

EPISODE #39; CHELSEY BLEVINS/WINEMAKER AT FIFTY-THIRD WINERY.

SPEAKERS

Chelsey Blevins, Fred Reno

Fred Reno

Chelsey welcome to my Podcast and the C'ville Chapter of the White Burgundy Club.

Chelsey Blevins

Thank you so much for having me on today. It's wonderful to come in into your office and get to chat about a lot of different things going on with the Virginia history.

Fred Reno

Well, as I always like to say I start at the beginning. Yep. What's your story? How did you get into this whole gig?

Chelsey Blevins

Yeah, so it's kind of funny. I always say you know winemaking sort of found me I never really grew up thinking you could be a winemaker. But I got out of college back in 2014. It was kind of like, you know, what, next for me, what am I going to do next and just on a whim, one day happened to drive by Horton vineyards just went in for a wine tasting. And I was kind of the only one there in the tasting room. So, I had a lot of time to kind of pick the brain of the tasting room, staff member and they were like, Oh, this girl is definitely interested. Let's take her downstairs for a tour. So, I went downstairs for the tour. You know, I was in awe of all the big tanks everywhere, all the barrels everywhere. And I met the winemaker, at the time his name was Mike Henry. He took me around showed me everything and at the end of the tour, he was like, Hey, would you like a harvest job? And I was like, You know what? Sure. I don't know exactly what that would entail. But I'm definitely interested in learning more about the winemaking process. What year was that? That was 2014. Yeah, it was right in July, so was right before harvest. And I think they were just like gearing up trying to find some more interns to help them out. And, you know, I looked at Mike, I was like, you know, what am I actually going to be doing here? Because I'm just such a novice in this industry. And he's like, Oh, you'll just be cleaning things. And I was like, okay, I can do that. That should be fine.

Fred Reno

That's a hell of a good training to start under Mike Henry. Did you have an opportunity to have much interaction with Dennis Horton?

Chelsey Blevins

I actually did get to meet Dennis, I think two or three times, he was a little bit out of the picture at that point in time. I know his health was kind of declining a bit then, but he did stop and every now and then he would say hi to all of us, just check on like the wines and see how everything was going.

Fred Reno

And so, after the internship where did that lead you to?

Chelsey Blevins

so, after I finished my internship there at Horton, I actually jumped in at Barboursville Vineyards. I took an employment in their Wine Library, which is really interesting for me, because, you know, I got to learn a lot about the different vintage variations here in the state, you know, we would open up like three or four different Octagons in a day maybe like two or three different Cab Francs from different vintages and I got to taste them and kind of sell them and you know, explore into the depth of like, what Virginia really offers through a long course of time. I actually gained a lot of experience learning about different Virginia wines through that job too

Fred Reno

what kind of interaction were you able to have with Luca?

Chelsey Blevins

Oh, yes, I actually got to know like Luca, Daniele, Fernando, Alessandro, all of them, we would all have dinner together, we pull out all these different wines. And, you know, we would kind of discuss everything we would taste wines together and talk about like what we were tasting, which was awesome. So, I love those guys. I have a lot of respect for them all over there.

Fred Reno

Well, I always say about Luca, there was an old EF Hutton ad in the eighties that said when EF Hutton talks, everyone listens. Well, I always say when Luca talks, everyone listens.

Chelsey Blevins

Oh, yes, definitely.

Fred Reno

So then, you're going to PVCC to take some classes that how you met Dave Drillock?

Chelsey Blevins

Yeah, So while I was working out at Barboursville, I knew I needed to expand my knowledge in the wine industry a little bit further. I looked into taking the PVCC courses. And yeah, that's where I started meeting Dave, I started meeting other winemakers and wine growers throughout the state and just getting a little bit more experience. Those classes were fantastic. Because in the morning, you would sit down and have a lecture part and, in the afternoon, you'd actually be getting out in the vineyard, working with these people and learning and seeing the vines and stuff. So, for me, it was just helping me grow a little bit more of my knowledge base.

Fred Reno

You know, I'm curious about that. Because my friend Scott Elliff out at DuCard has a connection with PVCC for interns, what vineyard were you able to work in?

Chelsey Blevins

Oh, yeah. I actually did work with Scott and Julien out at DuCard. I did a little bit of pruning out in their Norton vines. You know, we're kind of watching it through the season. It was, I believe, a vineyard management course that I took with them. Okay, so yeah, I got to meet those guys. They're awesome people. But yeah, just try to continue my knowledge in that way. And then through those classes is where I met Dave Drillock. He was taking the classes at the same time that I was. One of the days he came up to me, he's like, You were taking a lot of notes in your notebook, like, What are you writing down? And I was just trying to absorb everything I could from these classes. And he, he looked at me, he was like, Are you interested in an assistant winemaker position? And I was like, actually, yes. I would love to, like, get back into the production side of things. You know,

Fred Reno

Fantastic. Well, it sounds like a very serendipitous meeting and just a wonderful path. And then you got to work under Graham Bell.

Chelsey Blevins

Yeah. I joined 53rd winery in 2015. So that's when Dave and Susan were first started. Take on the business. And so, I studied under Graham Bell, we work together up until 2019. And I just started learning everything I could through him, and you know, it was just me and him in the cellar. I mean, I was in there doing everything with him. So

Fred Reno

Well, let me see, Mike Henry, Dennis Horton, Luca, Graham Bell, what an amazing star-studded lineup you got to learn under.

Chelsey Blevins

I feel very fortunate. But like I was saying, like, Winemaking, just all sort of found me and it all just started happening. And you know, I felt like I was just at the right place at the right time get to where I've gotten today

Fred Reno

Was wine, something you would enjoy yourself prior to any of this?

Chelsey Blevins

in college, I actually did drink a little bit of wine. But I mean, it was it's not what I enjoy today. I actually used to drink this Moscato that the Zonin Family produced, which I thought was kind of funny, you know, looking back now and then I also really liked this Franzia Boxed Wine called Red Delicious, that was like my go to in college, but so like, my wine knowledge kind of just started there. And then once I got into Horton, and I was exposed to, you know, 40 different wines, I was like, wow, there's really a

whole broad range of flavor out there. And it really got me interested in learning more about like, you know, what else was out there. So, my palate really grew and expanded from that.

Fred Reno

You come to 53rd winery and that's a pretty unique situation there because you have two different distinct vineyards and two different growing areas. One that is primarily, mostly all French American hybrid. And some Norton to be planted there in the future. And then the other vineyard is really more of vinifera up in the hills of the Shenandoah. So, what's it like working with that kind of mosaic of different varieties?

Chelsey Blevins

Oh, for me, as a winemaker, it's so fun, you know. I tried to when I get all the grapes in the cellar, I try to keep everything as separate as possible. And what that does is it gives me a lot of different blending options; I get to really see the different flavors that kind of come out from the different varieties planted on the two different sites. For me, it just has really helped my knowledge base kind of grow and expand in that aspect. But it's just it's fun to kind of play around with the two sites.

Fred Reno

I'm curious about that. Do the grapes come in at different times usually? Or do you get sort of a mad crush and a lot of things coming in at the same time and ripening?

Chelsey Blevins

It kind of depends on the season, but for the most part, they do ripen differently. So, the site that's in Louisa County tends to ripen about two to three weeks earlier than the one that's at Simmons gap that's in the mountainside at Dave's property. So, but I mean, I believe it was last year, just the way that the season was going, you know, once September hits, like everything just started pouring in. It's like okay, here we go, let's get this processed.

Fred Reno

From a winemaking standpoint, what's the difference between working with a French American hybrid, or an American hybrid in the case of chardonnay, which you have one of the better chardonnays I've tasted here in the state. working with that, and then working with classic vinifera?

Chelsey Blevins

Oh, so they're they're night and day different from what I've found. You know, your hybrid wines are going to be very different from the vinifera because you know, you're going to get high TAs, which is your total acidity, they have more proteins and a lot more pectin's in those grapes. The reason there's more proteins and pectin's is because of the disease resistance that the grapes actually have, the vinifera wines don't have as much of that. So, with my winemaking style, I really have to tailor each individual wine to the type of grape that we have. And I think that's why we've been so successful. I try to keep in mind, hey, I'm getting the Chambourcin in, you know, I need to make sure I use enzymes. I need to make sure I press it with rice holes, so I don't clog up the press. And then also keep in mind of like the acidity and the low tannin amounts in that wine and just try to make it as fine-tuned to the wine as possible.

Fred Reno

Wow. That's, that must be really fun, but challenging at the same time.

Chelsey Blevins

Oh Yeah, I mean, you've always got to be on your toes here in Virginia. I'm not only just keeping track of what's going on out in the vineyard with the weather, but also, you know, how are those grapes developing? And then what are they giving me each year? And how are they different from one another.

Fred Reno

and then I have to ask you about my latest passion, which is wine's being produced from Norton, and the Norton grape. What's it like working with Norton?

Chelsey Blevins

So, Norton a lot of winemakers have a love hate relationship with that grape. That's kind of a given. But I've been dealing with Norton, since the beginning of my wine career, when I started out at Horton vineyards, I've had a lot of experience working with this grape. So how it kind of develops in the vineyard is you get these really small, tiny berries, they don't have a lot of juice in them, you know, they've got these thick skins on them. It's really hard to get a lot of juice out of the grapes initially when you start processing them. So, I have to do a little bit more of like extended maceration on these grapes, you know, I have to run them through the destemmer to try to break them up a little bit more to get more juice extracted. The punch downs are a little bit of a doozy, it sometimes takes my whole-body weight to kind of breakthrough that cap. But as long as you kind of do like the extended maturation and kind of help break it up as much as possible in the beginning, you'll get a good juice product out of it. And then after I kind of get it into the wine form, you know, I definitely put it through malolactic fermentation. Norton has really high malic acid in it. So that kind of helps cut that down and balance out the wine a little bit more. And then we also try to age as long as possible in the cellar just to try to give it a little bit more finesse. Yeah, David told me a story that I thought was really interesting, about the very first vintage Norton he had a 53rd It was a 2015. Yeah, I guess it would have been Graham who came to him one day, I think in late 16 or 17. Yep. And said, Hey, I forgot about these barrels. And I'm really sorry. And Dave said, we'll make the blend. And Dave said this wine is fantastic. And that's how he got the idea of, okay, we better barrel age this longer. Yeah, no, I thought it was funny, too. We kind of forgot about those barrels, you know, you kind of get caught up with everything else in the cellar. And then we were going through, we're putting these blends together. We're like, wow, like this is actually really developed very nicely. You know, it actually like the astringency kind of cut down on it, you've really developed some nice flavors for us, and that that wine flew off the shelves.

Fred Reno

I bought a bottle of 2015, just recently at Tastings because Bill Curtis, he always has all these older bottles, and every now and then he'll put one or two of them out of his backroom there on the shelf just to see if somebody will pick them up. Yeah. And I happen to be cruising in there and went, Oh, I need to get that, you know, I can't wait to open it as part of my journey here to chronicle what that tastes like because that's to me, that's a great story. And that's got to be an interesting wine.

Chelsey Blevins

oh, it's such a fun wine. And 2015 was actually a really great year for Norton. It's actually one of my favorite Norton's that we've put out so far that in the 2019 I'm actually really fond of right now. So

Fred Reno

If there's such a thing, what's your favorite varietal to work with?

Chelsey Blevins

Oh, man, that's a tough one. So, I guess right now I really love Chardonnay now is just one of my go to varieties because you know, it does so well for us in the vineyard. We don't have to spray as much. It's more of an eco-friendly grape in my opinion. And then once I get it into the cellar, I just add the yeast in there and let it go. And it makes a beautiful wine for us every time it's really light. It's really refreshing. It gives you a lot of great granny smith apple notes. You also get a little bit of mineral character from it, but it's a really complex wine for a hybrid you really wouldn't expect that to be honest.

Fred Reno

I'm a bit surprised that there isn't more Chardonnay grown yet in Virginia given the character of the wine you can produce, and the versatility. It's like Chardonnay, you can barrel age it, you can stainless steel.

Chelsey Blevins

Exactly. All that. No, I'm definitely a big proponent for like, you know, planting more Chardonnay here in Virginia, we have good years with Chardonnay, but they're not as consistent as Chardonnay produces. And I'm really like, if you're going to produce more of like a stainless-steel style Chardonnay, why not plant some Chardonnay You get a lot more insurance out in your vineyard. In 2020 we were pretty much wiped out of a lot of our varieties. But you know, Chardonnay came back, and it produced for us and that was fantastic to have some wine to work with that year.

Fred Reno

Speaking of hybrids, I was completely taken by the quality of your Chambourcin. I love Chambourcin. I'm a big "Cru". Beaujolais drinker. And I believe Chambourcin handled correctly. It's resembles a very high level "Cru" Beaujolais and your wine. It's at the top of my list now for Chambourcin. And that blend that I just recently stumbled onto that you made, Arrowhead. What is that? What's the composite there?

Chelsey Blevins

It's 78% Chambourcin. And then about 22% Norton in that blend?

Fred Reno

Well, I'll tell you folks, if you see any Arrowhead red wine from 53rd, it is delicious. Buy it. Buy it if you can find it.

Chelsey Blevins

Oh, yeah, that we I think we only produced about 100 cases of that wine. So, I would definitely recommend you know, getting out to the winery and getting it soon because that one's going to be bought up fast.

Fred Reno

Do you have much interaction with your consumers when they come to the winery?

Chelsey Blevins

Oh, yeah, so we actually do a lot of different wine club event days, we do some winemaker dinners and stuff. And that's where I really get to interact with our customers a lot. Most of the time during the week, I'm holed up in the cellar taking care of the wines. But I do try to get out and talk with everyone and see kind of just what they think and get their opinions on the wine. I'll also go over in the tasting room and just check on the taste room staff see how they're doing and, you know, people are always coming up to me saying Oh, wow, like I loved everything on your wine list. There wasn't a single wine that I didn't like, and that for me is one of the best compliments. Because everyone's got their own individual taste, their own individual palates, but to say, hey, there wasn't anything on there that I would shy away from. I mean, that's your goal as a winemaker

Fred Reno

right now, in total between the two vineyards about 22 acres of bearing fruit. Is that correct?

Chelsey Blevins

Yeah. we have, I think it's about 10 acres planted at Dave site, and it's close to 15. Right now, at the 53rd site. We've been pulling up vineyards at the 53rd site and replanting, but it's been a slow, long process. So, when Dave bought the vineyard, a lot of the vines had a lot of like leaf roll virus issues they just weren't producing as well. And we had some vines put on a Geneva double curtain trellising style, which really wasn't conducive to our winemaking style. We've been slowly trying to pull out vineyards, let the ground go fallow for a couple of years and then replanting, so it's been and quite a project for all of us.

Fred Reno

So, production caps at about 4000 Plus cases.

Chelsey Blevins

Yeah, right now we're hovering right around 4000 cases. But once all of our plantings are in the ground, we should be closer to 7500 cases. That's kind of our end goal, at least for the next 10 years or so.

Fred Reno

I'm curious about something. Virginia and young winemaker like yourself. Where do you get your lab work done and checked? How does that work here?

Chelsey Blevins

I do as much analysis testing in house as I can. I've actually been really fortunate I work with Joy Ting, she's my wine consultant. And she is like the go to person for lab analysis. Like she has taught me

almost everything that she knows when it comes to stuff that I can do that's not too terribly expensive. It doesn't require a whole lot of equipment. But for like testing that I can't do in house I'll send out to this place is called Imbibe Solutions, it's here in Charlottesville. And I'll send it there. And then I also if I need to do other testing, I'll send out to California, there's a place called ETS labs. I kind of work between those places, but I try to do as much in house as I possibly can at this point.

Fred Reno

Well, you just keep bringing up stars every time that you have worked with. I mean, Joy Ting, change you keep working with all the right people.

Chelsey Blevins

Exactly. I really think that's really what's helped me be so successful. I try to collaborate with these people just learn as much as I can from them. And you know, keep in mind all the different things that they've taught me along the way.

Fred Reno

That's fantastic. Looking forward here, in the short to mid long term, what do you see as the biggest challenge you're facing right now?

Chelsey Blevins

Right now, I definitely think dealing with the climate is definitely a big challenge for us. Also, I'm kind of a one woman show in the winery. I would love to get to a point where we could get a little bit more help. And I can get a little bit more involved in some of the winemaking aspects. But definitely the climate is something that we're really focused on looking at a little bit more out in the vineyard, you know, we're trying to pick specific varieties to plant and different sites that we know are going to work really well and produce great wine. So, we've all been doing research to try to figure out okay, what's the next variety that we're going to plant here? So, one thing that is kind of new for us, we actually put in some Corot Noir vines, which is a hybrid grape. It's more known in like New Jersey, kind of like the northeastern part of the United States, but it's a disease resistant variety. It's very cold tolerant, it doesn't bud out too early. We aren't too worried about Frost issues with that. We're all really interested to see what these vines are going to produce. Because I think with the Chambourcin and the Norton, we could have another winner here where maybe we can make like a single varietal or kind of blend with those grapes and make a really unique red wine. Do you do any outsize bottles, larger bottles, format That's kind of one of my personal winemaking goals. We haven't quite gotten there yet. But like my dream is to like produce some magnum bottles. That's kind of like my next step. I'm hoping that we'll get to hopefully in the next five years or so.

Fred Reno

Well, yeah, especially, I can imagine putting some Norton in a larger bottle and really letting it go.

Chelsey Blevins

I would love to see how it ages. That's like one thing for me that I just personally would love to know more about.

Fred Reno

Is there a community of young winemakers here in Virginia that is now collaborating together? Is there anything that's been formed?

Chelsey Blevins

I don't think there's been anything like official formed, but there are like a lot of us we all stay in touch, like on Facebook and on different social media groups. It's kind of hard to get everyone together all the time. But I've got friends all over the state, if I have any questions, you know, or any concerns, I'll call them up and be like, hey, what do you think about this, but there's also some really great up and comers, like Cory Craighill, she's awesome. We've got Maya out at Early Mountain. Like we've got a lot of really great young stars that are kind of coming up in the industry, which I think is great.

Fred Reno

Well, I know Chelsey, you don't have the pleasure of being able to really imbibe on this wonderful White Burgundy because you're expecting. But taste some tell me what you think about this wine.

Chelsey Blevins

So, this burgundy that you pour it is just absolutely delectable. I get a lot of fruit up front with this wine. I get a lot of nice mineral contents on it. But for me, it's just like the texture and the body that I get the finish that really, really stands out for me.

Fred Reno

Yeah, little 2017 folks, Meursault Vigne Vignes, Paul Garaudet.

Chelsey Blevins

Oh, that's gorgeous. Oh, my gosh,

Fred Reno

I know what a wonderful glass of wine. I mean, it would be wonderful, If we could find a way to make wine of this consistent complexity from Chardonnay, but you know, Chardonnay might do the trick. We'll treat it like this. I mean, I had Jay Youmans told me earlier. He'd had some Chardonnay's that were as good as Premier Cru Chablis.

Chelsey Blevins

Oh, yeah, no, I totally agree. I think what we need to do here in Virginia is really focus on planting the correct varieties, you know, dealing with the vintage variations that we're dealing with and just really knowing your grapes and knowing your site and how to work with that year to year and really, a lot of that takes experience and knowledge and that's something I've been really trying to work on.

Fred Reno

Do you have a diary? Do you keep extensive notes of vintages?

Chelsey Blevins

My gosh, yes. I have a bunch of different winemaking notebooks. I always keep one in my car. And when I fill it up, you know, I go on to the next one. So, I've got a library going back to like 2014.

Fred Reno

Fantastic.

Chelsey Blevins

Yeah, but I think that's kind of helped me really develop my palate and really figure out okay, what am I tasting in this wine? What am I getting from it? And I kind of have like my own little code system that I've come up with to kind of like rank wines and everything. But that's pretty much like my diary system that I use. And then also just from all my classes and stuff, I have loads of binders just full of information.

Fred Reno

My favorite question I always ask every vintner What was that one wine that you had that you're light bulb went off? And you said, Oh, okay, I get it. Now. This wine can be so ethereal. So mystical. What was that one wine? Every one's got one wine sometimes.

Chelsey Blevins

Oh my gosh. It was a Nebbiolo that I tried. And that was just like the one for me. I was like, Oh, if I could make this something similar to that here, Virginia that I would just you know, retire.

Fred Reno

Was it Italian Nebbiolo?

Chelsey Blevins

It was an Italian Nebbiolo I can't remember the exact producer right now. It was it was like five or six years ago but that was like the one variety where I was like, man, like I love this wine. This has everything going for it that I love. If we can emulate something similar to that here in Virginia. I think we'd really be going places.

Fred Reno

Well, Luca has done a pretty good job with Nebbiolo at Barbourville.

Chelsey Blevins

Oh, I love like their 2009 Nebbiolo is to die for it. If you ever get a chance to try the 2002. Those two vintages were fantastic, so I don't know how many bottles they have left over there. But

Fred Reno

yeah, Barbourville is one of the few wineries who does have a library.

Chelsey Blevins

Yeah, they have quite an extensive one too. And I was very fortunate to get to taste through some of those wines through my employment with them.

Fred Reno

Well, putting Virginia aside for a second of all the wine growing regions in the world. What's your favorite wine growing region that you loved to enjoy wine from? We've touched on this a little bit before the interview. But what type of support? Are you able to get from Virginia Tech or even locally here? PVCC as it relates to winemaking or vineyard? Or what kind of support can the industry count on at this point?

Chelsey Blevins

Sicily, I definitely have to say Sicily. I have a friend who lives out there and I actually got to go visit in 2016 with a big group of friends. Some of them were from Barboursville, which was great because they all spoke Italian. But I fell in love with the region there. Like the Nero d'Avola, oh my gosh, it won over my heart. So that's definitely like my favorite wine growing region in the world. And then all the wines that come from Mount Etna, I love those volcanic soil style wines, like they are phenomenal. Right now, I know Virginia Tech does do some lab analysis, I will from time to time, send some stuff out to them. PVCC has kind of like ever since COVID has taken over, they've been a little bit quiet, to be honest, I'm hoping that program will kind of get started up again now that things are opening up a little bit more. But really, I rely on the community of winemakers throughout the state. But those are the people that I really call on to and, you know, respect and admire. And if I have questions, you know, I'm reaching out to them. So luckily, I've been able to network pretty well, and you get on social media, and you could pull up a bunch of different people and be like, hey, like, what do you think? And really, like, we're all like in it together, which is such a cool thing. Like you don't find that in other wine regions in the world. We're all trying to do the same thing here. We're trying to make the best wine possible. We're trying to put Virginia on the map. And I think the camaraderie between the different winemakers throughout the state is really something special that we have here.

Fred Reno

Well, I have to agree. That's one thing I've noticed, since I have been here is there's a level of collegiality that exists. And everybody's, for the most part sharing, trying to raise everybody's boat. And it's really refreshing to see, for me after 43 years in this business, it reminds you what it was like, believe it or not in California in the 70s in the early 80s. Yeah, that's what it was like. And of course, Oregon when it first started in the early 80s and late 70s. That kind of existed. Not so much anymore. Although I think Oregon has a bit more of it's still Yeah, but yeah, Virginia is just got this collaborative feel to it.

Chelsey Blevins

Are you familiar with the Winemakers Research Exchange?

Fred Reno

Yes, I am. I learned about it because I wasn't paying as much attention when it was mentioned a couple interviews. And then, I realized it was important. That's why I had Joy Ting to talk to her about it. Are you involved in that at all?

Chelsey Blevins

Because she's my wine consultant like, Well, I'm not allowed to do experiments, but I do participate in them when I can. You know, I think that's been a wealth of knowledge for me. I've actually changed a little bit of my winemaking styles just from going to some of those like guided tasting events that they've put on like I've changed the way that I add sulfur to the wine, I changed when I add tar Tartaric acid to the wine. Like it's really opened my eyes to see people actually doing logical experiments here. They're really testing something and they're getting data back from it that's really important and kind of has guided me in a good direction, which I think it's been awesome. So that's been a terrific resource. Oh, yeah. And then you get winemakers from all over the state that get together all tasting these wines together. We're discussing them. I mean, it's all blind and guided and everything, which, for me, it was it's just been a wealth of knowledge, being able to go to those seminars, I'm really glad that they were able to get their funding to keep that going.

Fred Reno

I want to back up a second because you've worked with some really terrific people here in Virginia. And what I'm surprised by is Graham Bell doesn't seem to have the profile that I believe he probably deserves, given his tenure, and the quality of wine he's produced. And I've never met the gentleman. What was it like working with him? What's was his persona like?

Chelsey Blevins

it was very interesting. He is a very, he likes to kind of, you know, stay underground a little bit. I kind of consider him an underground winemaker. He's not looking for all the accolades. He's here to make wine and do the best he can every year. And learning from him was awesome. He doesn't really like to be out in the public limelight. But you know, he wants to make these really great wines. So, he is kind of somebody you're, you're not going to really find on the radar. He kind of like stays in the cellar and do his thing, you know, but he's done a fantastic job. Like, I don't know, if you've had a chance to go out to Lake Anna to try his Tannat that he produced. I believe it was in the governor's case two years ago. I mean, he did a fantastic job with that wine. And I actually have to help him make a little bit you can help take care of it and process it. But, I mean, that was a great wine and, but he's just one of those guys. he's going to stay under the radar because that's just who he is.

Fred Reno

Yeah, I was wondering about that. Yeah. And then, you know, of course, I interviewed Mike Heny. He's over at Shaps these days. Directing traffic over there. And Luca was part of my interview process. I've always lamented that I never had the opportunity to meet Dennis Horton. He passed away before I moved to Virginia. But Bruce Zoecklein had suggested something to me that I'm mulling over. And that is simply to whenever I close this Podcast, as you know, my goal here has been a donate these as a historical documentary to the University of Virginia, which I'm in discussion with him right now about doing but maybe for my last Podcast, I'll get a half a dozen vintners who knew Dennis well, and have them each tell me on tape, their favorite Dennis Horton story,

Chelsey Blevins

I definitely reach out to Graham for that. Like, I think he's got a lot of stories. He worked with them for quite a while. And then of course, like, you want to definitely get Mike Heny in there. He worked with him, I think for 20 years or so.

Fred Reno

Yeah, so Chelsey, you've been able to work with some incredible people here. What a learning experience.

Chelsey Blevins

Oh, yeah. No, that's my big thing. You know, just keep listening. Just keep growing, keep learning. I definitely feel like I've come a long way. And I'm so grateful for all the people I've met along the way that have helped me get here.

Fred Reno

Well, I'll tell you also 53rd winery, there's a really good country vibe to the location, the place, the facility. It's wonderful. It's comfortable. And yet it doesn't seem over the top at all.

Chelsey Blevins

Oh, yeah. No, we all we're all I'd like to think we're all pretty humble out there. We're grape farmers, but we want to make the best wines possible. And that's our focus is the wine itself. We want people to come out, have a relaxing place to stay at, kind of a wine get away from the world, but still have really great wines to enjoy. So that's kind of our mantra for you know, 53rd

Fred Reno

when I met Dave Drillock the owner, I really instantly enjoyed him. And then the interactions I've had with him. He just seems like such an honest gentleman.

Chelsey Blevins

Oh, yeah, he's super down to earth. He's been a fantastic boss to work with. I mean, he'll get out there in his overalls. He's out there picking grapes with us. He'll be out there the whole step of the way. I don't know a whole lot of owners here in Virginia that actually go out and get their hands dirty and be out there with us processing, out there picking grapes. I mean, he's out there on his tractor, spraying the vines and everything and pulling weeds, you know, doing everything he can to get the best wine quality, which I think that's priceless. There are just not too many people out there with that heart and soul and willingness to do that, especially from like an owner standpoint.

Fred Reno

Well, the thing that frustrates me here since I've been here is how still under the radar, the Virginia wine, making wine, growing scene, and story is around the country. It just surprises me. Because it's my feeling that Virginia is the most interesting wine growing region in America today. I try to tell folks who don't know about Virginia in the trade and wine business. You have to think about it like France, if you will, or Italy, whereas in France, they don't grow Pinot Noir in Bordeaux, and they don't grow, Cabernet Sauvignon in Burgundy. Virginia is like that. There are just certain varietals that just do very well in different places around the state.

Chelsey Blevins

Exactly. I think we're still kind of making some headway there. I know. We're still really young industry, like really, it wasn't until like the late 80s, early 90s, that things really started to kick up and change for us here in Virginia, where people started like, like Dennis Horton, sort of getting all these crazy and strange varieties planted. Hey, let's try this isn't that because we weren't quite sure what was going to do well here with our climate, because it's a whole different beast compared to California, or Italy, or France. So, I think now, we're kind of hitting our stride where we're like, okay, we know certain varieties work here, like I think Cabernet Franc does well, there's a lot of hybrids like Chardonnay and Chambourcin. That work really well. I mean, we even do single varietals, Petit Verdot. And that's not something you really hear of throughout the world. I think we're starting to hit our stride. But we really need to kind of push ourselves out a little bit further and get more recognized. The state of the world is a winemaking region. And I think one way we can do that as by entering different competitions throughout the country, maybe getting a little bit more publicity on, you know, like different wineries throughout the state that are doing really well and have their focus on making high quality wines. I think if we can kind of like move in that direction. I think it'll help but I still feel there's a way to go as well.

Fred Reno

I'm trying to help with my podcast.

Chelsey Blevins

I definitely think this is definitely a positive for us here.

Fred Reno

To really get the word out and get a national and even international reach. Yeah, I mean, not to spend too much time dwelling on this, but I was surprised when I get these analytics that I have listeners right now, in 15 different countries. And that surprised me who is listening to the niche Podcast, about Virginia wine growing, and Virginia winemaking, in Poland, in Sweden, Switzerland, UK and Germany and France and even one listener, Moscow if you're listening out there, Moscow who the hell are you? But it's been rather gratifying to see that these people are. So, the words getting out there above Virginia. And there's so much opportunity here.

Chelsey Blevins

I 100% agree. Like I've been trying to like network as much as I can, you know, on social media, because that's like the easiest way for me to kind of get out on like an international basis. And I've been able to meet a lot of winemakers throughout the country, but even throughout the entire world through, there's this Facebook group called the traveling winemakers page, as people from all over the world are posting, you know, of course, they're posting job opportunities, but they're also posting like, Hey, this is what we're doing here in this region. And for me, that's been such a cool thing to be able to see what other people are doing throughout the entire world at the same time that like I'm processing grapes. That's one way I've been trying to like, you know, break out a little bit away from like the Virginia scene and kind of get us out there a little bit more. You put out a post every now and then and just see who bites you know.

Fred Reno

Well, Chelsey, this has been terrific.

Chelsey Blevins

Yeah, no, thanks you so much Fred. Thank you so much for this great wine. I mean, this burgundy is killer.

Fred Reno

Delicious, isn't it? Yeah. Well, again, thank you for your time. I really appreciate you coming to my studio.

Chelsey Blevins

Yeah, thank you again too.