

# EPISODE # 14 LUCIE MORTON/WORLD RENOWN AMPELOGRAPHER & VITICULTURIST

Fred Reno, Lucie Morton

## **Fred Reno**

Lucie, welcome.

## **Lucie Morton**

Thank you, Fred. Pleasure to be here.

## **Fred Reno**

Well, it's all my pleasure. Of course, we'll start at the beginning. What is your story. How did you get into growing grapes and become known as the World's foremost Ampelographer? I mean, what was the driving force here that got you interested in grape growing and how did it start?

## **Lucie Morton**

Well, it's even beyond your 45-year window. My journey started in 1971 when I was finishing up grad school, and my father had moved to my Grandparents farm in King George, Virginia on the Potomac River, and dad was looking for a cash crop for our farm. He was a very much of a French wine appreciator and had spoked French and had done World War Two, etc., etc. Anyway, he said, You know, I wonder we're on the Potomac River how different can it be from the Gironde River in Bordeaux. Meantime, he had read in a southern-states cooperative magazine, because we did have grain crops on our farm at the time, about a man named Willie Schwerin from Kentucky. And the title of the article caught my dad's eye, it said 10 acres of hybrids \$10,000 and Willie Schwerin in Kentucky, bless his heart had been buying grapes from Philip Wagner, and was one of the early growers of French hybrid grapes. And he saw the value added, you know, for them to get \$1,000 an acre, when corn and soybean for maybe 50.

So, Dad made that connection. He was a lawyer and commuting to Washington. I was just about to graduate with my history degree from University of Pennsylvania. I had spent a post grad year in England at Oxford, and Dad said, and clearly you can imagine, I wasn't absolutely certain what I wanted to do. I thought it was international relations or law school. But dad said Lucie, would you take a gap year between getting your degree and going to graduate school? Would you be my farm manager for a year? And would you look into grapes. So, Fred I looked into grapes, and I've never looked back. This was Moorland Farm. You can look at [www.moorlandfarm.com](http://www.moorlandfarm.com). Because one of the cool things that has happened to me in the last couple of years is, well we will get into it more as we go here. I did plant a three-acre vineyard for my Dad but realized that actually wasn't where I wanted to spend my whole career and probably wasn't the right business for Dad. In 1980 they sold the farm. I went on and by that time I was getting married and had my career being a consultant and grapes, writing books and things. I never really looked back to Moorland, although I love it and it's a beautiful place. An auto magnet Ron Rosner bought it invested many millions of dollars into refurbishing everything. And two years ago, my nephew John Morton, bought it back into the family. That's very cool. So, I am back to the future. But the first thing I said to John was, yes, we can have some grapes, but no vinifera and my best wines back when I sold all my grapes, home winemakers and also Ingleside Plantation, our fruit and my best wines were Chambourcin and Seyval Blanc. I think that the Chardonel grape, which is a Chardonnay Seyval Blanc cross makes better wine for what I'm looking for, which is more acid.

### **Fred Reno**

Well, I'm glad you brought it up, I've been trying to find a bottle of Chardonel from somebody here because it's exciting to me when I read about it. And let me interject just for a second here. I haven't had much exposure in my career to hybrid wines made from hybrids, for obvious reasons, because most of my career was spent in West Coast of the United States. However, since I've moved here, I'm a big fan of Seyval Blanc. I'm really enjoying well-made Seyval Blanc.

### **Lucie Morton**

Well, there aren't that many Chardonels. One of the people I work with Rosemont Vineyards in southern Virginia has a 100% Chardonel, both bubbly and white wine, they call it Lineage. So, it doesn't necessarily say Chardonel on the label.

**Fred Reno**

Well, I looked into it, and you have to be part of their wine club to get the wine.

**Lucie Morton**

I know I love that. You know back in the day, Fred, what's ironic for me is most of my career early on was actually in California also and most of my clients today in the Mid-Atlantic region are probably 95% vinifera. It's just I knew I've always held out a torch for the grapes, as being unique to our area totally suited to our environment an opportunity to make very good value wines also.

**Fred Reno**

Well, I am a big "Cru" Beaujolais drinker. My wife and I, it is essentially either Virginia wine or Cru Beaujolais those are our go to wines now, and Chambourcin. If you could just take that little back edge off it, it's so close to a really good Cru Beaujolais that I love it.

**Lucie Morton**

Right and guess where I bought Chambourcin labeled Chambourcin in France. It was in the Loire Valley. Chambourcin was the number one unauthorized grape but grown by quite a bit people. Most people don't realize there was almost a million acres of French American grapes in France in the 1958 census.

**Fred Reno**

That's amazing

**Lucie Morton**

It was 40% of the French vineyards because they had just been through World War 1 & World War 2, the depression and they didn't have money for tractors and sprays, etc. So, as a student I bought a labeled Chambourcin farmer wine at the farmers market in the Loire valley. You're right, it's got a lot of that profile that people who like those wines are going to appreciate.

**Fred Reno**

Let's back up then because I see you went to France in the late 70s, is that accurate?

**Lucie Morton**

Early 70s so that's the thing, I did work for my Dad for a year and became the farm manager, looked into grapes, and thank goodness right here in Virginia and also Maryland in particular we had Philip Wagner who wrote the first American book on winemaking and growing grapes in the United States, but he wrote his books before he ever had Boordy Vineyard. Boordy Vineyard which is celebrating the 75th anniversary. He started that in 1945 and I work with them now. But we bought our first vines from Philip Wagner. My mom and I bought his book a wine growers guide, and we had the book in one hand and we're pruning my mother's old concord vines at my Grandmother's house. So, my grandmother planted Concord, Keiko, and Niagara in about 1930 in response to prohibition and my dad got her Philip Wagner's book in 1933, he bought that book, I have a first edition that my dad signed to my grandmother and then later in the 70s when my parents and I met Phil Wagner he signed the book again for me so it's very special. Another special thing is that probably 20 or so of those old grapes that are now 90 years old are still there at Moorland and my nephew and I and his wife have restored them. We honor them and I even had them virus tested at Cornell. They're clean of all viruses so if anybody needs wood for some beautiful Concord grapes for their backyard. It is a testament to that Concord grape the reason it is the grape for the millions in the east coast it was there for 90 years without pruning, spraying or anything else.

**Fred Reno**

Tell me about your interaction with Pierre Galet. How did that all happen?

**Lucie Morton**

So, going back to, I did that year with Dad, and planted the vineyard in 1973 with 13 different French hybrid grapes from all over the place. I looked at the catalog and said Cascade 13053 makes a nice rose oh I think 300 of those. It was kind of wild west in Virginia at the time there were zero commercial wineries when I

started. None. But really anybody who gets into viticulture knows there's a lot to it and there was a raging debate then between hybrid growers, vinifera growers. I said to dad, and one of my heroes was Hamilton Mowbray, Mowbray vineyard in Maryland. Ham was wonderful because he did consulting for Piedmont vineyard in Middleburg Virginia and he had Mrs. Furness plant Chardonnay, Seyval, and Cabernet Sauvignon. Ham was one of these people who said this is not an either-or situation he was a big Francophile, and he was well known for his Seyval, and he also grew Cabernet Sauvignon. I had a good model because Philip Wagner was very pro hybrid and very distrustful of vinifera he'd had his test plantings freeze to the ground too many times or get lost to fungal disease etc. I was lucky because of this experience I finally knew I didn't want to be a lawyer. I didn't want to be a diplomat, I wanted to learn how to grow grapes and said to dad, there are three ways I could go. In the United States it would be UC Davis or Cornell. Then there is Montpellier, France. Davis, at that time I realized that my history degree did not qualify me for their program. And they said if I would take two years of prerequisites, I could take viticulture 101 in the third year, that was not happening. Cornell at the time, had a small fruits program, but it wasn't much. So, I ended up picking grapes, getting a job through my dad who is a patent lawyer, and he was the lawyer for Chemise Lacoste, you know the tennis guy, Rene Lacoste, and Bob Abdesselam was the French lawyer Dad was the American lawyer. Bob dad said, Lucie wants to go pick grapes in Bordeaux. Bob says okay, I'll get her job at Chateau Fourcas Hosten in Lustrac, Medoc but also our neighbors in King George was Caroline Guest, Raymond Guest was her husband Ambassador to Ireland. But she was French and was best friends with Liliane de Rothschild. So, here's me in 1973 I planted the vineyard at Moorland in the spring and that fall I had two harvest jobs at Lafite and Lustrac Medoc. Can you imagine. Well, along the conversation one of the guys who was a Negotiant, Guy Schyler, who was a negotiant in Bordeaux said, your daughter's not going to learn anything about viticulture harvesting grapes, she needs to go to Montpellier, and the registere at Chateau Lafite at the time, and both of his sons went to Montpellier. So, talk to them about it. And I wrote a letter to the university and said I would like to come, and they wrote back and said you're not qualified, which is true. I made no bones about it. But they said you can come as an auditor Libra; you can come and audit the fall semester here on your own money and time. You can come and if at the end of that semester, you go before a

faculty Review Board we might consider sponsoring you for a seven-month international course from January '74 to August of '74 with 17 other students from five countries. I went off and said to Dad, I'll be back for Christmas. I had no idea; I had never been to Montpellier, but I got there, and I picked grapes which was great that month of harvest. Got my French in line. I had good schoolgirl French; I aced the SAT and couldn't ask my way to the local restaurant. But I did make the connection there between spoken French and an academic French which I did. You know, I had studied it. I did the course there. But where I was super lucky was this international course was new. And they were planning on sending all of their agricultural engineering school students who were specialty viticulture to the international course, which was three months in Spain and a month of travel in Italy. And it was all over Europe, visiting research stations having professors come and talk to our group. The French students, we're going to do this instead of the traditional full year of viticulture at Montpellier. So, Monsieur Branas asked, who was the head of everything, had been there since the 1930s and I was in one of his lab students. He insisted that we do the entire program in French. It was all French guys, I was the only girl, first woman they'd had in the program, first American, all that stuff. He wanted them to be sure they got a full year curriculum in that first semester. So, I totally lucked out, lucked out because we had classes five days a week, six hours a day. When I saw the curriculum, I'm like, Oh my goodness, I'm learning stuff in French I didn't know in English. The very first night I went to the bookstore and looked at every viticultural textbook that they had at the Poulin bookstore, bought a new petite larousse, which is just French on French. And after three hours, I picked up a book called preceded de viticulture by P Galet, Galet. And I brought it home, I had no friends, I had no life. All I did was at night I would study. They would say tomorrow you're going to study Oidium, which is powdery mildew. So, I would look up oidium in Galet's book. It was like Winkler's General viticulture, the French version. It covered the waterfront, his 500-page book on general viticulture but all in French of course. I would read Oidium, and I look up every single word in the dictionary so that when I was at the lecture, at least the terminology was familiar to me

## **Fred Reno**

Yea so it would sink in.

**Lucie Morton**

Right, but I had been there for three weeks. We have four different professors, all of them, of course, PhD, you know, wonderful researchers and teachers, when I noticed that the guy talking to us about grafting, nursery material, *Vitis vinifera*, and different topics was p. Galet. And so, after class, I went up to him, I said, Monsieur by any chance, are you this P. Galet? Oh, Qui, Mademoiselle, Siwon. And he looked extremely pleased by the whole thing. I had him autograph it and went on. Well, it's a friendship that lasted. I was in France last year. 2019 Galet was 98 years old. He was the subject of the two documentary movies. I was able to be there.

**Fred Reno**

Yeah, fantastic. You actually did a book with him.

**Lucie Morton**

Right? I came back to Virginia. In the end, I got this interview, you know, could go on for two weeks Fred but got my degree, from the Ecole Nationale the Viticulture, core International, the thesis that they assigned me was Viticulture de l'Est des Etats-Unis; viticulture of Eastern America because my professors realized that I was going to be coming home and working in Virginia, that wasn't lost on them. And they wanted to see how I was able to apply what they taught me about soils and climate and everything to Virginia. So, I had to do my research. I wrote back to Philip Wagner. This is back when people sent those, you know, little air mail letters little like, right. Anyway, I made friends with John McGrew, who was USDA grape breeder in Beltsville, Maryland. And the first thing John said was, Lucie, don't let those French people tell you anything bad about the East Coast of the United States, we have the highest diversity of *Vitis* species anywhere in the world. Cornell University I guarantee you will be the first one to develop a mechanical harvester. So, John McGrew just said; you stick up for yourself when I was doing the winery visits because in the international course, you would go and visit the vineyard and taste the wine. I got a really good sense of the relationship between the vineyard and the winery. But when they would introduce me to the winemakers, I could be at let's say Richbourg. I could be some really beautiful place and they would introduce me and go; this is

Mademoiselle Morton. She's here to learn how to make Coca Cola out of *Vitis labrusca*. So, I had to learn to laugh it off. Because my guy friends were like Lucie, we're French. We're going to be mean, the best thing is to just, you know, laugh and counterpunch. But anyway, when I did get back to Virginia, I got back to the farm, had my first harvest in 1975. And there were no wineries yet to speak of in Virginia. So, I taught myself how to make wine. Then I sold my grapes. And I'm proud that some of my students were like Carl Flemmer, at Ingleside, Felicia Rogan, and John Rogan, Oakencroft. They came and made wine and they're like, hey, if we can make wine like this, maybe we can do this on our farms That was a positive thing.

### **Fred Reno**

You had a connection, I thought I heard or read somewhere to Robert Mondavi, and you got involved in something.

### **Lucie Morton**

Absolutely.

what happened was I had my Virginia vineyard to deal with, on the one hand, on the other hand, I came back with a graduate degree in viticulture. One of the other people that I consulted and met before I ever met him in person through his book, Leon D. Adams. Leon D. Adams wrote the *Wines of America*. That book came out while I was doing my thesis. I wrote to my parents and said, please send me that book because I'm writing on Eastern American Viticulture, and I don't know anything. Leon had made a point of studying the history of wine east of the Rockies. His whole mission was to bring wine growing everywhere. So, people would understand that wine is an agricultural product, and not booze. That was his mission, and he founded Wine Institute in 1933. So, when I got back from Montpellier, I got to meet John McGrew for the first time at his office at the USDA. I got to meet Leon Adams when dad went out to law conference in San Francisco. I met Leon and after that when he was doing research, for the Second or Third edition of the book. I told him, I'll be your driver, you know, because by then he was in the 70s. I was in my 20s. He wanted to see all the little wineries and wine possibilities east of the Rockies. I want to see all the vines. I traveled with him. And that was a big influence. Meantime, he was based in California, he understood that Napa Valley had phylloxera. He and I would go



into vineyards. And I never forget going to one in the Finger Lakes where I said to the guy, boy, you're Riesling is looking really good. He goes Lucie, that's not my Riesling. That's my Chardonnay. I said, Listen, you're telling that to the wrong person. I can tell from a moving car Chardonnay from Riesling. So, we stopped, and it turned out that this Finger Lakes grower had just gotten a mistake. He just flipped the nursery tags. What was cute was he sold his grapes to Glenora. And everybody used to say that their Chardonnay had a real Germanic character to it. And they thought it was because it was a German winemaker and the Finger Lakes climate. Really, after my visit, he calls them up and says, excuse me, my Chardonnay is actually Riesling. So that was where the Germanic character came from. But this was on a trip with Leon, and I said, Leon, I get the feeling nobody knows how to do Ampelography here. I've heard that the Gamy in California is not Gamay, that you know, the Gamay Beaujolais has nothing to do with Beaujolais. Actually, it's a clone of Pinot Noir and the Valdiguié grape. I said I'm surprised about that. I would go in with Galet's preceded de viticulture which was my textbook. I'd go into vineyard and show people, no this isn't Gamay, it can't be, this has to be, and I was showing pictures of the leaves. And I did that with Jim Haslett in the Finger Lakes. I said, Jim, here's what Riesling looks like. Here's what Chardonnay looks like. I said, somebody should translate Galet's book. Well, Leon being who he was. Said Lucie, you know who that it is? That's you. I'm like, are you kidding me. Absolutely not. You have no idea how complicated it is. There are so many words that I wouldn't even know how to translate into English. And Galet himself, I don't know, he's a little temperamental. But Leon got to me, and I said, Well, if you'll help me find a publisher, or if you'll back me up in this professionally, because who am I? I'm a 26-year-old girl from Virginia, for goodness' sake. He did in the end. I drove myself up to Cornell University Press, with a copy of the grapes of New York, which is a 1905 Ampelography by U. P. Headrick and a copy of Galet and I explained to them that the English word speaking world needed, and English, Ampelography. Well, and as you kind of said in the introduction, Fred, what's Ampelography, I've never met a single person ever at a cocktail party or anywhere who knew what Ampelography was?

### **Fred Reno**

Well, I didn't know until Chris Hill told me.

## **Lucie Morton**

And so really all it is, is grapevine botany, it's how to identify grapes by their leaves. For some reason, the French have always dominated in this. Galet, unquestionably is the world's Ampelographer. My textbook that I used as a student is a distillation of a four volume 3,500-page book on all the grape varieties in Europe. I mean, in France, he was the only one who cared about the American species. He cared and had his volume about American species, because they're so important for phylloxera resistant rootstocks. So, boy did I luck out to find Pierre, have him as a professor, nobody else would have appreciated it like I did. The fact that I was from the east coast, I lived in the land of *Vitis riparia*, *Vitis labrusca* and that I lived in a place where these grapes had a home big time. One of the chapters in that book is on rootstocks, Galet is like the world's preeminent expert on rootstocks. So, by virtue of translating the book for him, and I made sure that I didn't just translate it, I made it useful for an English language office. I mean, he had organized his books, according to the hairiness of the growing tip. I'm like Pierre; when people want to know what Pinot Noir looks like they want to look at P or, after M for Malbec, oops, that's called COT in French but we're going to call it Malbec because that's what it's called in English. Anyway, that was a great adventure. And as I said, I was 28 years old when it was published. I was 26. When I started it. I knew that the heart of viticultural academia was in California. And if I was going to figure out what the Gamay really was, I needed to go visit the foundation plant material service every year. Because I saw there were a mix up in rootstocks, there were a lot of things that needed to happen. Well, you mentioned Mondavi all of the wineries there, recognize that I had learned things in Europe that just were not taught in the US. So, they started hiring me as a consultant. The Virginia industry was small. They were all caught up in *vinifera* versus hybrid. And it's ironic, but I'd say, really, my career was started in California. I'd go to California four or five times a year, I would consult with, you name it. I never named my clients because I'm a little bit like the doctor. Nobody wants to say they have phylloxera right you know what I'm saying. When the AXR1 thing hit, they knew I'd written an article in 1979, which was 10 years before the 1998 when the university said, oh, by the way, we have a bio type that's killing ARX1. I had written in 1979, that they were on borrowed time on that rootstock. Because one of the Montpellier scientists in

1897, Louis Rivas had done a paper on why AXR1 and AXR2 would fail. And I learned that it wasn't like I was some genius, but I learned that it had failed in Sicily, and it'll last about 25 years or so before biotype develops, it will eat it up. And if you look at when AXR was first recommended, it was in the early late '50s. When phylloxera started taking out Napa Valley in the 80's. Well, so who are they going to call? Lucie. So, I had a great time.

### **Fred Reno**

Phylloxera buster.

### **Lucie Morton**

Yea, I was the Phylloxera Buster, meantime, the Virginia industry was sort of percolating along more or less without me because I was more focused. I've always been attracted to solving viticultural problems. I mean, I'm kind of a geeky academic, my training at Montpellier was like everybody there was being trained to be an extension agent, a researcher. So, I'm a geeky integrand.

### **Fred Reno**

So let me tie this back to Virginia, because when I interviewed Luca at Barboursville it was fascinating for him to say that when he was coming there in 1990, when he eventually really did succeed Gabriele Rausse, because, what I learned in talking to Gabriele was he left Barboursville physically in 1981. But they kept bringing him back because there were all these other people in between. Finally, when Luca showed up, that was it, okay. And he was brought in, and Luca just told the Zonin family that in order to improve their wine quality, they needed to replant their vineyards. And I just said, they didn't let you just rip them all up did they? He said no, no it was a process. So, where you when that was going on? What was happening in Virginia?

### **Lucie Morton**

Well, that's, that's a good segue for me though. I sort of stayed out. I was fully occupied. Plus, I had two children at the time. I had a full life with my work in California. Then after I wrote the Ampelography, I did a 1985 book called Wine Growing in Eastern America for Cornell University Press. I was East Coast correspondent for Wines & Vines. So, I had plenty to do. I just was uncomfortable

with what was happening in Virginia. I knew I would do things differently. I knew I was wanting to use more of a European approach to viticulture than the, let's say, the New Zealand way with the big trellises. And they were so afraid of vigor here that they thought they had to build bigger trellises and bigger vines, to deal with the vigor, Richard Smart invited me in 1988 to go to Auckland, New Zealand to the cool climate symposium. I was the only non-PhD speaker out of 80. He invited me there because phylloxera was coming to New Zealand, also to the South Island and he said, Lucie, you're the only one that makes any sense about rootstocks, I want you to just talk, which I did, but I listened carefully to Richard's approach to sunlight into wine. And something clicked. And I realized that the same principles he was using to make bigger vines I could use to make smaller vines. And I realized that high density planting 2000 vines an acre in Virginia at the time it was like, five or 600 vines an acre. Vines were spaced 10 by eight, very wide and California the same thing. They were 12 by eight. And so, I did go through the close spacing work in tandem in California, working with Zelma at the Chalk Hill Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard. They insisted on planting of four and a half by six and a half Cabernet block. And Zelma was like nobody knows how to farm this, we'll call in Lucie, she talks about small vines. I very happily worked with a lot of projects in Napa Valley, where they also went from eight by 12 spacing to 10 by six, you know, smaller and smaller. Now, you look at David Abreu with his four by five and while I was doing that in California, I'm like, why can't we do this in Virginia? Well, by this time, I didn't have my own vineyard and I'm very conscious as a consultant. This is other people's money. This is other people's future. This is their farm, and I waited. I said what if somebody asked me to consult and help them do a vineyard? I'm going to do close spacing. Well, late 90s, '98. I got a call from the Wehner family. And Harrison and Joan Wehner had a vineyard in Great Falls Virginia in the 70s. They made home wine, but they also had Juanita Swedenborg who's one of the early Middleburg wineries in the 70s. She custom crushed for them and their wine was the house wine at Chez Francois, in Great Falls, Virginia. Okay, so this is the Werner's. Well, they heard the industry was starting to go and you know, you had the vinifera winegrowers' festival. The American Wine Society was big, and people would talk and somebody, John McGrew, they were talking to John McGrew. He's very big into the American Wine Society. They being Harrison and Joan Wehner with they're three acres, Vidal Blanc. They said we need help with this vineyard. And John

said, Well, she's about to get off an airplane from France. You need to hire this young woman Lucie Morton she's going back to growing grapes. She lives in Virginia, she is Virginia. And she just has gotten a great education. So, they did. I worked with Harrison and Joan Wehner, and they were my first clients. When they called and said that they were going to move to their farm on the eastern shore, Chatham, and that they were thinking of doing a vineyard because their son Jon wanted to have something to do on the farm. I thought to myself, the Werner's are the perfect clients, because they've been there, done that, they understand that grape growing in Virginia is a challenge. You have got to go into it with your eyes wide open. It isn't fun. It's a job. It's work. It's a challenge. It's very rewarding. They called me and said we want to do this. I said under two conditions A. I know you know what you're getting into. And they're meticulous growers and B, you have to do close spacing, I said; or my heart will not be in it. If you planted your vineyard back then, for me in Virginia, close spacing was seven feet by four feet, and they're flat. The tractor alley depends on your side slope, etc. But in their case, they're on flat land. I said, if you will do close spacing. I will work with you. If you won't, you won't. And they said, well, Lucie, you're the consultant we will go for it. But it was very much against the times everybody else had these big lyre systems. It was political as is everything and I just I hate politics. I hate negativity. And I said to myself, we're not going to talk about it. We're just going to do it. I'm going let these vineyards speak for themselves. I'm not going to criticize anybody else for doing anything differently. We're just going to do this. But when they said yes, coming back to Luca, Luca had come to Virginia. I had seen how he'd gone from the catharsis system, which had its reasons for being but in the end, especially with mechanization, you're better off with smaller vines closer together, where you can cane prune.

### **Fred Reno**

He also emphasized and this is right in your wheelhouse. That the quality of the plant material that they had planted initially was not the best.

### **Lucie Morton**

Ah poor Gabriele. Luckily, he knew how to graft, Gabriele made a huge contribution to Virginia as he did this own grafting worked on the clones, but we were in the dark ages then in Virginia. What he did was so great you know

because it gave Barboursville the foundation on which to improve. And you can't do that without starting somewhere so he did an awesome thing. But I had heard that Barboursville was going closer spacing. I knew Gianni Zonin and he'd come and visited me and my parents at Moorland and I met Gabriele. In 1976 I did an article on wine growing in Virginia for Wines & Vines. I was their eastern correspondent, so I met him, and Joachim Hollerith is another one of the early ones. I met all these guys when we were all young in in our 20s and starting. What we're talking about at this moment is the 90s when Luca had come to Virginia. I'd heard they were going closer spacing, and they were pulling out the old ones both because of plant material and because it was an opportunity to do more of a European model. So, it was a combination that's what I went through in California. In Napa Valley AXR everybody says was a great opportunity to pull out the old clones, the old rootstocks, the old trellising, and reconfigure the vineyard. But I had a crisis of confidence when the Werner's were actually going to do what I recommended when I had never actually worked one on one with someone in Virginia doing it so, I called up Luca and said Luca can I come over and look at your close spacing? Can I see what you guys are doing? Because they were doing the same thing, eight feet on side slope, seven where it's flat and a meter between the vines. I said I'll feel a lot better, and I don't know a Franco, Fernando Franco was there but he had also worked with close spacing at Rapidan River and Prince Michel vineyard. It was another very smart move by Luca to bring Fernanda Franco over as he knew how to grow those grapes because he done it for the Germans. I knew that those two would give me confidence to do it for the Wehners. We did and it did fantastic, and they never looked back. I always look at do people repeat; if people when they have an opportunity to do it over again do the same thing you know you've hit it and the one change that we made at Chatham is I told them that for vinifera and for cane pruning which is what I believe in for a lot of different reasons, one meter spacings are really better than 48 inches so I'll do four feet for the front like Chambourcin or Chardonel.

## **Fred Reno**

Let me ask you this question, from your perspective, and you obviously have been here a long time doing this what is terroir if there's such a thing in Virginia.

What is distinguishing? Is it just climatic or are there different soil types as well for instance.

### **Lucie Morton**

Absolutely soil is one of those things where

### **Fred Reno**

Let me stop you for a moment because where I'm headed with this is I had one vintner say something to me early on that stuck in my head. He said Fred, it's entirely possible that some of the absolute best vineyards in Virginia have not even been planted yet.

### **Lucie Morton**

Absolutely right. We have a lot of potential here in Virginia, but we will probably going to have to move some woods okay. Think about how forested it is Virginia. That's been one of our problems, everybody plops a vineyard in the forest and I have a noxious slogan which is trees rhymes with disease so we have grape berry moth, grapevine yellows pierce's disease all of the disease and insects issues we have are exacerbated if you just pop the vineyard in the middle of woods so that was a huge challenge for us so you get a vineyard like Barboursville now that's a few 100 acres or Stone Tower winery now in Leesburg they're moving the trees back. I had a lot of pushback from people in the beginning because I laughed at them and said well in theory, I'm a tree hugger and you know for the environment, the rain forest etc., but if you're planting a vineyard in Virginia either you're planting grapes or you're planting trees. When we come down to terroir there's kind of a raging debate just in general and around the world about does soil influence wine quality? Having done an entire year in five different countries Spain, Italy, France, Switzerland, Germany, having done that at a grad level, doing nothing but visiting vineyards, tasting wines, and being talked to about their terroirs, you cannot visit Burgundy. (I know you, Fred). You can't visit those places and come away thinking soil doesn't matter, period. It matters not how it matters. It isn't that you're going to it's going to taste like the dirt. It doesn't. There's not a direct flavor transfer. But there's a lot to it in the depth of the soil in the water filtration. In the mineralogy, there's a lot to that

**Fred Reno**

Well, you'd be the right person to ask this because I've always believed this myself. Certain clones, especially once they're planted into a particular vineyard site, over time they mutate and become very representative of that site, as opposed to just pure Pinot Noir let's say,

**Lucie Morton**

Oh, absolutely. They don't necessarily mutate though, they're always the same. And believe me, I'm an Ampelographer. I can tell clones of Pinot Noir apart, I can tell the 667, from the 777 You can't even do that with a DNA probe at this time. I have a very tuned eye to grapevines. I'll tell you that they don't change I've seen 667 at Ankida Ridge, here in Virginia, up at 1800 feet and in Beaune with Christophe Bouchard, Christophe Bouchard of Bouchard Pere & Fils was in my international class at Montpellier. As was Lucien Guillemet from Chateau Boyd Cantenac and Chateau Pouget. So, I remember the so-called Dijon clones early on, by Messir, Professor Bernard at Beaune. They were selected in Burgundy. And there was a huge controversy over do you want a vineyard, you know, of clones? Or do you want a vineyard mélange of just the massal selection, they call it. And my professor Branas was highly against the clones. And very much for the clonal massal, the way I see it is, again, it is not an either-or situation. But the French were suffering badly with virus decline, family virus, leaf roll virus. So, the whole clonal thing came about when they had to clean these vines up. What I would like to see happening is we work with cleaner clones or selections, but you use a lot of different ones in your vineyard. I wouldn't want to just have one clone of Chardonnay, you know, so that's a whole other discussion.

**Fred Reno**

But that gives you sort of what I was talking about mutation, I didn't mean vine itself. But yeah, it starts to reflect the site as opposed to the variety

**Lucie Morton**

100% if it does reflect the site, you see that at Ankida Ridge. They are a client and one I call "the little burgundy" in Virginia. Over time and don't forget we've got these young vineyards; it takes vines a while to really get established.



**Fred Reno**

I want to stop you there because I want to give you credit for doing something very brilliant. And that is that whole project at Ankita Ridge. I was so blown away and impressed when I bought their wine when I was still in California. In fact, when I started talking to people back in 2017, when I was still in California about moving to Virginia, I would start talking and raving about Virginia wine, they looked me crazy, like what are you talking about? So, I'd have lunch with them, and I pull a bottle of Ankida Ridge Pinot Noir out and pour it for them. And they would look at me and be stunned. Right. just stunned.

**Lucie Morton**

Well, you know, if you're up at 1800 feet elevation, you have a shot at Pinot in Virginia. I would not put it down low. I mean, Pinot, Well, we know Pinot it's tough to grow in Virginia, but I told them, nobody cared that they were by definition going to be a little teeny vineyard five, six acres. I said, there is only one grape that can pull that off. And that's Pinot Noir, that micro scale of wine. But that is a terroir. I mean, what is terroir? It's elevation. It's the soil. It's the drainage. It's everything. And yes, there's a style and I think you probably will see it in their Gamay, they have a little Gamay, Well, I'm excited.

**Fred Reno**

Yeah, of course. I'm excited about that Gamay because I love Beaujolais. In fact, when I went up and interviewed them, I gave them a bottle of Chateau Fleurie. I was like try this. You will enjoy it. Well, I used to import it. So, I'm very impressed with them. And it can only go up.

**Lucie Morton**

Well, exactly. They learn, they mature. It takes a lot to learn your vineyard but coming back to soil. So, I didn't mention at the outset, Fred that I had been writing a book called The roots of fine wine for 30 years, it got started as a bibliography that I wrote for three Napa Valley vineyards, they paid me more money than any publisher would ever pay me to do a bibliography for them. I did a bibliography because they wanted to know more about the rootstocks. And then I'm like, wow, we need a book on this, just like we needed an Ampelography. And I'm like, that's hard. It was hard. But I did it. I started my

book and I've had three publishers accept it, Oxford, University California Press, etc. But every time I would get, you're working on your book and all of a sudden what happened for me was these rootstocks that I had recommended people plant in Napa, Sonoma, in particular, Mendocino north mostly North Coast, California. They weren't thriving. This is the late 80s, early 90s. These vineyards were having problems. You had four-year-old vineyards that were not thriving. I say Oh, boy I wonder why. People were blaming the rootstock genotype; they were saying 3309 is not adapted to Napa Valley. And I'm like, wait a minute, when I did my, the myth of the universal rootstock for Wines & Vines, it was published in '79. I said, publish it again in '85 because nobody read it the first time. Anyway, I went back and read all the research papers at the Oakville Research Station all the California USDA reports, they did tons of rootstock research in California when phylloxera came there in the late 80s, and 90s. And guess what one of the best root stocks was overall-- 3309. So, I'm like, just don't blame the rootstock. I ran around in California giving lectures called don't blame 3309. And I'd have all the vineyard managers from all the big places, they come and listen to me. But I'm saying, so what is it? Well, because I was doing so much consulting. I remember being in one Napa Valley vineyard in 1995. January. Let me back up for a moment. I had been in New Zealand in 1994, at Goldwater Estate their vineyard wasn't thriving too. And I said to Kim and Jeanette Goldwater. Can I need to dig up a vine, there's something wrong here. I need to dig this up and do an autopsy biopsy or whatever. You should see trying to get someone to give you one weeny little grapevine. It's like saying, Can I cut off your big toe, but we pulled it out. And I chopped into it. I looked at the rootstock and went, Ut Oh, what is in the pith? In the center of a grape cage, it should be a nice fluffy beige. It was black. The wood inside of it should be the xylem and all should be beige They had black dots. I'm like, wow, what are these like little black oil spots I said man, I've never seen that. And whatever that is, and then I dropped it because I had never seen it. Then put me in very swishy Napa Valley vineyard that wasn't thriving four-year-old Cabernet on 5C. And I said to the guys, I said Listen, I have an idea. Let's cut into your cordons, and if the center is starting to dry out. We're going to just keep cutting down the trunk. I said I'm going to make a bet. Well, anybody bet me 100 bucks, that we're going to cut in the rootstock and you're going to have black in the rootstock. 100 bucks anybody; no, they wouldn't do it, so we dug it up and sure enough, boom, there it

was. And this was a Napa Valley, you know, vineyard management company, the owners. This is all you know, Super-duper high end everything right. And one of them pipes up and goes. We're going to call it Morton's disease. Oh, no, absolutely not. We're going to call it Well, let me think what we're going to call it, we're going to call it by the symptom.

**Fred Reno**

Black goo right. We're going to call it black goo. I said because we already have black rock, black spot black gum, we're going to call it black goo because I guarantee you that word, that disease, has never been uttered in the grape world before now. So, this will mark 1995 I discovered black goo in Napa Valley. That name did the trick. It annoyed the hell out of academics because they didn't think it was dignified and blahdy blah. But hey, it's in Oxford Companion to wine, so I mean, it ended up sticking. It ended up being my big adventure in the 90s. But guess what, it held up my book, because now I discovered a disease of rootstocks. So what good is it for me to recommend a rootstock variety or write a book? If I know in my heart of hearts, there are problems that are being sold to people because I would go get flats of green growing vines and there be black goo in them, So it was coming from the nurseries and believe me talk about politics.

**Fred Reno**

Oh, I can't even imagine.

**Lucie Morton**

Oh, geez. But yeah, so my book got stalled.

**Fred Reno**

I'm going to direct you to something here. What do you see in future Virginia, for the next 10 or 20 years? I mean, where is this thing going to end up? Are we finally going to get the recognition here? Because I believe it's still going to take a big player to come in here and put their stake in the ground whether Virginia likes it or not, put their stake in the ground, like Zonin family did.

**Lucie Morton**

I was going to say it's already been done by the Zonin's.

**Fred Reno**

That was before; now is now.

**Lucie Morton**

They have a 200-acre property.

**Fred Reno**

Oh, I get that, but what I'm saying and talking about is somebody who comes in here and has the distribution clout, has the capital and the experience to know what to do. Because it seems to me, Shenandoah Valley is ripe for development and exploration for grape varieties. Would that be off the mark?

**Lucie Morton**

Well, I think that we're more of a European model. I think we're more of a European model, because I don't think we have huge tracts of land like they have in California, that are appropriate for grapes. And even in the Shenandoah Valley, you need the altitude, you need the elevation, they have some, you know, cold issues, frost issues. I know a lot of my clients are interested in expanding and are looking for vineyard property. I've been with people looking for vineyard property. I just don't think our topography lends itself to that. The one place that could happen is the Eastern Shore of Virginia. Okay, in any place where you've had farming, like Chatham vineyard has been there for a long time, they've done very well. But I also wonder, I see family estate wineries as being really good for the community and being a sustainable scale. You know, you can have 20 to 50 acres of grapes and earn a living if you do it well. So maybe a collection, what's wrong with the small family? I think that's the backbone. Besides my experience and the people, I work with my biggest pleasure is that a place like Chatham can sustain an historic property into the first second third generation. They have a sustainable business now. They partner also with oyster growers. But one thing Leon always said, when we were working together, trying to promote the winegrowing east of the Rockies, was that you need all three markups to make it work. So let me just say right at the outset, grape growing does not make money in Virginia. Well, maybe you could have,

**Fred Reno**

Nowhere really but yes,

**Lucie Morton**

Yeah. So, the wineries really are on the back of the growers, the growers, support the wineries and I'm a big advocate of tying, the bottle price to the price per ton. \$100 wine? When people go, oh my god \$3,000 for a ton of Virginia fruit. I'm like, they're getting \$30 a bottle. They're getting \$60 paying 6000. It's simple math. I think that is one of the few things that's kind of simple that's held up, is this paid by the wine if somebody's getting that money, and I also think it's the Value Added too that for the consumers to be able to come, and it was Leon's dream come true. That you go to any one of my clients, for sure. The successful Virginia wineries, you're in the heart of vines, you know, they're talking about their vineyard, you look at Barboursville at their videos, they're all about them, planting vines or, in the snow, or dealing with the frost. But it's Leons' dream to show Americans that wine isn't just something you pull off the shelf. It's something you pull off the vine. So, I'm not just sure that we have very many places that we are adaptable to a big player however if a really savvy big player did come in a you know, and post COVID, I think COVID has changed that dynamic a lot. Thank goodness in our industry that we are small and are not dependent on restaurant sales so people whose business model dependent on restaurant sales are suffering today. Hopefully that won't last forever but what's saving my clients are selling more wine now than they did the year before and their wine clubs are growing.

**Fred Reno**

Two things that happen post COVID that I find interesting that could help the Virginia wine industry specifically. That is people are buying more wine online than they ever did but phenomenally they're buying it what I call, sight unseen. In the past people would buy wine online because they knew the wine, they knew the producer and everything. Now people are experimenting like I used to when I went into a wine shop. They're now experimenting buying wine they never tasted before.

## **Lucie Morton**

Well, that's where I think Fred you could help. You understand marketing in such depth that there could be opportunities for people getting together with an online sales collective which would be awesome.

## **Fred Reno**

Really what I'm trying to do and what I'm trying to accomplish with this Podcast and why I'm here is to get a broader audience for Virginia wine on a national basis. I hope we can get to the point where people are they're thinking about buying wine they're just not defaulting to California or defaulting to Oregon or Washington state because that happens to be where they live and that's what they know. But that they're getting that intellectual curiosity that drove me all my career and drives people really to get into wine.

## **Lucie Morton**

Well, it drove you to France too, Virginia's halfway to France so hey stop in Virginia. I'm for all of the that's which is why I'm really against all these tariffs. The whole fun of wine is that it's International. How can how you appreciate an Oregon pinot if you don't have a French pinot to compare it with. There's another thing Fred I, wanted to get back to the soil issue. Yes, in Virginia, and the reason my book came up was a Bermuda triangle. For me the root stock book was soil nutrition. It just didn't make sense the soil test would say you were high in potassium, and the grape petioles and tissue would say you were low or vice versa. In our case, in Virginia many of our rock minerals are high in potassium which creates high PH in the wine. So, that's been something that I have looked at. I've worked with Bubba Beasley if you want to talk about soils, Bubba Beasley is a hydrogeologist based right here in Charlottesville and he and I won't do a new site anymore pretty much without having Bubba do electromagnetic imaging and then ground truthing with soil pits he's extremely knowledgeable about this. I have always refused to do it before, the EM imaging and then Bubba came along. I did soil pits and GPS them. I've been doing that since GPS first came out and a lot of people would only look at the top six or eight inches and I'm like, that's not where the roots are going to be. You need to go to the Virginia Wine Research Board. They have research that Bubba Beasley and I also with Dr Clifford Ambers, who's a PHD geologist in Virginia and a grape breeder. We

worked with Pollock vineyard on a specific project where we took block b cabernet franc on 312 rootstocks, 312 Clone, I think it was on riparia rootstock either riparia or 101 but same rootstock same clone. And Benoit Pinot the winemaker there, who's French and like us knows soil does matter had noticed that certain vines had different qualities and he had Bubba who was doing EM mapping, so we were able to get this underground map of where the soil change happened. We then flagged the vines, they made different wines out of them for three years and Fred, I could hand you those wines and the color was different, the ph. was different, the flavors as well. And in one block that to the naked eye looks flat and the only difference was the soil. We did Really good job, I'd say as a team, of defining what those differences were rooting depth, water holding capacity, soil pH, and everything.

**Fred Reno**

That's fascinating. Alright Lucie, this has been terrific and I'm serious, we're going have to have a series of interviews because you've got so much knowledge and there's so much, we could cover. But hey, thank you for your time today.

**Lucie Morton**

Well, thanks, Fred. Thanks for you being in Virginia. You know, I've never really left Virginia. And I'm very proud of our industry. And I think it's growing organically. And what would happen if somebody came within unlimited money? I think this is one of those places where money can't buy you happiness, it can buy you, hopefully the ability to put together a team, to design a great vineyard and place it in the right location.

**Fred Reno**

It's a future, It's a future.

**Lucie Morton**

Yeah, we'll see. All right. Thank you.