

EPISODE # 36 WILLIAMSBURG WINERY/PATRICK DUFFELER FOUNDER & MATTHEW MEYER WINEMAKER

SPEAKERS

Matthew Meyer, Fred Reno, Patrick Duffeler

Fred Reno

Matthew, welcome to my Podcast.

Matthew Meyer

Thank you. Thanks for chatting with me.

Fred Reno

Oh, absolutely. So, as I like to begin, always at the beginning, what's your story? How did you get into this business?

Matthew Meyer

I've been in this business most of my whole life. My father was a, he was one of the last great imbibers of Burgundian by choice, and its wines. And my Mom was an incredible chef. Not professionally, but as all Moms are. So, I really grew up with food and wine, my father sent us all over to eat at the best restaurants. We traveled a lot internationally. Wine was just always a hobby and a passion. Since I would try wine as early as five years old. And then I was doing something completely different. I was doing international relations, public policy working in Asia, in my early 20s. And someone said, you should go back to California, go to UC Davis. You know, make your

hobby your career. When you went back where were you at that time, (FR) I moved from San Francisco to Washington, DC. And then went back to Davis and got my degree from Davis. Then worked in Napa, my first job was at Grgich Hills, did not go well. And don't need to go into that any further. Then right after Thanksgiving, Heitz Wine Cellars picked me up and I was there for a long time, became the assistant winemaker and became really a part of the family. I got to spend a lot of time with Joe Heitz, which was really quite a gift. I think it was a gift, no doubt about it. What year was that? This would be from like 96 to 2002. He was a great man. He was definitely a curmudgeon. He was grumpy. But, you know, it was great to be able to learn from him. And his family, son David and daughter Kathleen, and then got to work with some other pretty talented winemakers. More of the old school style, though, which I really liked. We learned things, and then we really learn things when we're actually in the field, little things that people don't normally think about. I was in Napa for a while and very happy. And then one thing led to another, and I was like, Well, let me go try Virginia. I think I liked what Virginia had the potential to be. And what I saw about the potential for Virginia, which I thought was truly remarkable, was that stylistically, I saw that they could preach both new and old-world styles at the same time. Which I don't think anybody else does it better than Virginia. You know, we could make some pretty big wines. That new world style, but even those are more elegant and more refined. Like the old-world style wines and I really grew up on a lot of French wines. Because of my father. In fact, when I was working in Napa, and even going to school he would send me Burgundy because he said you're going to ruin your palette if you keep drinking all those California wines, have some burgundy. And then my friends would find out about this, and they would say, hey, Matthew, I think we're ruining our palette. You should probably call your Dad and have

him send some more Burgundy's. Yeah, so that's it in a nutshell. That's what brought me here. And I think that I do really enjoy that aspect. Nothing wrong with the big California and the New World wines. I also make wine in Argentina. That was stymied and I haven't been there for a couple of years because of COVID. But I go to Mendoza to make a wine. So, I do like the big, big bold wines I think they can be very elegant. But I do like the idea of blending those and marrying the two styles.

Fred Reno

What's your favorite varietal here in Virginia to grow and produce wine from if there is one?

Matthew Meyer

I do have some favorites. I think for red it would be Petit Verdot and for white, it would be Albarino. I think Tannat is showing really well. I also believe that the new varieties are always exciting and it's fun to wrap your head around the new and fun unknowns. But Merlot does really well here. I remember when I moved here. I never forget Breaux Vineyards Reserve Merlot, I had it and I was like wow, this is a really fantastic representation of what Merlot should be. I could say the same thing about Chardonnay, we make some fabulous Chardonnay, Chardonnay, and Merlot they're not exciting. They've been around, they're what our grandparents drank, you know, but I do like Petit Verdot, and Tannat I think is going to be a really good one. Albarino and Petit Manseng.

Fred Reno

How long have you been growing Albarino here?

Matthew Meyer

We planted that about six years ago.

Fred Reno

I'm curious where you would have gotten the plant material.

Matthew Meyer

California. But it was an interesting discovery. Because NASA called. I thought, well, this is interesting. They had some young research scientists that had access to all of NASA satellites. And they mapped Virginia meter by meter. I mean really, like for everything. Climatically along with some slope and everything. I had all this data, and I was like, okay, so what? So now, please understand that this is an umbrella situation like a really umbrella. But when they took all that data and entered it and said, Okay, well, what is the closest from an umbrella view it is all encompassing with Northern Spain? I've been a big fan of Albarinos and Vinho Verde for a long time. So, I was like, great. I'm planting Albarino. Similar climate here. Yeah. And it really has done well. I've had some people from that part of the world on more than one occasion say, yeah, you nailed it. This is Albarino. That's important to me to be varietally Correct. So, I really think that Albarino is something that hopefully will grow. I would like to plant even more of it. Obviously, it's more well known in Europe than it is in the states here, but I think it's growing.

Fred Reno

How do you like working with what I used to call hybrid, but now I've been corrected by Lucie Morton and we're talking about multi-Vitis grapes here in VA. themselves? You make Chambourcin, you make

several others that I think I'm aware of. What's the difference of farming them and then working with them in the cellar?

Matthew Meyer

Well, we had Vidal Blanc and Traminette. The Traminette we pulled out last year. And I'm now planting Merlot and Syrah. Vidal blanc does very well. And I use that. The main thing is for dessert wine, the ice wine. We can't do ice wines here, per se. So, I cryogenically freeze them and pick them as late as possible and freeze them, press them when they're frozen. And I've had some very high awards with that. So, they really are quite nice. But on the whole, I don't think Vidal blanc was ever going to, it's never going to make it on its own as far as just a dry wine Vidal Blanc. We had a hard time selling Traminette. Its parentage being Gewurztraminer has that very strong floral nose and you either like it or you don't. When I said we're pulling the Traminette the whole viticulture crew jumped up. I have played around with some Chambourcin, I bought some Chambourcin grapes. And I have no dislike for the hybrids or whatever you want to call them. I just prefer *Vitis vinifera* and I think as an emerging region, and I could be wrong. But I don't think we would be taken as seriously in the fine wine community. If we were pushing heavy on the hybrids. I think if we were pushing heavy on the *Vitis vinifera*, people can wrap their heads around that a little bit more. And I could be wrong. It's just an opinion.

Fred Reno

I see. You also produce Norton, which I've become a big fan of recently. How do you like working with Norton?

Matthew Meyer

Norton? It's actually pretty fun. We were buying it from Chrysalis. Obviously, Jenni has done a sterling job promoting and working with Norton. I do some strange things in life. And Norton, I actually cold soak it, which is totally probably unnecessary. It's such it's such a big wine anyway, but I found by cold soaking it tends to take that Foxiness away. And then I put a little bit of Petit Verdot in it and kind of soften it which is seems strange that Petit Verdot would be used as a softener/

Fred Reno

It gives it a little tannin structure that it lacks, and you know, in mitigating that malic acid.

Matthew Meyer

It did work and people enjoyed it, and amendment to the wine club members. I do like it. I think it also, if we have a year, that's a little bit washed out because heavy rains. And we didn't get some of the anthocyanins within the color. You can Norton, in a small percentage can kind of bump up the body a little bit, not a lot, just a little bit. So, I think that in the cellar it was always something I like to do.

Fred Reno

What's the biggest challenge you see for what you're trying to achieve here and looking for? What do you think the biggest challenges that you're dealing with right now?

Matthew Meyer

Weather, the weather and the changing weather? When I first arrived here, it was amazing. We really did not have frost issues. Just every once in a while. I can also generally say our budbreak will be two weeks before Charlottesville in the mountain range. Well, now the

weather patterns have shifted, and we are getting later frost and our growing degree days if you want to go that way, we are bud breaking around the same time, closer to Charlottesville. So, I can see that. I can deal with a lot of things, you know, rain through viticultural practices. But that shift and temperature swings has been more dramatic in the past few years. And it's been noticeable.

Fred Reno

Well, you answered the question that I always ask, which is what have you seen in the vineyard because of climate change? And you just answered that question. The later and later Frost is one of them.

Matthew Meyer

Yeah. And that's gotten to be the norm. So, it's something that we have to contend with. We'll be contending with that. Probably on the Sunday and Monday.

Fred Reno

Oh, wow. Yeah, it's on our doorstep. So, Patrick, before I get back to Matthew on a couple of questions. Just wanted to set the stage here. You purchased this property in 1983. Correct? Yes, sir. And then you planted your vineyard in 1985. Yes, sir. And we'd had a conversation earlier you you'd brought Lucie Morton and as your consultant, affirmative. That is great. That would be the right expert to bring in, especially in this area of Virginia from my experience. And then if I understand correctly your first vintage, was it produced here on the property in 1988?

Patrick Duffeler

We had an '87 harvest, which were the first wines that we sold, and that came from a portion on the Eastern Shore from Dr. Gubb, who produced Riesling. We had a bunch of Vidal that we purchased from a company which was in Charlottesville, and I went to harvest that with some Mexicans. The Mexicans stopped working because it started raining. So, I kicked off my boots and walked down and lifted all the lugs and put them in the back of the trailer. I got enough experience at walking in the muck. But we had some very nice fruit. We had some Chardonnay, and it was from another source. And again, this was in '87. We launched the Governor's wine as a blend of 51% Riesling 49% Vidal. That same harvest, but we allowed it to go through a greater maturity than the Governor's white. We released that Chardonnay, which was not from our vineyards. In '88, we had a harvest from our own vineyards. It was all released early in '89, including the Chardonnay that won the Governor's Cup in 1989. We kept having a lot of fruit coming from a number of sources. At one time, we must have had almost 10 viticulturist that sent their fruit.

Matthew Meyer

Oh, probably we've had more than that.

Fred Reno

In fact, I was going to ask you that question next. Matthew, how many growers do you work with currently outside of your own property?

Matthew Meyer

Consistently? between eight and 10?

Fred Reno

I figured as much. How did you two come together? How did you end up here in 2002?

Matthew Meyer

Back then I was looking for a change. I was coming out to Eastern Virginia and someone else received my resume. And then they said, you know, you should probably go talk to Williamsburg and then Patrick called, and I flew out.

Fred Reno

Well, Patrick's that his story, what's yours?

Patrick Duffeler

My story was that Steve Warner joined us in late '87. He was part of the winery in the 90s. And at one point, Steve, who was a very friendly person, but lost interest in the wine world, because his wife was highly, highly, religious person. And wanted him to become a saving soul as opposed to making wine. And that made his decision. He told me in 2001, Patrick, I'm going to recycle myself in my life. But I will work with you as long as I have to, I was very aware that his level of fascination and passion for the wine industry had decreased. And we placed a couple of ads, in order to try to attract. We had offers from French people, we had offers from Italian people, we had offers from people who had been in multiple countries. We had also a very sharp person who was from, I think, Michigan, the Upper Michigan area. And we had a proposal from a gentleman called Matthew Meyer who had been with Heitz Cellars in California. I was interested. And we flew Matthew over here, I will say, in my own view, that we intellectually hit it off immediately. I have no claim to knowing how to make wine, I have a claim to knowing about how to drink wine and enjoy wine. I think I can

still, regardless of my old age, smell wine. It's very, very important. But I think everybody has to be focused on his own specialty. And Matthew will probably tell you, I don't interfere with him. I don't try to bug him.

Fred Reno

Well, you must not because he's been here 20 years. So that tells you all you need to know about the relationship. If somebody's been here that long.

Patrick Duffeler

We've have a lot of people in the company that have been here over 20 years.

Fred Reno

That's really remarkable. And that's also commendable at the same time.

Patrick Duffeler

Thank you. I just think that in business, you have to let experts be experts. We had a CFO who worked with us, and he just left us because even though he was over 60 he hadn't received a proposal that he couldn't resist. You understand what that means. When he came over to me, and I just said no, he said, it's work I can do from my home. I don't have to leave my home. So, I'll do everything on my two computers. So, we have to recognize right now we don't have a CFO. But he was a remarkable person. He got along very well with Matthew. I don't think he ever asked questions about winemaking. He asked question about monetary issues, because everybody's got their own specialty and they've got to stick to their specialty.

Fred Reno

Well, I'm going to ask Matthew here my absolute favorite question. I like to ask every vintner and Patrick, I know yours. But I'll get you on tape here shortly. So, Matthew everybody has this in the wine business Is that one bottle of wine that they had one day that went? Bingo. Wow, that wine. Now I get it. Now I understand how ethereal wine can be. And the light bulb went off and everybody has that one bottle. What was yours?

Matthew Meyer

I don't. Probably because I think I started so early with my father. You know, just tasting obviously at dinner table getting a little sip and smelling it and talking about it. So, from my earliest recollections, I didn't need an epiphany moment, wine was already an aha moment. I have my ones that I really do enjoy, and they run a pretty large gamut because as a collector, I drink a lot of different styles and I think that is important. I also thought it was always important never to have a cellar palette. In the sense that there are some that only drink their own wines and that's what they know. So, and I thought it was important to have a lot so, I do have favorites. I drink large amount of champagne. I collect champagne. I collect it, I enjoy that. But really, I wish I had that fun story. But that's just my whole life has been about wine.

Fred Reno

Well, Patrick, you told me this earlier over lunch, but I'd love to have you talk about that moment because you'd mentioned that to me earlier, please go ahead and talk about that.

Patrick Duffeler

There are many things that have attracted me to the wine industry, its history. Its history all the way to Hugh Johnson talking about picking up all the floras in the Black Sea and finding about so it's been with human development for about 30 centuries. We know that and possibly more. We know the Egyptians had wine although I wasn't there. Although my kids believed that I had been there at the time. They were not totally accurate. I have had the epiphany Yes, of coming to love wine over in '56 When my father took us to a white tablecloth restaurant in Périgord, and my father said, Now I want to expose you to Foie Gras and Monbazillac, it was very important, but probably the greatest epiphany on wine it was when I was working in Burgundy. And I was working with Maître de Chai, the winemaker, the cellar master, as they would say in France and he talked to me about Patrick, you have to know the reality of the Miracles after Midnight. And the Miracles after Midnight was something that Mr. Galet was very fond of. Because he knew and we talked about the weather factor affecting burgundy as well as the impact Bordeaux or California or Virginia. I had not been involved in Bordeaux, then as well but spent a fair amount of time in Burgundy as I mentioned to you. Here I was in the cellar and Monsieur Galet said to me, sometimes you have Pinot Noir, that lack in color and consistency. And he said I have my medicine wine. And the medicine wine was something that he would go, as a gentleman double breasted suit every morning, he was in his early 70s. So younger than what I am now. But this was in the late 70s. It was mostly 77, 78, 79. And Monsieur Galet was absolutely wonderful because he had a one of his cellar workers who was in his blue outfit very familiar in Burgundy. And he would say, Okay, this barrel needs about one and a half percent of the medicine wine. And the medicine wine was a robust south-western wine that he would add. And of course, why is it Miracle after Midnight, it's because if you have a Pinot

Noir from Burgundy in an appellation-controlled area, it has to be 100% wine from the area, from the varietal and from, you know, the designated vineyards. Well, the French have a mental elasticity about that. Thank heavens, my experience is that in the US, the government doesn't tell you which varietal your wine should be, but they start designating the varieties and the varietals have to be listed if you use three varietals or more than 70%, if you got 75% of one variety it's enough for them to say, you know, so we have more flexibility than the French. But we don't do Miracles after Midnight here, right because it's not necessary. But in France, I found out after also, my experience in Bordeaux, that Miracles after Midnight is more frequent in France than one might think I found somebody who was in from Southwestern France, who was making a Cab and he was also making Merlot. And I said, Okay, how much do you have? How much of the Cab and how much of the Merlot? He said it's 50/50 of each. And I said you call it a Cab and you call it a Merlot. And, he said shit, it's the same stuff.

Fred Reno

Oh my god!

Patrick Duffeler

I'm not knocking it. I think, ultimately, I have a mind that says, it's what's in the palette and for the palette of the person. I remember there was a guy who sent a nasty report to the Wine Spectator saying, I drank a Penfold's, and I found out they use a concentrate to give it body. And I think it's outrageous. \$75 for a bottle where you got concentrate. I guess I made a comment that I sent into the Wine Spectator, and I said, Did he like the wine? Right? Did he enjoy the wine? Does it matter how it's made? Maybe the ATF at the time had not said that. If they use concentrate, they should say so. But that's not

the point. I mean, the fact is, if it passed, the test of the regulatory aspect of the concentrate was a concentrate from the varietal that he was to claim that it was from, it doesn't matter. The key part in wine is not having a finger up in the air and just talking about oh, I know the winemaker. And I know the terroir that is coming from, and I know this, and I know that, a lot of that is actually BS. The truth is, what do you like? And what does your palette say? And your sense of flavor? My old story has been for years. Nobody tells you how to eat your chicken. Right? You know what you like? Why should somebody tell you what you should like and why.

Fred Reno

They shouldn't? Well, Matthew, I got a question for you that I don't know how much interface in the 20 years here you had with consumers directly. Who are your consumers that are coming here? But what's been the change in the pattern? By that I mean, the consumers that you're seeing today, here at Williamsburg Winery, how do they differ from what you saw when you first came here?

Matthew Meyer

They're more educated now about wine, and generally, more eager to learn more. They have become more wine centric, which is a great change. Before when I first got here there was a lot of more tourists with something to do. And now it's, you know, we like wine. And we're going to come here because we like your wine. So that's been a nice, a nice change. And yeah. Younger people, I hate to use the word millennial to throw that word around. But the younger people are coming more. So, it's been very refreshing.

Fred Reno

What type of library cellar does Williamsburg winery have? And by that, I mean, what's the oldest wine you've tasted from the cellar here? And how do these wines stand the test of time, from your experience?

Matthew Meyer

I think they're standing really well. We have some excellent reds. We even have some old whites. We've always had a policy here. Even before I started, Patrick had been pulling wines and holding them just for that reason. So, we have a whole library set of library wines. And I think that's important, not only for us, but as an emerging region where we can go back and say, Well, look how they're aging and how they're holding up.

Fred Reno

For me, the key to wine. It's not if it will age and hold up. But does it get more interesting?

Matthew Meyer

Yes. Well, I can tell you that I get this debate all the time. And I think there's a lot of collectors that hold their wine way too long. I think most wines, I don't care how big they are. Around eight to 12 years, they're really good. You can still get the vintage, you can still get the winemakers personality, and that vintage's personality. I think as wines get older and older; it becomes a novelty. If you want to pull out a Mission Haut-Brion You know, from whatever I've had, back if you go to Petrus, back into the 50s. And every time I have one of these old wines, It just makes me sad. And I think wow, I wish we drank this like 20 years ago.

Fred Reno

Well, yeah, it's interesting. You say it because I had that experience in the 80s. We used to have a group in DC when I lived there. We had a little dinner we used to call the "Young and the Decadent" and we would have a lot of different older wines and Burgundies. And one of the dinners had, this would have been mid to late 80s, had a 1945 Chateau Mouton Rothschild, and everybody's waxing poetically around the table. And I said, this wine is dead. What are you talking about? This wine is just dead. I can't drink this, to your point.

Matthew Meyer

Yeah. I see that a lot. But it's again, there are a lot of egos in this industry, if you can imagine. And you know, people, so there's a lot of people that they want to be the person who can put down that really great old bottle. And there are some wines that do age well don't get me wrong, and they're fun. But as to your point, if it's not getting better or more interesting, then what's the point? So, I don't hold wines. I might joke all the time. As you know, I'm quite happy just letting the wine age in my stomach.

Fred Reno

I Like that. That's a really good saying. Patrick, I have a question that I'm curious about. We haven't touched on. Do you have any level of national distribution outside of the Mid-Atlantic region?

Patrick Duffeler

No, sir. But on the issue of aging wines, and aging wines from the Williamsburg Winery. One of my pleasures was the fact that we had a very good friendly relationship with the senior partner of a Merchant banking firm that we worked with over from Richmond. And the gentleman called me in about 2003. And he said, I've tasted your

Gabriel Archer Reserve for 10 years since the first one that was released. And the first one I released was a '91. And he said, I have kept a great memory epiphany, if you wish, about the taste of your '93. And I said yes. And he said, How much do you have left? And I said, we got about a couple of cases. This was in 2003. So, it was 10-years old. And he said, I'll buy one of those two cases on the spot. And we gave him it because he was a friend. We gave him the real thing. But it was interesting because it was an intrigue to me. I happen to love old wines. Matthew knows that. And he told me a couple of the old ones that I pulled together with him. And he said, This wine is declining in its profile. And I accept it. But at the same time. I drink on a daily basis, very young wines. 90% of it, 95% of it. But just out of fun out of the ambiance of the moment, I will pull a bottle that's 10, 15, 20 years old. And yes, like Matthew said and was correct. He said baa. It's over its peak. It's over. It's tough. But he accepts it. I accept that. And we enjoy it. Because yes, pulling an old bottle is something.

Fred Reno

well, there's some history there. I want to go back to this national distribution though. Have you tried? And what's the barrier if you've tried? Or do you even want to?

Patrick Duffeler

Okay, we did a limited amount of trying when we had Rob Bickford at the time, as I mentioned to you working with us. And he is a magician as a salesperson with wholesale distributors. At the best of time, both Matthew and I shared the opinion about wholesale distributors. There are very few that are really wine oriented. They are only thinking in terms of pallet to go out the door and how much money they can make out of that. Yes, there's no question when I think in terms of, well I

showed you our pattern study and our evolution. I have a lot of respect for Mr. Frederick Reno because he is for this Free Trade support. And I can't wait until we have the right to even expand the distribution of wine on a direct basis. Now, if you sell a wine at 10 bucks a bottle, you're not going to have anybody from Chicago saying I want you to ship me a half case of your wine. But then when you start having bottles like the Adagio or the Gabriel Archer Reserve or the Trianon are selling for \$45 to \$50, sure there is somebody from a Chicago who might want to have case of that. I believe it and let me add one as a last thing, the entire European continent has abandoned the case volume industry, they've all gone to the six pack, six bottle case. And I think that this is something we're going to be considering, particularly in the ability to ship six pack to customers on a broader basis than just directly in the Mid Atlantic area is going to be a real thing. And when I have somebody who's thinking about free trade concepts of the world of wine, and the incredible fantasy that you know, just to register your labels in Connecticut, you have to pay a high amount of money. So, we don't sell anything to Connecticut if we don't want to.

Fred Reno

No, I understand where you're coming from. Well, Matthew, question back to you coming from a winery, which was Internationally known, like Heitz Cellar, and then coming to Williamsburg winery. If you say you're with Williamsburg winery, if they don't know you then probably half the wine business goes, who's that?

Matthew Meyer

Yes, it was, it was challenging, because I was used to an environment where people called Heitz, and we would just say, You know what, you can have a case this year. Or if you're nice, we'll give you two cases.

But I think that was also a reflection of that people were not, it wasn't just Williamsburg, it was Virginia wines were not as known. So, people weren't asking for them. It was the first time I found myself having to explain, no, these wines are really good. You really need to try them, as opposed to someone just saying no, we don't need to try them, you know, just send them to us. So that was a challenge to think about, as okay, it wasn't something I was used to? How do I tell somebody? This is? You know, this is good wine. You have to try it and, it'll do well for you?

Fred Reno

I will tell you, from my experience, one of the things that I hear all the time, still, which surprises me, because these people who are talking, they don't know what they're talking about. They're saying, well, Virginia wine is really expensive. And I'm like, you know, in Virginia, in the sweet spot, \$25 to \$35, retail, you can buy some world quality wine, and wine that is equal to wines that sell for \$50 to \$75 from California, or other regions in the world. I've had many wineries tell me since I've been here. Well, Fred, I don't make that much wine. And we have 1000 cases or whatever it might be. I say, Do you understand that some of the greatest wines in the world are made in 500 cases or smaller lots. And everybody in the world wants them. Everybody's clamoring for them. That's my mission right now is to get that word out about Virginia that no, these wines are not expensive. They are relatively a bargain. In fact, just to go on record. There's reputedly about 300 wineries here in Virginia. I haven't tasted all the wines, although I'm trying, I haven't tasted them all. But from what I tasted my professional opinion is, a good 15%, it could be higher, of the producers here in Virginia make as good a quality of wine as anybody in the world full stop. Now, some of the varietals, as we know are a

little different, that drive the business-like Petit Manseng has excitement around it. Petit Verdot has become a bit of a signature grape here is as Cabernet Franc was before, but the actual pure quality of the wine is equal to anywhere in the world.

Matthew Meyer

Absolutely.

Fred Reno

So, Patrick,

Patrick Duffeler

my answer to that one is slightly evolutionary, with Matthew, in the sense that I completely agree with the comment that obviously, when you're working for a Heitz, you don't have to make any statement except that I work for Heitz. The issue in Virginia has been a challenge. Because the truth is, in the 80s and 90s, there were a lot of Virginia wines which were overpriced. That has changed completely. I did not believe that the first wines we released in '88 needed to be over \$10. I wanted to be under \$10 such that it could get into the mainstream. The mainstream has changed a great deal and of course, the cost of living has changed also over the last 30 years, 35 years. So, Virginia wines have not increased nearly as much on a comparative basis. Because the people who make great wines in Virginia have really absorbed the situation, I think they're probably a little bit more and I believe there are 320 wineries overall in Virginia. My opinion is there are probably 15 to 20 that are really professional, there are quite a number more, quite a number more, which I would say probably about 25% of the winemakers now in Virginia, are conscious that they have to produce a quality product at a balanced price point, that satisfied the customer.

But the image of overpriced Virginia wine has been something that's been around since the 90s. Now, that is no longer the case. Because you have a greater difference between the people who are producing let's call it at least 10,000 cases, but maybe up to 40,000 50,000 cases. And the people who are absolutely exceptional in quality, but only do 3500 cases, like Jim Law, who's really just about between 3.5 and 5000 cases. And he never participated in competitions. And that's just it's his niche. I wanted a different niche. I wanted also to have a broader approach. We are very pleased we have over 1500 members in our wine club. They get a lot of people, they talk to Matthew, they love to talk to Matthew, love to hear Matthew, they welcome the wine. And like Matthew was saying they will try new wines that sometimes Matthew makes, especially for the wine club, limited release. We make 100 cases; 200 cases and they love the trying. Like Rkatsiteli

Fred Reno

I see you have Rkatsiteli and that's wonderful. You get the grapes from Horton? Yeah. Because Where else would you get them? Right?

Matthew Meyer

I would also reiterate too on that because it's something that we hear a lot, especially particularly my wife. But I think truly that the people that say Virginia wines are too expensive, are not the real connoisseurs. I think a real connoisseur weighs the value and says no, they're good wines, the people that say that are buying \$10 and under California wines, and they know them. And that's the comparison they make well, why should I buy that when I can just buy this wine for. And then there are admittedly some restaurateurs that are just looking at that dollar price and saying well, but I can get a California, or Australia, or Argentine wine for you know, four or \$5. And I can put it by the glass

make a ton of money. Virginia wines are just too expensive. So, to me, it hasn't really bothered me, because I know the people that really understand, know that we are fair market priced for our quality. And that's reassuring to me, there's always going to be people that don't understand. And I think they're the ones that are sometimes the loudest unfortunately, when it comes to oh, they're too expensive.

Fred Reno

Well, let's turn to this question, Patrick, the future of Virginia wine, what has to take place here? What do you see down the road here 10, 20 years of wine growing, and the future of Virginia wine to really get that awareness? On a much broader scale? Maybe it is the direct to consumer that is what's going to drive that nationally. I don't know.

Patrick Duffeler

My outlook for the next number of years is actually very bright for Virginia. Real experts, there are quite a few people who love wine. People who love wine as an industry who have a passion for wine. Real wine experts respect the passion that wine makers have for what they make. And that's critically important. It has to become more perceived. Let's call it Nationally. Now what Matthew can say about the wines that he makes, or what I can say about the wines that he makes is irrelevant, because anybody who listens to either Matthew or to me is going to say they have a prejudice point of view. The issue that is so fundamental is what you as a completely independent person who has a lot of experience in the wine industry, who has a good palette, who has a palette experience and know what's called price points of products and their business style. When that statement can become perceived by people who have a national interest, all of a sudden, there will be a click. And that's sometimes what it takes. It's a click of

awareness and a lot of people to just say, all of a sudden, oh, yes, they have come of age, the tipping point, the tipping point of coming of age. This happened to Oregon. It happened in many respects to Washington. I was a good friend with Steven Spurrier. And I met him when I was involved in Burgundy. And I'm talking about 1978, when he was the owner of Académie du Vin in Paris. And a lot of French people would say, what, how can an Englishman be the one who is the Wine Academy over in Paris, and we all know the judgement of Paris was the tipping point for California. And that is what's going to happen. It's a similar tipping point. And maybe it's going to be an auction, maybe it's going to be Grand Tasting. And we can talk about that because I'm very oriented towards that. We participate in a wine auction in Virginia Beach, which has 750 people there. Matthew was reminding me recently about the fact that majority of those people are totally California oriented.

Fred Reno

I am going to switch here really quickly because you made me think of something here. As it relates to the Virginia wine industry and where we're at, in our evolution. I still think that this is the most exciting wine region in America today, for wine growing. Especially because the experimentation, and what I tell people who don't know anything about Virginia. I say listen, you have to think about Virginia, like France, or even Italy, France, for instance, they don't grow Pinot Noir in Bordeaux, and they don't grow Cabernet Sauvignon in Burgundy. I say the diversity of what goes on here in Virginia, is so exciting and so interesting. And despite our discussion about climate change earlier, I can tell you, and I would love your comment, Matthew, because you honed your skills there. I saw progressively in California, that they couldn't get physiological ripeness in a grape at 24 degrees of sugar,

or even 25. They could get sugar ripeness, but not physiological ripeness. So, they would leave it hang, you know, to 26, 27 in some cases, produce the wine because now they got the seeds aren't green and they get the physiological ripeness. And then, of course, people don't know this, but it's legal in California, to water back and put a certain percent in the tank. So, they either water back, okay, or they De-alc the wine to get the alcohol under 15 Somehow, right? And folks, if you see 14.5 alcohol on a label, it's over 15. I can tell you that right now. But the point I'm making is doing that strips the soul out of the wine. And for me what Virginia has in their wines, they still have soul, they still have a soul that you can taste a sense of place.

Matthew Meyer

Absolutely. I do have a theory, though, about California. Because I think it's important when phylloxera went ramped through their vineyards because UC Davis comes out with AXR1 rootstock, which its parentage is *Vitus vinifera*, everybody jumped on board. And I've been having California wines for many, many years. And if you go back to the 80s, some of these beautiful, beautiful wines had about 13% alcohol, AXR1 rootstock, now, AXR1 one starts to fall, eventually it would. Now everybody's clamoring. They need rootstock. And they're quite mad at UC Davis. So, then they start doing all you know, 101-14 30309, all these new Riparia, all these new Rootstocks that don't have any *Vitus vinifera*, parentage. (interesting), and I think what's happened there is that now, they're on different feet and they're not on their own feet. completely different. I think that has changed some of that because you're right. When I was trained by some of these old timers, the old school guys in California. Where you tasted them, and they're like, that's just not ripe. I'm sorry. Yes, I've got 24 and a half bricks, flavors are not there. Let them hang for a little bit longer. So, to me,

that is one of my theories. I could be wrong. But I think I think I'm right. You know, and then you did get these bigger wines. Now, but again, I would argue, I honestly don't care if a wine has 15% alcohol, if I can't taste it, if it's balanced, and I can't taste it. I don't think it's flawed. But I've had flawed wines that are 13 and a half 14% alcohol because you can taste it and they're not balanced.

Fred Reno

I'm in complete agreement here. I'm not put off by the alcohol. What I am saying though, is too much manipulation for me, strips the soul out of the wine. Absolutely. Yes. You know, and that's the concern I would have.

Matthew Meyer

And I do think that Virginia is gaining a reputation for a style. We do have a style, which again, as I mentioned earlier, that blending of the Old and New world, that marriage of those two, I think is unique for Virginia, and I think, Virginia, it's unique that nobody else does it better than we do.

Fred Reno

I would agree. They're just the great combination. Who's that that said, Virginia is halfway between Europe and the West Coast. Yeah, in geographically, we're the middle.

Patrick Duffeler

There's the element that in many respects, Matthew's background, is from an English family and from an English family that appreciated Pinot Noir. Matthews told me so many times right now, about his Dad bringing out some Pinot Noir

Fred Reno

As opposed to Claret.

Patrick Duffeler

And my background also goes into the European flavors. And my view is that the first objective in a wine is not to splash, more alcohol than other products, or more aggressive flavor than other products. I think the most important is the elegance of the product in itself. In its flavor. My bitch about the concept of so many of the competitions is when you are asking a guy to taste and I was in the fragrance industry, I mentioned that to you. When you ask somebody to taste 120 wines in the morning, you will remember maybe two or three at the end of the morning. Because Oh yeah, they're aggressive wine. And I remember the aggressive one. I remember the one that's over alcohol-ed. You can't focus anymore on the distinction on the genuine elements of the flavored components.

Fred Reno

Well, I don't disagree with you. In fact, Matthew, I was going to ask you the question. I'm curious, I learned something very valuable when I was at Sonoma-Cutrer, from Bill Bonetti. I don't know if you've ever had an opportunity to ever meet Bill Bonetti. But I called him the Leonardo da Vinci of the wine business. He was always tinkering. I learned so much from him. And he was when I got there, he had almost 40 years of making wine in California. So, he had a lot of that background. But we did all of our technical tastings at 11am every morning, and I'd say Bill, why 11 and he goes, that's when your palette is at its best.

Patrick Duffeler

That's what perfumers would say to me

Matthew Meyer

We do most of our tastings between 10 and 11:30.

Fred Reno

Interesting. Yeah, you know, and the other thing I learned a long time ago, from a consumer standpoint, most people buy wine based on the way it smells, whether they know it or not, than the way it tastes. And by that, I mean, if you hand a consumer a glass wine, and there's a very beautiful bouquet, the wine jumps out of the glass. They're predisposed to like that wine already. If you hand them a glass of wine that really doesn't have a lot of aromas, hasn't developed anything. They're predisposed to kind of not like the wine and say it's just okay. Has that been your experience?

Matthew Meyer

Oh, absolutely. Especially if we look at the fact that you know, 90% of what you're tasting is really what you smell. Because if you don't have a sense of smell, you're not going to taste anything. You've got sweet, sour, salty, bitter, that's it, it completely goes away. So, the sense of smell is critically important. It's also of all of our senses. It's the one that has the longest memory. I know, I can close my eyes and I can tell you exactly what my grandfather's garage smells like, I can feel it in my mind. I know what it smelled like. So that sense of smell is, is really, really important. Plus, if a wine smells good. I think I would even take it another bit further, in addition to the how the olfactory how the smell of this wine is important, also is visually. I think if you give somebody a wine, which is visually not what they're expecting, in the sense that if I

say here's a Cabernet Sauvignon, and it looks like a Pinot Noir, you're going to say, I don't like it. So, smell, visual, and then you've already made your mind up. And if you've made up your mind, it's not going to taste good. So, I think that's why you really have to that balance that structure.

Fred Reno

Well, Patrick, you had said that being in the fragrance business, you know that?

Patrick Duffeler

Yes. Oh, absolutely. The thing is, the fragrance people would tell me because when I get into an industry I just want to really understand so, I want to literally lead an educational course and perfumery at the company which was specialized in fragrances called Fragrance Selective in Switzerland. Anyway, they identified 11 o'clock in the morning as the best time for the olfactory system. But most importantly, they were saying we perfumers can probably be comfortable up to 18 sniffing of different products. After 18 We don't And they say you guys, and we were two in the course, said you guys are not from professional perfumers. We recommend you stop trying to sniff after 12. You're going to be learning a little bit more after professionalizing, but I don't care whether you're a genius or anything after 18 You are not going to be capable. You're going to have saturation in your olfactory sense. And my criteria for wine actually is I love the smell of wine. I love the color of wine. I love the taste of wine, but the aftertaste is what I really look for. Because that is the element that a wine is and there's an awful lot of wines that, if an okay nose and that nice color, a nice flavor, but have zero aftertaste. To me. That's really short. I love the aftertaste.

Fred Reno

Well, Patrick, Matthew, appreciate your time here today. This has been terrific. Thank you. We'll get this documented and it will be part of the oral history.