, that must have been a challenge.

**Bill Curtis**

It was. Upstairs from the Court Square tavern was a place called the Monticello room, big formal dining room. Held 125 people. It was the old dining room of the hotel. I did a Friday and Saturday night seafood buffet. And I used to feature lots of Virginia wines on that. And we used to sell quite a bit of Virginia wine, but there was a lot of resistance.

**Fred Reno**

What would have been the top wine in your opinion at that time that you were selling from Virginia?

**Bill Curtis**

That's a real brain twister. I sold a lot of wine called Chermont which ceased existing a long time ago. A fellow named Josh Sherman who was a Navy fighter pilot. He had a vineyard and winery down in Howardsville Virginia, which is somewhere near Scottsville. What we call the back of beyond because he was in the back of beyond, he couldn't get any tourists to go there or visit or anything like that. His son didn't want the place when Josh died. So, that sort of shriveled on the vine. I would say Meredyth was a big presence at that point. Archie Smith was a real character, love the man. There was Piedmont vineyard and winery which no longer

exists. And if I had to say, if you put a gun to my head and made me say which one was the finest the finest of the three or four that were around Piedmont Vineyard was the finest.

**Fred Reno**

Weren't they the first to plant Chardonnay or at least partially grow it? Yes, Chardonnay was darn good. I think there was a story I recall, the proprietor of Piedmont wanted to be the first one to sell a Virginia wine in Washington, DC; sold the wine to a merchant and went and bought it herself or something like that.

**Bill Curtis**

Undoubtedly. You're not talking about Mrs. Swedenborg, are you? Mrs. Swedenborg at, gosh, what was the name of her winery? She made a lot of good wines that was further up 81 near Strasburg. And she's the one who did that lawsuit against the restriction on Virginia wine.

**Fred Reno**

Well, in fact, to be honest with you I was so close to that whole thing, because I was part of the Coalition for Free Trade that ended up hiring Ken Starr, which got us to the Supreme Court. And I was at the Oral Arguments. And I'm embarrassed to admit, I didn't realize that Juanita Swedenborg was the contravening ruling in New York State that allowed us to get to the Supreme Court until I moved to the Virginia, I learned that, and I thought, what an interesting footnote in that whole battle for the legal right for wineries to ship directly,

**Bill Curtis**

She made an awful lot of good wine, too. I remember having a Pinot Noir from, say 1979 or '78 '82, maybe somewhere in there. That was awfully, awfully good. And I was at her place having it and she said well enjoy it because I had to rip them all out because they all got Crown Gall.

**Fred Reno**

So, no official, I guess training as a chef, you are just self-taught.

**Bill Curtis**

Self-taught. People ask me where I learned to cook, and I tell them in the kitchen. That's the best place to learn.

**Fred Reno**

So, what was the inspiration behind starting and then opening Tastings?

**Bill Curtis**

Well, I always you know, I realized that that commercially, beer was the way to go because you could sell it and do an awful lot of business with it. And I could get a hold of unique

products from all over the world. Just by going up to the DC area, Northern Virginia area. But my passion was always wine. And even when I had the Monticello room above the Court Square Tavern, I had a wine club. I started a wine club that I sort of didn't disband during COVID. But it makes no sense during COVID Because I don't think we need to have another private club during COVID. So, it's just wine dinners now instead of a wine club, I don't have any dues or anything like that. But the wine club had met continuously from 1981 to when COVID started, and it was in the Monticello room upstairs. And we used to have the Monticello Cup Competitions, before Ms. Rogan was holding them at the Boar's Head. I did like three or four judging's at the Monticello Room. And it was a big, huge room. I wasn't doing anything with it on Saturday afternoon. So, you know, we just got together a whole group of people, merchants from DC. People in the wholesale business, people I knew. And we just went ahead and did the Monticello Cup competition.

**Fred Reno**

That's fantastic. Yeah, that's really wonderful story. You say you taste everything you selling your store? That must be fun.

**Bill Curtis**

Oh, well, it's work. You know, it's work. I mean, sometimes you taste things that you really don't want to put in your mouth, and you spit them out. But tasting is a is a necessary if you're not going to sell wine on the basis of point scores and on the basis of somebody else's palate. You better have your own knowledge of what you're selling. And you know, people say, Well, you're the expert. And no, I'm only an expert about my own palate. I'm not an expert about your palate. So, you tell me what you like, and maybe I can match you with a wine. That's my job is to match up something that you're going to like, tell me what you're having for dinner. Tell me what your price point is. I'm an awfully, you know, persistent little guy because I feel that you've got to ask a whole bunch of questions in order to do your job correctly.

**Fred Reno**

That reminds me of my early days in retail wine myself in Washington DC. The first thing you always ask the customer when they come in is what's it for? Is it a gift? Is it for dinner? If it's for dinner, what are you having? How can you advise them if you don't know what it's for?

**Bill Curtis**

Right. And the all-important thing is, why would I be showing you \$60 bottles of wine when you really want a \$20 bottle of wine? Exactly. I was asking what's your comfort price point?

**Fred Reno**

So, by 1990, the wine industry here in Virginia had to evolve to some level. What was it like? Contrasting that from when you began?

**Bill Curtis**

Oh by 1990, the Virginia wine industry was a little more complex. I think I always thought that it was going to take until you had a few 100, vineyards and wineries in order to reach what I call critical mass in order to get nuclear fusion or fission. Whether you implode or explode one way or the other, you've got to have a whole group of people who gather around and are able to exchange knowledge and do what Robert Mondavi did in California. Somebody needed his Crusher Destemmer, he said, Sure, take it, you know, you need it, I don't need it. And that's what got him in trouble with a whole bunch of other people, including his brother. But, you know, the deal is high tide lifts all boats, right, rising tide lifts all boats. And that's the philosophy that Robert Mondavi had. And I think that's the philosophy we needed to have in Virginia in order to rise to the forefront quickly. Unfortunately, right off the bat, it didn't happen, because Virginians are a private lot. They like to go do their own little thing and don't have anything to do with it, a little bit like Vermonters. You know, we don't neighbor, that kind of thing. You'd run into that all the time and people didn't know what other people were doing or what was going on here. And that's not a way to get a whole industry going.

**Fred Reno**

Well, that has obviously refreshingly changed, because when I moved here in 2019, from California, I was struck by what I see of the collegiality between the vintners here.

**Bill Curtis**

Exactly. It totally flipped flopped.

**Fred Reno**

So, let's talk about the impact. We know what the Zonin family had with Barboursville and Gabriele Rausse. And then, of course, Luca, following him. Let's talk about Dennis Horton because he is still a mystery to me. I never got an opportunity to meet the man. And I hear so much about him. What was he like?

**Bill Curtis**

Dennis Horton was pretty much honed-in on the money. If you talked to him. You talk to him for five minutes and he'd be talking about money. You know, I mean, it's a necessary thing in the wine business, but he was chasing after the next star. And he thought Viognier was going to be the next star. So that was his first big hit. And he turned out a couple of Viogniers. I remember taking a bottle of his Viognier out to the IPNC in Oregon, to the Pinot Noir celebration, and feeding it to none other than Pierre Ravanni, who was very impressed by it. I think he actually went to Hortons or to a couple of places after that when he came back to DC and did a tasting with the guy because of you know, we I just had this deal. Well, how about how about this, you know, if you write all these wines, and you know, there wasn't enough of

that going around, Felicia Rogan got some wine in different places. I think even the White House at one point with political connections, which was what we needed more of. And in New York, especially. She had good connections in New York with Peter Sichel and people like that. She knew people and she could get her wines into restaurant. Patricia Kluge the same way she knew people and she could get her wine into restaurants. And I think once that started happening, you started building up that critical mass that I'm talking about, of people talking back and forth. Well, you know, if they can do this and charge this for it, well, then I can make wine that good and do the same.

### **Fred Reno**

What was the perception of Virginia wine of your customers, let's say in the 90s? And then how has that changed? And what's the perception today of the customers you have coming into your establishment?

### **Bill Curtis**

The perception in the 90s? You had to do a lot of talking about, No, it isn't overpriced, ma'am. Compared to wines from other parts of the world. Curiously enough, Fred when I first did the Monticello Cup the first year, we had trouble with people giving Virginia wines, decent marks. So, in the second year, I had a flight zero. And I didn't tell them what wines I just said now, we're going to set your palates with these wines. And I had six wines, I had two White Burgundy's, a Chardonnay from South America a Chardonnay from California and two Virginia wines. And the Virginia wines came in second and fourth. And, if you're not looking at the label you don't know what they are you don't know you're drinking Virginia wines. I said I just want to set you guys' palettes to make sure you know what you're tasting here, and we can give proper point scores to these things. And we wound up getting proper point scores. It was a lot easier to give out medals under that circumstance.

### **Fred Reno**

You know the brown bag never lies. It's the right exercise all the time to get people to change their perception

### **Bill Curtis**

to recalibrate and change their perception. That's quite right. What about now today, and now today it's a lot different kind of thing because you have people who have their favorites and come in asking for, you know, Gabriele's wine or Whitehall's wine or Barboursville wine, I carry a lot of wines from Jim Law at Linden, because I think he's the most classic winemaker in the state. But I do things like if people come in and say they want a Virginia wine, I say, Well, do you normally drink European or California wines. Well, I drink California. Well, in that case, you want White Hall. Because Tony and Edie have been making California style wines at White Hall ever since they started in 1991. you drink European well go for Gabriele. Gabriele comes

from the northern part of Italy, a very rural part of the northern part of Italy and makes wines that reflect his upbringing.

**Fred Reno**

Let me switch gears here a little bit. One of my pet peeves. It will be fun to get your take on. What's it like dealing with distributors in a state that has incredible franchise protection for these folks? What's the challenges here dealing with distributors in Virginia?

**Bill Curtis**

Well, first thing you have to learn is that every day is Christmas for the distributors in the state of Virginia. People don't understand, when they come into my shop, they say you had a lot of wine in the shop. I say, Yeah, I got a damn poor bank account to prove it because I have to pay for the wine when it comes through the door. And I said, You know what that does for the distributor, and they say no, it says it gives them 3% profit on the bottom line already. Because it takes 3% to run an accounts receivable department in any large wholesale dealership. It's sometimes hard to get their attention. But I would have to say the best of them have come around and are now selling the top wines from Virginia very well. And pushing.

**Fred Reno**

Well, that's good to hear. But you are an anomaly in the sense that you're one of the rare fine wine merchants still left in this business.

**Bill Curtis**

You know, I don't tend to sell negotiant wines from France or grocery store wines. And don't get me started on Pet-Nat and all of that. I would like to think it's a high praise for you to say that. I would only say instead that I believe I'm probably one of the few people who's really passionate about the wines I sell. Lots of people could be selling pork bellies, you go in a store and all you see your tags with scores on them, flea like the wind. Right? I would have to agree 100%.

**Fred Reno**

Well, COVID had to turn your world upside down like it did a lot of folks. How did you manage to navigate this? Because it seems like you have a really strong following and things are reasonable. Well, I would assume I mean, how did you navigate these waters?

**Bill Curtis**

Yeah, well, it took me a little while to come around to the fact that, = because we lost a key person who had been the sole person out front as far as greeting people, seating people, a lady named Jenny who decided to go live with her grandchildren. Down in Virginia Beach. No

way I can fight that. You know, she'd been out there 13 years. Lovely, lovely gal never seem to do anything but smile at people. That is indeed harder than COVID.

**Fred Reno**

Yeah, losing a treasured employee.

**Bill Curtis**

Of course, she had all connections, everybody comes in says, Where's Jenny? I mean, everybody expects to see Jenny there.

they weren't coming for me and the food, but to see Jenny Right. So anyhow, once we got over that, I figured that we could probably do okay in the To Go market, and started out doing 30, 40 dinners on a decent Friday, Saturday night because people came out to support us. And people did not want to go into a situation where they might be, they might be put in contact with COVID. So, we did our best to get meals out if we needed to. People were very generous with tips, and very generous with buying meals. I even I did a couple of sorts of not catering jobs but, you know, guy would call me up and say, I got eight people for dinner, what can you do for me at the last minute I said, Well, Collin, I got some soft crabs in the back. he says Yeah, I'll take some. So, it's just a matter of hustle and fitting things and putting the right key in the right lock. And so, the first part of COVID, we did fine with that, then everybody's expectations changed when the vaccines came out. And everybody expected they were going to be able to go in and sit down in a restaurant, and that I still really don't have any in house dining. I might reinstitute it later on. If I can get the right help. It all depends on the right help. I'm looking for another Jenny to come my way. anybody listening to this who wants to come by please come by. I've got really good help in the kitchen now because my hands are getting 75 years old and don't do what they used to do so anymore. I don't think he'd mind me telling Pete Bowyer used to be John Casteen's Chef. He used to be the UVA President's chef. Wow. And he sort of got hired to do all these dinners when Mr. Casteen was doing his \$2 billion campaign fund for people flying in and the, you know, looking to donate \$5, \$10 million. And when they decided that he was no longer needed, about three quarters of the way thru COVID, he took an early retirement and became available. I've been trying to get him to work for me for 25 years. Never worked out because he got full health benefits from them. And you know, he had six children. So that helps to have full health benefits. So have good help with the kitchen. I have, you know, a great guy out front. Nick Dubroff, who helps me putting things up and selling wines, he will do anything. So, we're sort of on the edge. I just resigned a new lease, who knows what's going to happen at the end of the lease, but I can only repeat if you're looking for a good job. And you like smiling at customers, like you know, it's having a good time to working hard and making good money, come by.

**Fred Reno**



Well, I'll tell you folks, I'm sure Bill looked at me when I first walked into the store several years ago, and he must have said to himself, who the hell is this guy?

**Bill Curtis**

You did look a little out of place in Charlottesville when you came in that day.

**Fred Reno**

I imagined I did. But I have always enjoyed all my experiences at Tastings. Dined there a few times in the early days, but dealing with Bill and buying wine, and it's been fun. Always. Every time I've come in there, I've always enjoyed it and felt great about what I bought. You never steered me wrong. Other than one time I had a bottle of wine I thought it's not quite as good as he said it was, but it might have been my palate that day. Who knows, you know? And that's another thing about wine tastings. I heard a comment you made, and I am 100% agreement with you. Most people don't know this. They buy wine based on the way it smells. Not the way it tastes. If you hand somebody a glass of wine that has a wonderful bouquet, wonderful aroma, they're predisposed to like the wine. If you give them a glass of wine, that's so dumbed down, there's really not much going on. They're predisposed to not like it. And it's amazing. You honed-in on that when I heard a comment you had made like that?

**Bill Curtis**

Yeah, your, your eyes. Conversely, it's the same with food. I don't do a whole bunch of what I call towers and squiggles. You know like everybody's taught in chef school to do that. I try to present my food as comely, very calmly, it looks very nice, but it's very plain. And it's meant to be plain because it's meant to go with wine. You know, I don't want a whole bunch of things going off in your mouth, eight different ingredients on the plate, forget it. You know, we make a sauce. And you know, a meat and veg and just like your mama told you eat your greens, eat your vegetables, and eat your meat. And we just try to make it the best we can make it look good, but don't get overly worried about that.

**Fred Reno**

So back to wine for a second, I'd love your opinion on hybrids vs vinifera here in Virginia.

**Bill Curtis**

Oddly enough, I think the best hybrid as far as I can see, I'm not a real big fan of white hybrids because I don't think the White hybrid grapes Vidal and Seyval carry that much flavor with them. I really like Chambourcin, and I really like Chambourcin that's aged, not many people age it to the point where it starts to get a real complexity, a real saddle leather, cheesy kind of complexity to it, sort of like an old Gamay, or something like that. Or Baga from Portugal, when you age those wines they just become incredibly complex and incredibly, well I'll use a fancy psychological word perfecting they draw you in they make contact with your senses, and you

just want more. And I think Chambourcin has the ability to do that. It's just a shame that people don't age it. If I had a shout out to anybody in the vineyard business, I would say, Make a Chambourcin and hold back, hold it back for three or four years and then release it and see what happens in the market.

### **Fred Reno**

That's really interesting because I'm also a big fan of Chambourcin, especially when it's well made, and that back edge, that just a little sting when it's poorly made is there, because I'm a big Cru Beaujolais drinker. And when it's at its best, it has that property. But that has been my biggest frustration since I moved here. There's not enough aged Virginia wine, right, that I can taste to see how does this age but that's fascinating. I'm going to start aging Chambourcin now and see because I like Chambourcin a lot.

### **Bill Curtis**

I came to this Fred by tasting some of old Konstantin Franks Chambourcin from New York State. When I you know, I mean, we I used to buy more. And even Virginia got started, Hermann Wiener was big in in helping the Virginia wine industry get started. I met him a couple times. And he had brought some Chambourcin, and we tasted it up in the Monticello room at one of the wine dinners. And I tell you what, a 5,6,7-year aged Chambourcin can be absolutely beautiful.

### **Fred Reno**

I certainly believe that is possible. So now let me switch to something that Mike Heny told me the one varietal that parts the waters here in Virginia. And that's Norton.

### **Bill Curtis**

It does. The first Norton I tasted was unremittingly acidic. It just felt like it took the enamel off my teeth. If you don't make it right, I think what you'd want to do is post fermentation maceration to try to get those tannin molecules to polymerize so that you don't have this hugely tannic monster. But once you do that, then you wind up with a really outgoing, rich, plummy wine almost like a cross between a Merlot and maybe a Syrah.

### **Fred Reno**

Well, I, I'm involved, full disclosure right now in a Norton project that I'm trying to understand. So, I've done everything I can't I just got done reading the book three times the Wild Vine, which really is the history of the Norton, right. One of the most interesting things was when I interviewed Shep Rouse, at Rockbridge over a year ago, unsolicited he pulled out a 2002 Norton, he had made almost 20-year-old Norton. And it was special. Yeah, it was special. It reminded me of those old Inglenook Cask Cabernets I used to get in the mid to late 70s When

I was in retail, or an old BV Private Reserve Cabernet. It was just balanced and mellow and it was delightful, and I thought, Oh, this is what happens to Norton when it's properly age.

**Bill Curtis**

You know what the Burgundians always say? All wines want to become burgundy. They say that about Beaujolais. They say that about Pomerol. They say age it long enough in all starts tasting like burgundy. Right? So, I can well imagine that a grape like Norton would segue into something that's very, very Bordeauxish.

**Fred Reno**

Well, I've been drinking for the last three weeks, probably various Norton's every night. And then put them back in refrigerator. Follow them over 3,4,5 days, all the different variations. And I've come up with a marketing concept. I'm not going to share it here right now because I don't want anybody to steal it from me. But I will refer to something else. I think Norton, to me, is an acquired palette. Just like Zinfandel was 30 years ago. I think there's a lot of similarities between what Zinfandel went through and what Norton could possibly evolve into and go through right now.

**Bill Curtis**

Do you see the same variation? I always called Zinfandel the chameleon grape because wine from guys up at Summit Lake up there in Napa. And it would taste like Bordeaux. You got it from Ridge, and it would taste very berries. You got it from Santa Barbara somewhere and it was just out of sight. It was almost Kool aid.

**Fred Reno**

You're absolutely right Bill. That's what I'm discovering that there is just these many different variations and shades of flavor profile in the different Norton's I'm tasting. Right? And that was always part of the problem with California Syrah. When people would buy a bottle of Syrah, they didn't know what kind of wine they were going to get. And I don't know that they've ever overcome that in California with Syrah.

**Bill Curtis**

Syrah is probably the hardest grape to sell.

**Fred Reno**

That's exactly what I've been experiencing. And it's been fascinating to see that variation. So, looking forward, what's your biggest challenge right now?

**Bill Curtis**

Do you mean to the Virginia in a sense with Virginia wines? You know, one thing that I've noticed that Virginia wines have sold a lot less during COVID. And I think there's two reasons for that. I think tourism was way down for a long time. And we used to sell lots of wine either because of tourists, i.e., people would say, Well, my buddy's coming from Indiana, and I want to get a really good bottle of Virginia wine, there was a lot of that, okay, so that because of tourists, or the tourists coming in directly to buy it to take it back to Indiana, or wherever they came from. Right. So, we lost a lot of that during COVID. Okay, then, you know, hopefully Virginia didn't suffer that much in sales, because the other part of the sales we lost, was everybody going to the wineries to the tasting rooms, when they opened up. They can go outside, and it was a safe place. And it was you know, you had me saying, Well, I'm sorry, I don't want to serve any dinner inside to you. So, you get a hot dog and let the kids run around and drink all the Virginia wine you want. So, I hope all the sales shifted from the standing retailer to the tasting room. So, I think those were the two challenges that I as a retailer faced and that's why some of my Virginia sales have not been as robust as they were. But that's going to come back, I believe.

### **Fred Reno**

I'm curious about your opinions on this, I look at Virginia, from my perspective, and I think it has the opportunity to be recognized as the most exciting new wine growing region in America today. Like what Oregon turned into. My opinion, well over 20 years ago New York State had that opportunity to become that. I don't know anything about New York State wines. I'm not involved with them and never have been. I don't know what the politics were, but they never seized it. And that moment's gone. Right. And I believe what we do here in Virginia, collectively as an industry, during the next two years is going to determine whether the Virginia wine industry seizes that opportunity that's right in front of them, or it passes them by. What do you think?

### **Bill Curtis**

Well, I think you're right. You're right in a way. I would disagree about New York because I think what New York's fault line was, was climate. They didn't have enough degree days, what they call degree days to achieve good ripeness, in every vintage so they got vintage variation. It was always kind of an anchor dragging on their feet. Now, they did do something right, which Virginia, as far as I know, hasn't done right. Does Virginia yet offer a degree in Enology from Virginia Tech?

### **Fred Reno**

That's a very good question.

### **Bill Curtis**

You see, I think Virginia is missing a tick if they do not offer a degree in viticulture and a degree in enology through Virginia Tech like Cornell University in New York does. I think New York became very quietly the underpinning, because all the laboratories were up there where people sent samples away, they send them away to Cornell. And then, you know, Virginia Tech did a little of it, but it was always this sort of State University, and do you support, you know, the devil alcohol? So, I'm thinking that you're right, in a very basic sense that we've reached the critical mass we've got what 400 some odd wineries?

**Fred Reno**

Yeah, it's hard to count them when they say 350. Somewhere in that neighbor.

**Bill Curtis**

Yeah, right. So, we can forge ahead now, but I think you've got to have the bonding effect of having guys who grew up in Virginia, same plot of land, got their degrees from Virginia Tech are coming back and listen, look at Oregon State. You know, when my friend Mike Etzel sent his kids to college, they all went to Oregon State two of them became Enologists.

**Fred Reno**

Now that you mentioned it Virginia has a lot of South African winemakers, a lot of French winemakers, a lot of winemakers who trained in California, and or are Italian. I hadn't thought about that angle.

**Bill Curtis**

Yeah, I mean, once you get a core of people who are native, grew up there, know what the food's like, know what the people are like. That's all involved with wine because wine is a social animal, it's totally different from liquor and all of that right. So, to me until Virginia Tech becomes totally integrated into this kind of situation and we can see degree people who for their work study programs are working and studying at Virginia wineries, you know, that kind of deal,

**Fred Reno**

I'm going to ask Bruce Zoecklein that question, because I have to speak to him later this week about something.

**Bill Curtis**

Last I knew they didn't offer it. That may have changed.

**Fred Reno**

Yeah, I'm with you, you've raised a question I can't answer so I should know that. I'm going to have to ask Bruce that. Well, what do you think about this 2014 La Chablisienne, Fourchaume?

**Bill Curtis**

Absolutely perfect as it is spot on for all of the terroir markers of honey and beeswax and a little bit of saltiness on the finish. It has that slightly limestone, flinty feel to it absolutely correct fruit texture. You know, ripe vintage '14, you said right. Yes, it is one of the ripest vintages, but still, you get the coolness in the very finish. It's not cloying at all. It's not heavy.

**Fred Reno**

It's begging for oysters. And even some stone claw crab?

**Bill Curtis**

Yeah, if you've got the \$100 and you want to buy a pound of them. That's all.

**Fred Reno**

Well, Bill this has been a lot of fun. And I'm going to close this folk, but Bill brought a bottle of Meursault Santenots from Marquis d'Angerville. 1993 Vintage. We're going to pop this and see what this tastes like. And you're not going to know because I'm going to shut this Podcast right down now. Bill thank you.

**Bill Curtis**

Thank you for having me.