

EPISODE #5 CHRIS HILL/ VITICULTURIST

SPEAKERS

Fred Reno, Chris Hill,

Fred Reno

Hi, this is Fred Reno, your host, and welcome to the Fine Wine Confidential podcast. This morning I'm fortunate to have Chris Hill, a noted Virginia viticulturalist, who is considered to be one of the important early pioneers in the development of Virginia vineyards in the modern-day wine industry. Chris was past president of the Virginia Vineyard Association and received their lifetime achievement award in 2018. We're here at Pippin Hill farms and vineyards located in Central Virginia in the heart of the Monticello AVA. Pippin Hill is one of the many wineries Chris has worked with to develop their vineyards and continues to collaborate with them on their wine growing.

Fred Reno

Good morning, Chris. So, let's start in the beginning. How did you get involved in being a viticulturalist? What drove that passion if you will, that idea?

Chris Hill

Well, I was at Virginia Tech, taking horticulture classes. And I really wanted to get into some sort of plant and growing industry. I graduated and moved back to the Charlottesville Virginia area and was working in at a garden center, and then with the extension service, at 4H in different things. Then some friends of mine wanted to start a vineyard. I suggested they start with a quarter of an acre. I had a couple of classes in viticulture at Virginia Tech, certainly liked those. The industry in Virginia was just starting. But my friends said, Well, we'd like to start with a sizable planting. So, if you want to do it, we'd like for you to help. My job was with the 4H was ending and in September of 1981. With Glendower Vineyard, we put in nine acres to start. We were off and running.

Fred Reno

Was in 1981 that you initially planted Glendower?

Chris Hill

So, we did a fall planting of a hybrid called Vidal Blanc. That was the first grapes we planted and then we planted the rest of the vineyard in the spring of '82.

Fred Reno

Was there any vinifera in that venue in the beginning?

Chris Hill

Yes. I had about two and a half acres of hybrids and about six and a half of vinifera, which was Chardonnay, and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Fred Reno

Where is Glendower? Is it still an active vineyard today?

The vineyard just got pushed up two years ago, and the farm was sold which was fine. The vineyard had been hit over the years. One winter, we had a minus 17 Fahrenheit. Boy that did some damage. And then another winter, we had gotten down to probably minus six or seven and so the vineyard had had been through some real trials. It was a lovely farm. It's beautiful, great to work, but the elevation wasn't very good. So, when a snow would come through, you'd have snow cover, high pressure builds in, you get a real clear still cold night, you get this tremendous inversion, and the cold air is sinking. And if you're too low, you're the one that fills up with the cold air, whereas the more elevated areas stay relatively balmy. For instance, February 5th, 1996, that night at my home, which was at 1200 feet, located south a little bit west of Charlottesville, it was zero and 12 miles away, by the way the crow flies, it was minus 17. So, there was a 17 degree drop in that 12 miles. And then if you went to the James River, which was just another mile a half further on those 12 miles. It was minus 20. Wow, It was an eye opener to East Coast, the potential difficulty of East Coast vinifera grape production.

Fred Reno

Well, that is a bit of a setup for my next question that came to my mind. You've been growing grapes here for close to 40 years. There's a lot of talk as we all know about climate change which I have my own opinion about what that means. I'd love to hear what you think is the difference between 40 years ago? And today? I mean, what have you seen, if anything that has been a gradual shift? Or what is it? What do you see?

Chris Hill

From the predictions I've seen, basically the Middle Atlantic states are going to probably have the least amount of change within climate change, the further north you go is more change. The further south you go, we in the Middle Atlantic, we'll probably get more extreme weather and my concern with the Mid-Atlantic states is we're predicted to get wetter and wetter which could be an issue. But one thing we will have, which we've always had is volatility. As we've always had and had to respond to, there will be years where it will be quite dry, for Bermuda high billows, from far enough to the west will get caught up in that we will be dry. If that doesn't happen. Then in August, or in September, we'll get the tropics. This year our tropical weather was in August. And it's been a real challenge. That being said 2019 was brilliant. 2018 was very wet. 2017 was wonderful. We had a great vintage in 2017. So, it'll be a lot of ups and downs. The question in our industry is whether you can ride with that. Because the weather is so inconsistent.

Fred Reno

Well, when we first met well over a year ago, and I spent some time with you in a vineyard you said something that stuck with me since that day now well over a year ago. And that was very simply, I was out there trying to understand what I would call classically, what is terroir, in Virginia, and your answer kind of surprised me a little bit. I would love you to talk about what you see is, what we would call classically, what is terroir in Virginia? What are the best growing areas? If there's such a thing? What is terroir? What does it mean here?

Chris Hill

Well, my feeling about the subject of terroir has always been for us that it was a function of rainfall, how much rain do you get and when do you get it. Our soils typically are fairly good agricultural soils. So, with the with a rainfall we get, we get a lot of vigor and that's where the viticulture really comes into play. You can't control the water. You can't turn it off and turn it on. You'll get on some years you're crying for rain and others it won't stop. Then there are some soil types that are fairly lean. I'm seeing those as being producing perhaps year after year on year, better red wine, just because they don't have the water holding capacity, and you don't have quite the production of I hate to throw out this term Methoxypyrazine.

Fred Reno

Yeah, I was going to ask you as I've seen you mentioned that before. What is that?

Chris Hill

Remember, I'm a grape grower, not a winemaker. But the leaves produce this compound and imparted to the seeds. I think it's a type of tannin. But anyway, it is in the winemaking. If you have too much of that, then it will impart a very distinctive flavor to the red wine. And this can happen anywhere in the world. And if the red fruit is picked too soon, you have a lot of it now during the ripening process, this material gets masked over and so in really dry climates where you don't get as much lush growth, there's less methoxypyrazine being produced to start with. So, there's not as much imparted to the seed and the fruit so you're starting off with a lot less here in Virginia and on the east coast in general, where you can't control the rainfall and you can get a fair amount of it if you get a lot of lush growth, a lot of methoxypyrazine produced that gets imparted to the seeds, the seeds are carrying a heavy load of it. So, it takes more time for us to get that flavor masked over going into the fall which has something to do with it.

Fred Reno

Let me interrupt for a second with what I always refer to as getting the grape, physiologically ripe, or mature as opposed to sugar mature, ripe?

Chris Hill

Well, this is sort of maybe just the opposite of that. The grape is probably physiologically ripe fairly soon, the grape doesn't care whether it's got methoxypyrazine or not, you know, it loves to have it. And if you were to taste the juice you would go well, that tastes nice and sweet, and it tastes good. But you'll also notice that it has a very distinctive green bell pepper flavor

Fred Reno

Oh, so it imparts an herbaceous character.

Chris Hill

That's the herbaceous Ness. And so, we on the East Coast need to tone that down. And that's done during the ripening process. And after the fruit is physiologically ripe, then you need to wait even longer and have that green bell pepper flavor go away. So now that's where we talk about that term hang time. Now is when you'd really like to have some nice sunny weather. Because if you get rain, while you're waiting, your juices getting diluted. So, you have a less intense juice, you'll have less sugar. And also, the more rain you get the more difficult it is to hold the fruit intact. If it's ripe enough it wants to start to break down. So, it's a heck of a challenge.

Fred Reno

From your perspective what are? Let me ask it this way. What are essentially the best grape varieties to be planted in Virginia? If there's such a thing? What grapes do you like to work with? What grapes do you see get the best results on a consistent basis for white wine and for red wine?

Chris Hill

Well worldwide there has been a real boom. And Fred, you would know this a lot better than me. But it seems to me there's been quite an uptick in the consumption of Rose. Right so, as a winery, you need to have some Rose in Virginia. Thanks to Matthieu Finot we're having great luck with Merlot.

Fred Reno

Yeah, Matthieu Finot, for those of you who don't know, is at King Family Vineyards.

Merlot is a good grape to grow. However, if we get a lot of rain in August, then making red wine out of merlot is a little tricky, because the juice gets diluted, and the sugar won't build back up again. Well, here's the beauty of rose. We don't need a lot of sugar, and we don't need as much ripeness. Merlot is a nice, consistent producer.

Fred Reno

Well, I'll tell you the varietal, which got me intrigued, because I hadn't been really exposed to it before. And there's been so many wonderful examples recently, is Petit Manseng. I just like the Petit Manseng here and I just had no idea. I hadn't been exposed that grape before, certainly as a single varietal and wine. And there's some terrific examples here. I love to turn people on to Petit Manseng around the country that I know because they themselves don't know what it is either. It's a chameleon. It looks dark. They think well is this matured and yet this is dry. What is this? How do you like working with Petit Manseng?

Chris Hill

Petit Manseng, is I think the nicest grape to grow in Virginia. It's got a thick skin, loose clusters small berry, I guess that's where the petit comes from. And I think it makes a wonderful white wine. It's very distinctive. It's got tropical characters that you just won't get like pineapple, maybe a little coconut. It has these flavors that are very unique. And I'd have to say one thing about wine drinkers. You've got one group of wine drinkers that love all these different wines that are available throughout the world. We live in a time now where if you like wine, it's a great time to be drinking wine. But then again, there are other wine lovers that love a certain wine day in and day out and that's what they like and that's what they stick with. They get used to Chardonnay. That's all they are going to drink. And that's fine. So, they drink a Petit Manseng they go, whoa, that's really different. And if it's really different than sometimes that surprises people too much, but if you're adventurous at all in your heart, and soul you should definitely try Petit Manseng. It's a lovely wine.

Fred Reno

Yeah, I find it to be ultimately really versatile at the dinner table. I really love it. So, let's talk about the farming aspect of this. I see where you favor a trellis system called the smart Dyson. Why do you like that trellis system here in Virginia? Or is it just you like the trellis system.

Chris Hill

Richard Smart and a fellow named Dyson in California sort of invented this this system, where you have a lot of vigor you'll have for instance, you'll have varieties like Sauvignon Blanc that are extremely vigorous, just in their nature. And it's more vigorous than other varieties. Now, you put that variety in Virginia, and it's really vigorous, because it's getting the additional rainfall. Where you have a lot of vigor, you'll get this tremendous growth out of the vines, and we know worldwide most places use what is known as vertical shoot positioning, where all the shoots go up vertically, and it is one canopy, one single canopy coming off the wire, everything goes straight up. Well, in Virginia, my experience was when I did that, I had a very difficult time keeping the thickness of the canopy down, it was too thin, okay, it would grow leaves and grow leaves and grow leaves. You could hedge it and grow some more leaves later. So, you end up throwing all this canopy away in the summer. And we still wind up with a dark interior canopy that promotes powdery mildew promotes all kinds of bad things. Richard Smart comes up with his whole philosophy in his book called sunlight into wine, where you divide the canopy instead of having one canopy going up straight. He would divide the canopy on different planes. And in the case of the Smart/ Dyson, you have shoots that you allowed to go down.

Fred Reno

Oh, that's where the ballerina term came from.

Chris Hill

Yeah, the Smart Dyson is where you take a catch wire force those downward shoots down completely vertical. And the ballerina is where you allowed them just to hang out and let them kind of do their own thing. And we combined that with really serious leaf pulling in the fruit zone. That's right around that first

bottom wire where the cane or the cordon lays. So, that all of the canopies are very thin, you know, they'll be like no more than three shoots per foot of a row. And at the same time, you've got all this vigor and if you want to carry a bit of a heavier crop, particularly on the white varieties, you can do that.

Fred Reno

Wow that sounds interesting. So last count, how many wineries have you been involved with helping develop vineyards here in Virginia in your 40 years? A dozen or more?

Chris Hill

I don't know.

Fred Reno

I sit here looking at the list which includes, Keswick, Veritas, Pollack. Obviously, Michael Shaps Wineworks, where we're at here today, Pippin Hill Farms, Barren Ridge, Lovingston, Del Fosse. That's just a small list, I'm assuming of the people you've worked with. They're all high-quality producers. So clearly, your hand has had something to do with this.

Chris Hill

But the main thing is, that the ones you mentioned had been fairly successful, but it's really due to the people that were starting. I mean, it's been such fun to work with all these people. Extremely dynamic. I love what they do, and they really get after it. So, what little I could teach them they just absorbed right away. They always had a lot of good people around them with a lot of it being family. There'd be a lot of people involved. And I'd be just part of the team. And in my case, it would just be in the vineyard. But that's where I like to be it's just been amazing, really.

Fred Reno

I didn't mean to leave out King Family Vineyards, I believe you worked with them as well.

Chris Hill

Oh, yeah. But some of the most fun has been to work. It's of course always fun to work with the wineries. But there are also a lot of independent grape growers in this part of Virginia, of course, that's a Wild Bunch there. Working with the grape growers has really been a hoot. There's always been a tremendous amount of enthusiasm, I think that gets spurred on. I mean, it's a lot of the work is drudgery, but there's something about producing a big crop of anything. It could be corn and soybeans. I mean, that's what keeps farmers in there, I think part of it is the aesthetic of going out there at harvest day, and where you've got a good year going, and it is phenomenal site. And then you get all these people together, at least in the grapes, right? This whole community of people that come in and start picking, then you've got to gather what's been picked out of the field and into trucks. And it's just a big deal.

Fred Reno

Well, I, I've always told people in my career, especially consumers, or even businessperson who are not in the wine industry, and they say, Boy, maybe I should get in the wine business and things of this nature. And I'd always say, Listen, you have to understand at the root of all this, it's farming. That's what this is. It's farming. It's not glamorous, it's farming, and the farmer gets paid for what he drives across the scale. That's the challenge every year is balancing quantity versus quality. And I had this conversation with several vintners already, I said, if you're getting into wine business, and you think you're going to make a lot of money, unless you're a rather large corporate structure, you're in the wrong business, the only time the farmer makes any money is when he sells the farm. That's usually the case, and definitely the case, for most estate wineries, as well, when they finally decide, and they built a brand. They're ready to retire and they sell, that's when they may make some money, but the day to day, it's farming. Yeah, that's what it is.

Chris Hill

Yeah. So, you have to be naturally drawn to that and have the ability to get there either through your training, or the money you made in a previous life. I'll have to say in the wine industry, the amount of enthusiasm is really the fuel; once people get involved, they really get after it. And it's been fun to see the response to the public, people really enjoy coming to visit these wineries in this part of Virginia,

where you know, the land, and the topography is so beautiful. It's just a pleasant way to spend an evening, really any time of year. And we've been really lucky that we've been able to attract a lot of folks.

Fred Reno

That's what I'm hoping to do is help get the word about Virginia wine out on a much larger basis, so that people start to understand what's happening here. Because it's exciting. It is very exciting. Here I am, myself 41 years in the business, and I feel like a kid again, talking about Virginia wine. That passion is there.

Chris Hill

And, Fred, if you can sell Petit Manseng wine on a large scale, we can definitely produce the fruit on large scale.

Fred Reno

Well, that's interesting challenge.

Chris Hill

And really, really high-quality fruit. This is a nice grape with a potential future.

Fred Reno

Tell me what the impact was going back historically, from Lucie Morton, her contribution to this whole growing thing because her name comes up as one of the pioneers obviously, as well.

Chris Hill

Our industry has a lot of remarkable people. I got to tell you, she's, definitely one of them. This is my understanding. She studied under Pierre Galet in France and became an Ampelographer where she could look at the vine and determine through growth characteristics, primarily at the growing tip of the plant what variety is was. These very specific things that Galet had worked out, and she could identify varieties just by the plant no fruit, just by, the leaves. Yeah. And so, she was hired a lot by nurseries that were worried they had made a mistake. In other words, they would have a row of young vines, that they were growing for

sale next year. They weren't really sure whether they got the variety, true or not. So, then they would call in Lucie, and Lucie started noticing, through her viticulture in mature vineyards, we've all noticed different diseases and what's going on with that vine. Well, Lucie started out identifying these diseases, these trunk diseases in the nurseries and this has been profound. This coincided with the ability to identify viral diseases through testing that had not been previously available. Lucie was able to go into these vineyards and find examples in the nursery of these diseases. And for years, these diseases had been shipped to the grower, the nurseries didn't know. It wasn't like was really anybody's fault. But Lucie's work was just foundational in getting examination of nursery stock. Particularly the mother vines where the cuttings come from to do the grafting. That's where it led to, to check those vines for these different viruses. Because of Lucie, meaning of the expression, virus free, has taken on a completely different meaning. Now, it really means something. Whereas back in 1981, as it turns out, it really didn't mean very much.

Fred Reno

I understand.

Chris Hill

Her work has been really the most profound, and she really angered a lot of nursery people, and pathologist. In other words, she disturbs, she rocked that boat, but she's tough. She hung in there, and has really, I think, improved not only US viticulture, but really, worldwide. And then she found cohorts in France, in other parts of the world in Italy, and in different places. They were thinking the same way. So, they have gotten together, and it's been a wonderful movement when she got push back. Fortunately, there were some major wine producers in California like Robert Mondavi that backed her.

Fred Reno

Wow, that's, that's great history. I didn't realize that.

Chris Hill

You might have to talk to Lucy to make sure I got that story accurate.

Fred Reno

Well, she's on my list for sure. You're into the viticultural areas of farming and I'm sitting here trying to understand, from my end, why Virginia hasn't been able to break through nationally and internationally with the type of recognition and following that I believe it deserves. And I keep coming back to the fact that there's no Robert Mondavi here. I mean, California don't really understand, well, maybe they do realize how lucky they are that Robert Mondavi did what he did, because without him California's wine business would look completely different, in my opinion, just completely different. It was that tireless, crusading about wine quality that drove him and drove the international/ national recognition. And I'm looking around going, Okay, where's the Robert Mondavi? Where's that one person here in Virginia, who is willing to go out there and just say, hold on here, we make world class wine in Virginia. We make as good a quality wine as anybody. That individual who is willing to put the chips on the table because that type of energy is contagious in the marketplace. Who knows maybe that Robert Mondavi is out there right now and they're just about ready to come out of their shell.

Chris Hill

I think the one thing that's always held us back a bit is the wet weather. Because as an investor, you've got to be able to handle the rainy years also. Now we get a lot of really good years. But in California, it is rare that they get rainfall during harvest.

Fred Reno

Oh, I know I spent most of my career there. I understand.

Chris Hill

When you look around the world. Most places that commercially produce a lot of wine, have really dry summers that it really come, down to that. So that's one of the reasons I would really like to see the success of Petit Manseng because it's one grape that really handles rainfall better than any grape I've ever worked with. It's an East Coast grape. But, Fred, you've got to develop the following and the people that that are interested in trying it and buying it.

Fred Reno

Well, everybody, I've turned on to Petit Manseng, primarily Shaps Petit Manseng, because it's one of the better examples of a dry Petit Manseng, they go, Wow, I had no idea you know, and they get it. It's just a matter of getting that out there. I had a Vintner say to me about a year ago, something that stuck with me for quite some time. I would love your opinion on this. They were saying to me that they thought that maybe some of the best potential vineyards in Virginia haven't even been planted yet. What's your thoughts on that?

Chris Hill

Well, so I think we for red wine, we have some soil types that deliver year in year out a better red wine than other soil types. The problem is those soil types are not at elevation. So now, we haven't talked about frost, which you know, even major grape growing regions have issues with frost. Frost is a big deal in California. So along with other investments, you've got to invest in wind machines that bring down the warm air from above and mix it with colder air below that, hopefully, raising the temperature below to a high that you don't get frost, it isn't an annual problem. We have a lot of years, that is not a problem. But when it is a problem, it's a big problem.

Fred Reno

But what about overhead sprinklers? Which is common in California? There's so much water here?

Chris Hill

That's a great question. That's another system. I would need to talk to California people about that because a lot depends on at what time of night, the freezing temperatures occur. So, if the freezing temperatures occur at midnight, then your trellis system is certainly got to withstand a heck of an ice load. So, there's all of that. I was just talking to a grape grower from Burgundy, and they use the wax blocks. And his thing was, he didn't want sunlight hitting the frozen tissue first thing in the morning, when the sun first comes up, he wanted the ice to melt before the sun hit it. What he wanted was a smoke cloud cover over the vineyard before so that ice would melt completely before the sun hit it. I never heard that

before. They now sort of take a look at that and see what the physics are behind that. And whether that's true.

Fred Reno

That sounds different.

Chris Hill

But that's really labor intensive. It is a lot of effort. A lot of smoke. And your neighbors may have something to say about that.

Fred Reno

Yeah, I bet they would

Chris Hill

In Burgundy they'll go along with you a little bit better perhaps than they would in this part of the world. So, what we use now are helicopters, which are great, and they are really effective. Unless the temperature falls below freezing at one o'clock in the morning. The helicopters fly in the thermal cloud, the warmest air above the vineyard. But that's a fixed amount of warm air. Once all that warm air has been shoved downward, you can exhaust the thermal plane then there's nothing but cold air. So, if you start too early, you're going to exhaust all the warm air before sunrise and then things will freeze up anyway. You've got a lot of gambling. There's some serious gambling that goes on when you're flying helicopters as far as the amount of money you're spending and what the return if you're going to get. The other way to do it Fred is to go with a vineyard at an elevation where you're in that thermal plane. That's the ideal and in Eastern Blue Ridge Mountains 900 to 1200 feet, you find those sites. We can definitely find people that are probably buy them and put grapes on them. Those sites are usually fairly steep and heavily wooded. Those sites are there, but they're not a lot of them.

Fred Reno

So, the contribution, if you don't mind talking to it because you went there, I'd love to hear your thoughts on the contribution of Virginia Tech to the overall wine industry here.

Chris Hill

Well, I mean, we really struggled early on. I planted my first grapes in 1981. Tony Wolf came on the scene. He's the state viticultural extension agent, and he was trained at Cornell, as was Richard Smart. Until Tony came, we simply were going along blind. I mean, we didn't know what we were doing particularly. We had a tremendous problem that we didn't even know about it. It's a little moth called a gray moth. And it flies late in the evening and is extremely small. I didn't know moths could be this small. So, that was pointed out to us like this is a problem because the larvae burrow into the fruit. We knew we were getting rot at harvest, but we hadn't identified as that was the problem. And besides that, Tony, is a tremendous speaker and educator. His thoughts are so organized. Hate for him to hear me say this. He's downright eloquent. What he's done is educate all of us as to our issues, and how we can solve these problems. Plus, when he first got here, and he started this experimental vineyard, as a result we have a lot of the varieties that we use now have come from Tony's original vineyard of different varieties, the Hortons were the first people that really latched on to a lot of these varieties. If it wasn't for Dennis and Sharon Horton, we wouldn't have anything. They and Tony worked together very closely on varietal selection. A lot of this didn't pay off until years later, but you got to start. And Bruce Zoecklein, who at the same time came out as a state enologist our winemakers were making horrendous mistakes. But Bruce really got people to see what needed to be done. For instance, we didn't use refrigeration of the fruit before processing, particularly white grapes. We didn't do that at all. I would bring Phil Ponton at Oakencroft, I would bring him a truck full of 95- degree grapes. He would take those and put them in the press Fred and that 95-degree juice just rolled out of there, God help everybody.

Fred Reno

I remember the early days at Sonoma-Cutrer, where I was at. We came up with this invention of a chilling tunnel before anybody had it. And the bins that they picked it into the field were designed to be quarter ton bins, and they would stack four on top of each other. There was this conveyor belt and it looked like, well the best way I can describe it was it looked like a carwash. And they put the bins on a conveyor belt and Bill Bonetti, he was a genius, the winemaker could chill the

fruit down to 40 degrees before it would go to the mechanized sorting tables, and get hand sorted before the grapes would go into the press. So, it didn't matter what time of the day, although you'd like to pick obviously, first thing in the morning. There was the chilling tunnel that could that handled all the grapes that were received and would bring it down to 40 degrees Fahrenheit before would be sorted and go into the press. And that was one of the things that Sonoma-Cutrer invented.

Chris Hill

How long would it take for it to take it down to 40?

Fred Reno

Well, that would obviously depend to some degree on what temperature the grapes were when they came in. But most of the picking was done in the morning. It wouldn't be much more than if I recall correctly. 30 to 45 minutes. It was very powerful.

Chris Hill

That's amazing. Very powerful. Yeah, that'd be great.

Fred Reno

And you could get about 10 tons of grape in the chamber at one time in these quarter ton bins. Stacked four on top of each other. So yeah, they could take about 10 tons at the time.

Chris Hill

If we had that here we would have gotten off to a much early start in our development of quality.

Fred Reno

Yeah, just to digress for a second what Bill Bonetti said to me one day when I got there, and boy, I learned so much from him. He was such a fascinating individual. He's always talk about maximizing vineyard potential. That was what his job was. And I really didn't understand what that meant at first. And then I realized, Oh, he's talking about the chilling tunnel. He's talking about the sorting table. He's

talking about the press where he only took the free run and two atmosphere and three atmosphere press juice. That's what he was talking about. He was getting the most he could, out of whatever the quality of the grapes were, he was extracting the most he could out of it

Chris Hill

That is really important. And in Virginia, that's super important, you know because what we have is variable weather. And every year, you need to maximize everything that you can. And the best operations here take advantage of really good years. And that's where the quality is just unbelievable. And then on the years that are more difficult. Then those operations that are able to maximize give wonderful wine. I mean, it's still a very good wine. But they've been able to, to maximize whatever grapes that we get in.

Fred Reno

Chris, I really appreciate your time this morning. This has been really a learning experience for me getting to understand the viticultural side from someone who's been at this now for almost 40 years, and I can't thank you enough for giving me your time this morning. This will be a delightful episode. Thank you.

Chris Hill

Thank you, Fred.