

EPISODE # LEE HARTMAN/WINEMAKER BLUESTONE VINEYARD

SPEAKERS

Lee Hartman, Fred Reno

Fred Reno

Lee, welcome to my Podcast. I appreciate you coming over here this morning.

Lee Hartman

Thanks for having me. It's great to be here.

Fred Reno

And of course, White Burgundy is on the table folks, as it always is. Beautiful bottle of 2019 Chassagne Montrachet, Vieilles Vignes, it should be nice. Well, let's start at the beginning. What's your story? How did you get into this game?

Lee Hartman

So, my parents and I really got started with a vineyard in 2008. And as you were saying, prior to that, I think it was in 2001 or 2002. My parents were having a Sunday school lunch at their house on a Sunday afternoon and a friend of theirs has some grape vines in his backyard. But they had, you know, a half an acre or so. And they had a very, very small planting of stuff. He was lamenting about how he wished he had more space to grow vines. And as I say, my dad totally fell for it. His name was Phil Kreider. He is a really great home winemaker; he made wine in his basement. And then they ended up planting a garden vineyard. And it was maybe 100 vines. A row of this and a row of that and a row of something else. And in hindsight, it didn't make a lot of sense for how we did it. But when I was 17 when it was being planted, I asked my folks if I'd be able to try the wine when it was ready. They said, well, you'll be 21 or 22 when it's ready. For sure. You know, we did that for a number of years. And in 2008, we decided, yeah, we know what we're doing. Let's plant 10,000 of them. So, we got in touch with Virginia Tech, and sent in soil samples. They then looked at the property and

thought yeah, this would be a good place to grow grapes. I was graduating from Eastern Mennonite University in 2008. And I previously lived in Europe, I lived in Germany, and I love traveling around. I've always loved travel, it was something I was exposed to at a young age, you know, friends would come and visit when I lived there. And I would kind of act as a tour guide. And I really loved it. I loved being able to show people around, I loved being able to tell them about history and what's happening locally. So, I wanted to be a tour guide or work in a museum or something like that. I studied history in college. And we waited to see if somebody would reach back out after I applied to a few places. My parents said until you hear from somebody how about you help us plant some grapevines and then I totally fell for it.

Fred Reno

Boy, that must have been an interesting experience as you were on the ground floor.

Lee Hartman

Yeah, that was in 2008. And I was graduating with a degree in history and didn't know what I was doing. So, that first year we planted 4000 Red Vines. The next year we planted 4000 whites 2010. We built the winery. The first couple years we were making wine in my parent's garage. We had the garage bonded and they said yep, this is a winery, you've painted the floor, there's a stainless-steel sink. There's no motorcycle in here. So sure. This is a winery. Our first year as a licensed winery was 2009. And then we did move the production facility from my parent's garage down to the bottom of the hill.

Fred Reno

Well, what was the guidance as far as what you were good at originally initially plant in your vineyard, as far as varietals?

Lee Hartman

I will start off by saying that every vine that we planted in 2008 is gone. So, I guess you know, we followed the old Jim Law model of you know, you rip it out when it's not working. We planted Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot and for one

reason or another we planted 500 vines of Pinot Noir, and then we planted a little bit more than an acre of Norton. And we had this really nice south facing slope and we thought it's going to have great exposure; it's just going to soak up sun all day and make these beautiful ripe grapes. In the category of, if we knew then, what we know now right, across the country road is another hill that's even bigger than ours. In 2010 I think there's a polar vortex and so we had extreme cold temperatures and all that cold air from our hill and all the cold air from across the road all settled at the bottom and come spring there was a visible line in the hill where below it everything was dead. Chris Hill was our consultant at the time, and we decided that the Vidal Blanc, I mean they grow that stuff in Quebec so, we thought well we'll be okay should this ever happen again. And so now we have on those same blocks we have moved the Cabernet and everything else was replaced with Vidal.

Fred Reno

What's the elevation of the vineyard?

Lee Hartman

Where the winery is, it starts at 1200 feet and it goes up to 1300 feet, which is where our tasting room is. In 2015, we doubled the size of our farm operation. And we bought some property a half mile up the road. And that's where my wife, my son, and I live now. That property goes from 13 to 1400 feet. So pretty good elevation.

Fred Reno

I will interject something here, folks. I have had wines out of a can, which I thought have been atrocious. And I couldn't understand what anybody would drink wine out of a can. And then I had a can of their Vidal Blanc. I thought this wine is really good. It changed my mind about canned wine overnight. I was like, this was really good.

Lee Harman

There's been a real shift in the last five or 10 years about what kind of wine should be in what kind of vessel. When we first started talking about canning

wine my wife was pregnant, it was 2015. We went to New York City to see some shows. It was there I saw for the first time, because I didn't see it in Harrisonburg, I finally saw canned wine. And so, my wife wasn't drinking, and I wanted something to have back in the hotel room. So, I bought two cans, one for myself and one to bring to my dad. I drank it in the hotel and brought him his and he said how is it? I said, I don't think it's bad because it's in a can, I think it's in a can because it's bad. And that has shifted a lot in the last several years. So just because something's in a can you know, it's a perfect half size vessel. It's easily carried, it doesn't break like glass, you can take it tailgating or camping or a music festival or wherever you want to take it. That's what my team and I like to do. We wanted to be able to bring our wine with us.

Fred Reno

Are all of your wines that you produce currently from your estate, or do you buy fruit as well from other growers?

Lee Hartman

At this point, we are contracted for three tons of outside fruit this year. We are selling more than that. So, we pretty much just stick to valley owned fruit. Everything does come from Virginia and hopefully an hour away or less. And anytime we can either get higher elevation or Shenandoah fruit, all the better.

Fred Reno

Well, it's interesting to me, because Shenandoah Valley is, if I'm not mistaken, the largest geographic designated AVA. And yet it only has about 10% of the wineries in Virginia.

Lee Hartman

Yep, that's right. Accurate.

Fred Reno

It just seems like to me, there's a huge future. And Shenandoah Valley given all of its conditions. Talk a little bit about the difference between growing grapes from Shenandoah Valley and what they might be facing in Northern Virginia or here in central Virginia. Like in Monticello.

Lee Hartman

Yeah. So, it's a really well-defined region. It's it is really large, but it is, nestled between the Allegheny and the Blue Ridge Mountains and runs north and south. The farther south you go in the valley, the higher elevation goes. The Shenandoah River that goes north, we are higher elevation, so that gives us cooler nights, which helps us keep brighter acidity in the wine keeps things very nice and fresh. We are typically about five degrees cooler. Now this isn't every single day, but about five degrees cooler than that in Charlottesville. And according to Google, we get about half a foot less rain every year than they do between those temperatures, less rain, there seems to be a pretty constant breeze all the time. So that helps keeps things nice and dry and hopefully a good bit cleaner. I think that when you drink wines from the valley, they have a real clean and fresh quality to them that kind of defines them.

Fred Reno

You had mentioned earlier, and I knew this myself, Michael Shaps was your original consultant. Is that accurate?

Lee Hartman

Yeah. Back in our garage winemaking days he was our consultant. I think for roughly five years. So, he would come by, we would taste through the wines. He would tell us what we're doing well, what we can do better. It's interesting because unless you are a bi-hemispheric winemaker who's also making wine south of the equator, you get only one shot at this a year. We felt it was really important in the beginning to make sure that we had good guidance, somebody who could really tell us, what we should be doing, what we should be looking out for, because you don't know what you don't know. And, after a number of years, with him really kind of leading us along on things I had gotten to know lots of

other winemakers, a lot of people that you've had on the show, and it was really handy for me to be able to call them up. All of my friends. I would call Jake Busching. I'd call Matthieu Finot, I'd call up and more recently, Joy Ting. I call these people and I'd say, hey, you know more about this than I do? What can you tell me? That's one of the best parts about our industry. Everybody's kind of looking out for each other. If I have a question, I've got 300 answers.

Fred Reno

Well, that is what has impressed me, since I've come to Virginia in 2019, is the collegiality that exists here, which used to exist in the early days in California during the 80s, when I was starting to go out there. It doesn't exist anymore. It's really refreshing to see that everybody in Virginia is trying to help each other improve and make better quality wine.

Lee Hartman

You know, there's no reason somebody with a degree in history should be able to make wines to the volume that we do, like nobody should trust me to do this. But I have a lot of friends who always give support and give guidance. And that's been really great. Not only do we want each other to be making better wines, but every year I have a seminar at Bluestone called; so, you want to start a winery, because people will call us or, they'll stop by and ask me in the tasting room about starting a vineyard or a winery. My first question is always do you want me to talk you into this or out of it? Because I can do either one really well. And, through that we've had two different parties of people who really wanted to have a vineyard and we planted it for them. We couldn't talk them out of it. We planted a farm vineyard, and we care for those farms. At the end of the year, we buy the fruit off of them. I would give any one of my toes to have two dozen wineries in Rockingham County right now, we've got five. But it's something I'm just so envious of Albemarle, Nelson County, Loudoun County and Fauquier county. They just have a critical mass of wineries. It makes people want to go there. And you can pull out of a winery outside of Charlottesville and say, well, should we turn left, or right? No, it doesn't matter. We'll find another winery. Whereas nobody accidentally comes to Bluestone. We are on the way to nowhere, and it's beautiful. And it's so wonderful. And it's nice to kind of get away from it all. But, if

I could just get a few more wineries on my road, I'd be the happiest person in the world.

Fred Reno

I'm curious, being a Branding guy in the wine business, your branding, why Bluestone? How did the brand name come to be and what does it signify?

Lee Hartman

So, Bluestone is another way of saying limestone. Everywhere in our hill, there's just outcroppings of bluestone or limestone. Every time you go to rip a row or to dig a row. Thinking that's going to be a future site for grape vines, you get these, everything from baseball size to Boulder size, rocks in the ground. And you know, that is literally what our wine is like, if you buy into the idea of terroir, which most of us do. It's just a bunch of dirt, water, and sunlight. And so, for us, our site is the most important thing that we have.

Fred Reno

Well, this glass of Chassagne Montrachet we have here its soil is a combination of classic Côte de Nuits, Burgundian soil, which is more red clay and limestone. And their elevation, you know, the sweet spot in Côte de Nuits, and Côte de Beaune is not necessarily the top of the hill and definitely not the bottom.

Lee Hartman

We have found the grapes, because we have a couple of different blocks of Chardonnay, for example. The one near my house is three acres. And at the bottom of the hill, you have different grapes than you do at the top of the hill. And the Chardonnay that is outside my parents' house we keep that separate as well. So, when I'm making a Chardonnay at every chance that I can to distinguish this lot is different than that one, I'll try to separate them. We separate the clones, we separate out the blocks, we separate out the press fractions. Barrels are treated differently. They're given different temperatures, different yeast, different treatments all around. And that's always fun because it gives me more chances to learn every single year. But also then at the end, every one of those barrels and every lot is its own unique wine. So even if you had a whole bunch of Chardonnay that was all harvested on the same day by the same team grown by

the same people, and then you put it back together you have a 100% Chardonnay blend, and it makes that wine more interesting, and I think representative of the farm as a whole.

Fred Reno

Is your Father and Mother still both actively involved at the farm and the winery.

Lee Hartman

Yes, they work more than anybody. If I come by in the morning, my wife and I have chickens, so we have eggs, and I'll bring them eggs in the morning before I go down to the winery. My mom is, you know, counting out things from yesterday. She's getting bank deposits ready. That's early in the morning. And they help close up every night. My dad will do everything from taking the trash out from our concerts, to taking the tractor in for repairs. If somebody's doing it, it's either my vineyard manager Jessie or my dad.

Fred Reno

Well, you know, you touched on this earlier about folks who come to you and say, Hey, I'd like to start a winery. I want to start a vineyard. I always tell folks, because I've had that during my 40 plus years of people will say, man, it looks really great. And I say well you have to understand that at the base it is nothing but farming. 100% Yeah, it's just farming and in comes with all the chores and the hardships that farming gives you.

Lee Hartman

That's one of the really great things about my vineyard manager, Jessie, she has a farming background. She has no experience with wine or grapes. But she came in, I think in 2019 and this is her fourth season with us. She knows her way around a tractor. If your truck is stuck in a ditch, you call her she'll get you out. That sort of thing. But it's interesting because In Rockingham County, we are surrounded by farms. We're not surrounded by other vineyards, but we are surrounded by farms. And it is cool to be a part of that community. Whether the other farmers think of you that way or not.

Fred Reno

It is accurate for me to say you make wine from well over a dozen different varietals.

Lee Hartman

Probably. It's it is a lot. We grow all five Bordeaux varietals. We have hybrids like Chambourcin, Vidal, Traminette, Muscats. We have Chardonnay, Petit Manseng. Now, and then we also buy about three tons a year of Viognier. So, it's about a dozen. And then there are blends. And then we do a fair amount of custom crush for the size operation that we are. We do some vineyard management stuff. It's a lot of juggling.

Fred Reno

Oh, you have a lot going on. A lot of facets. It is definitely winegrowing.

Lee Hartman

Yes, for sure. It's something that if you're doing this, you have to really love wine. If you don't you are just going to be beating your head against the wall. But it's something that I enjoy, doing all of these things. I enjoy working with my team. Hopefully, they enjoy working with me too. But it's a lot of work, but I don't know what else I would do.

Fred Reno

The one question, I love to ask every vintner, and everybody's got it; at least I thought everybody had it. But I've had been corrected. So, what was that one wine that you had in your life where do you went? Oh, now I understand wine can really be this interesting and ethereal. What was that one wine?

Lee Hartman

So, when my wife and I first started dating, I was 22. And I was not into wine at all. I just did not care. We started dating. And a few months later, my roommate was getting married in Oregon. And everybody was booking plane tickets to go out and we thought, hey, we're young and dumb, let's drive over there. So, we made a five-week trip out of it. And she dragged me to wineries in Washington and Oregon and California, and I just couldn't be bothered about it. And I did not

know that a few years later, I was going to start getting into wine and planting grapes and all of that. And so, man, I would do anything to have that trip again. But she also took me to wine tastings at a local wine shop. And I remember one time, it was the first time I ever had a bottle of wine where I thought, Oh, yeah. \$30 I see why people would spend \$30 on that. And it was a Syrah from New Zealand. It was. It's called Kennedy Point Winery. Well, It was the first time that I really had a wine that if somebody said what does it tastes like? I wouldn't say Yeah, it tastes like red wine. You know, it really tasted like an individual thing. I'm sure that I had some other very good wines prior to that, but nothing ever really struck me, never caught my attention like that.

Fred Reno

Well, what's your thoughts about this White Burgundy you have here in front of you?

Lee Hartman

This is great. So, I've discovered through being in the tasting room or being the guy locally that people know Oh, yeah, that's Lee he something about wine. People ask about how long is a bottle of wine good for, like, how long is it good for after you open it? Or how long should you age wine. And to me, this has got just that really good integration. It's got a good bit of gas in its tank like you could you could enjoy this a few days later, and it's got some good grip with really good texture too.

Fred Reno

Well, as long as we're on the subject of Chardonnay, I'll tell you this story. When I first moved to Virginia in 2019, I got a small little group of younger sommeliers here in Charlottesville, where they're well known. And I said to the leader of the group; listen, I'd like to have a little blind tasting was a several folks with good palates. And I'm going to pick the most neutral grape, which is Chardonnay. I'm going to buy all the wines. I'm not going to tell you what they are. But we're going to have some Virginia wine. We're going to have benchmark California Chardonnay, there'll be some burgundy in there as well. That's I went down to Tastings and talked to Bill Curtis the owner and well-known wine authority in Charlottesville, because I just moved here to try to get some advice. And he gave

me a bottle of Bluestone Chardonnay 2016. He said here put this in the tasting. I'd never heard of Bluestone. So, I put it in. I had three benchmark chardonnays from California. And I don't mind mentioning them because they're benchmarks. One was Mount Eden, which is you know, everybody goes, Okay, Mount Eden. The other was Les Pierres, which was our cru at Sonoma-Cutrer. And the other was Olivet Estate, which is still the oldest Chardonnay vines in the Russian River Valley, at that time, these were 45-year-old vines. It was Gary Farrell Winery expression of Olivet Lane. And then there was Bluestone plus two other unnamed Virginia wineries, and a white burgundy. And when we got done, I said to everybody, okay I want you to rank these two different ways. Give me the one you liked the best today. It's a one. The one you liked the best is the one the one you liked the least is a seven. But I also want a second ranking. And that is a quality ranking. Whether you like the wine or not, is it well made? Is it exceptionally well-made. Well- made, or of poor quality. That's one, two, or three. And they're like, Wow, I've never had that done before. I'm trying to establish in my mind what I believe to be true that Virginia wines are equal to the highest quality wines being produced anywhere in the world. I want to establish the quality metric. And when we got done and I was revealing everything, it was Bluestone that won this tasting and blew everybody's mind

Lee Harman

That kind of blows my mind a little bit. It's humbling. I'm willing to bet it might have been if you got it from Tastings, it might have been the 2014.

Fred Reno

I don't know why I thought it was 16. But your probably right.

Lee Hartman

The only reason I say that is because the 2014 wine ended up in the Governor's Cup case. And so, I think that's probably why it found its way to Tastings. But yeah, that's all grown on the north side of my parents' house and barrel fermented. Just a really awesome year, 2014. But you know, Chardonnay comes in really early and still retained great acid. That was about the time I really started getting into Chardonnay. I liked growing it. I enjoyed making it and I don't care how basic it makes me I just I love to drink Chardonnay.

Fred Reno

I always say that brown bag never lies, right? I have learned that in 43 years in this business. Even though I bought all the wines I was pretty much familiar with all the wines in this blind tasting there was only one wine I could identify. And that was Les Pierres, because I was so closely associated with it for a number of years. That was the only one I could identify blind. It did end up actually finishing second in the tasting. But other than that, I couldn't identify what the wines were. And that's what I love about blind tastings, they really remove all that bias. But the thing was every one of the Virginia wines in his tasting got a quality to above average quality ranking too. And that convinced me that I wasn't crazy when I moved here the Virginia, that the quality is here.

Lee Hartman

There are a lot of people who have a background, even elsewhere outside of Virginia, who have decided to come here and really believe in it. Not only are they working hard on their farms, but they're working hard to make sure the whole industry does well as well. I think that one of the nice things about Chardonnay is it has that neutrality to it. It really shows the hand of the winemaker. It also shows how things went in the field. It shows how things went for that season. So, it's one that I enjoy. I think that you kind of need to look at it under a bit more of a microscope, but it really shows what it is and has less aromatics to kind of hide behind?

Fred Reno

It's a blank canvas and how the winemaker along with what the grapes are, and how they handle them, determines everything doesn't it.

Lee Hartman

That's something we learned very, very early on. Our first year in the winery that we built at the bottom of the hill was 2010. And I didn't know what pH was. I had no idea. Again, nobody should have trusted me with that much fruit. And that was about the time my dad was stepping away from being the main winemaker. Then

I was kind of taking things over because prior to that he had been making wine in his garage and his lab was the kitchen. So, I was kind of taking it over in 2010. Because it was just a year of amazing fruit, you'd have to try to mess this stuff up. Our Cabernet that year, which was grown at Adventure Farms right off the Charlottesville airport, ended up in the Inaugural Governor's Case. We learned pretty early on if you have really great fruit, being a winemaker is not too hard. The hard part is done outside in the vineyard.

Fred Reno

Well, speaking of farming, you've seen 12, 13 vintages. In that short period of time, what have you seen, if anything, as it relates to Climate Change? What are you dealing with? And again, when I call it climate change, I'm talking about, it's getting warmer or it's getting colder. It just appears the climate is more severe whatever the conditions. What have you seen?

Lee Hartman

I think there's this real, easy ambivalence to climate change for a lot of people. And I think that you can say, Oh well, the ocean is going to rise by a foot and you're like, well, but I live at 1400 feet. Or the temperature is going to rise by two degrees? And we're like, oh, well, 76, 78 degrees I can't tell the difference. But if you have two degrees increase in the Gulf of Mexico, you're talking about mega tons of water evaporating every day, and that creates chaos in the atmosphere and creates bigger storms. It changes what you have to do on your farm. I'm not a climate expert but it does seem like things are, for instance this year has been a very wet year, a couple of years ago, in 2018. It just rained all year. In 2020. We've got hit by five Frost's after budbreak. So, there are certainly some more weather-related challenges.

Fred Reno

As I said, severe weather. Or what I call whiplash weather.

Lee Hartman

Yeah, it can be that way. Just in the last few days, it went from 97 degrees to I think it's a high of 75 up in the valley today.

Fred Reno

Well, speaking of climate change, it allows me to segue from one of my passions over the last few months. And that's wine produced from the Norton grape. I am really on this Norton train. For a variety of reasons, I won't bog down in this interview. Do you have Norton still planted in your vineyard?

Lee Hartman

We did.

Fred Reno

And so, Norton is out now.

Lee Hartman

It is out, but we still have it in the tasting room. And we probably will for a few more years. Norton was one of our original plantings in 2008, why did it come out? It was not easy in the vineyard. Now you've got these really light clusters that are very loose, you can almost see through them, the berries are so tiny, and there's a lot of great things about that. It helps fight against disease. However, when you have really tiny berries, you have a much higher ratio of skin to juice. But in those berries, they're just chock full of seeds, there's not a lot of juice, and then your acid balance is a little bit different than others. So, you have a lot more Malic acid than you do in other grapes. So, it's a challenge in the field, a challenge in the cellar, and then you have to really sell people on what Norton is, and it's a really acquired taste. We looked at it, and said in 2018, which, as we already were saying was such a challenging year, we said about midway through after we calculated how much more it was going to cost us to get that fruit all the way to harvest and then in the door. And we said that acre of Norton is not worth taking care of anymore.

Fred Reno

Well, yeah, I can see that for one acre. So, the Dry Dock is a Port style Norton?

Lee Hartman

Kind of. It's a silly play on words. You can't call it a port because it's not from Portugal. It's not sweet, as we didn't fortify it during fermentation. So, it's not sweet, it's dry. It's not an imported port to Docks so we came up with the name Dry Dock. What we wanted was an after-dinner wine, that wasn't sweet. I feel like too often, you have a really beautiful meal, you have a bottle of wine with it, and then dessert comes out. And now you're washing down something sweet with something else that's sweet. It's just way too much sugar. We wanted something to bring balance to the end of the meal. And that's what we did. We already have a dessert wine called Blue Ice. It's a coextracted, Traminette where we freeze the grapes and then press that off and barrel ferment it. But yeah, we wanted a red wine too. And so that's how we came up with Dry Dock.

Fred Reno

I had it after dinner just a couple of nights ago and it is quite good. And now I understand it's not fortified. So, a little lighter and not as high in alcohol like a Port.

Lee Hartman

Sure, we didn't fortify it during fermentation to stop it and leave that residual sugar. But it was aged in Virginia whiskey barrels. So, I wouldn't say it was fortified, but it was maybe passively fortified by the barrels that we got from different distilleries.

Fred Reno

Question for you about sales and marketing, your young generation coming through here and the future of Virginia wine business? What is it going to take In your opinion, what have you experienced, for Virginia to get a national presence and recognition? I continue to be surprised at all the people who in "air quotes" know everything about wine in the business and when I talk to them about Virginia, why they have no idea what I'm talking about?

Lee Hartman

That that is the million-dollar question. I'm not sure you know, in the world of wine, and what comes first the chicken or the egg, as a winery, can you start producing thousands of cases of wine that you haven't been able to sell yet, or, you know, nobody's going to buy. No one is willing to invest in the shelf space, or to take you on unless they know that you're going to be able to fill that shelf space year-round. So, that's a challenge. I do think that the quality is there, particularly, you know, when you get away from the \$10 cap, or the \$15 cap that a lot of restaurants or wine shops want to put on a wine they are going to buy. Once you start getting to \$20 and above, I think we run with the best of them, no question. But my Chardonnay, we sell about 200 cases of that a year. Could I make 2000 cases of it a year, maybe if you give me a few years, but I'm not going to make 2000 cases of it a year unless I know somebody's going to buy it. So that is a challenge, I think that some of some of it is going to rely on the bigger houses here in Virginia, some of the bigger names that have that capacity. And some of it is also just going to be national brands that have on grocery stores and wine shops. Really, kind of making some space for it. And investing in that. I think we have to market ourselves really well. It is interesting that just recently Wine Enthusiast got in trouble for saying that we are only going to focus on these states. And one person that listed out the states that they were they were going to be reviewing wines from at the end they said, and surprisingly Virginia. There's like surprisingly nothing Come on.

Fred Reno

That's my point. Yeah.

Lee Harman

I was glad to be included. That we as an industry are included in what should be thought of as quality wines. I think that's probably a very quiet step in the right direction. People who maybe know something about wine would say, Yeah, this place is making good stuff. So hopefully, some people take note of that and aren't surprised by it.

Fred Reno

Just sort of a side note, I'm curious, do you put any of your wine in larger format bottles?

Lee Hartman

Not yet. We've definitely talked about it, particularly now that we are making sparkling wine. We've talked about doing a bit of that. But no, not quite yet.

Fred Reno

I am just always curious about that. Because you know, wine always tastes better than a larger volume.

Lee Hartman

It does and we we've talked about doing it. We've been using the bottling truck for a number of years okay. And a lot of times you know during the day you just do that. We do still have our in-house Corker and maybe what we need to do is pull off some magnums in advance before the truck shows up. Run them through our in-house Corker and just get it done. But we haven't done that yet.

Fred Reno

So, it's still a little bit early, but what do you think you're looking at here for 2020 Vintage?

Lee Hartman

So, 2010 In my first year or really making Wine.

Fred Reno California vintage.

Lee Hartman Yeah, it really was. I mean, our cab that ended up in the Governor's case, clocked in at 14.9% Alcohol. Our Cab Franc was 15.2 with no capitalization at all. That's just what it was. Grapes coming in had pretty high pH that needed to be adjusted. But the sugar and alcohol were not a problem. And I made these wines and I just thought, making wine is easy. And then 2011 was really shaping up to look the same. And everybody was really excited about it. Then in September, it started raining. And it just didn't stop until Thanksgiving. So, I'm very slow to talk about what wines are going to look like with grapes

coming in the door. This is not going to be the best year we've ever had. It's not going to be the worst year.

Fred Reno

Virginia vintage.

Lee Hartman

Yeah, there is no such thing as a normal Virginia vintage. And that plays out if you look at the last five years, you know, all of those years are just wildly different, as wildly different as they could be. 2019 was practically a drought year and it was very hot. The next year was a frost year and then it was freezing all summer.

Fred Reno

Well, that is what I like about Virginia wine. In general, I find that the wines here in Virginia still have what I call soul. Yes, a sense of place. You can line up 10 Napa Valley Cabernets or 10 Russian River Pinot Noir, and they all taste the same. You know what there's a soul and individuality to Virginia wine I find exceedingly attractive, quite honestly.

Lee Hartman

I will say though, that as far as the Virginia wine industry is concerned, in 2011, for many years, which was known as the year of the Rose. There are great wineries that made no red wine that year, they just decided to produce Rose. And we're going to hit this again in 2012. We'll give it another go. It was a hard year, it was real hard. And I went from, it used to be that if I saw 2010s, in wine shops from Virginia, I just bought them it didn't matter who made them. It very rarely steered me wrong. And then to the next year, I would just avoid those wines altogether. But then 2018, hurricane season we began seeing it start in May. And it was such a brutal year. But at the same time, I think that the wines that that came out of Virginia in 2018, were much better than they were in 2011. Because we as a state figured out what we were doing, we learned that, Oh, you don't have to make red wine, you can do something else. In 2020 I made a wine called the odd bird. It's a white wine made out of Cab Franc, Petit Verdot and

then 7% Petit Manseng because I had to top off the barrel. But thinking outside of the box and really working on your feet is something that that we as a group have gotten to do really well.

Fred Reno

Well, I you know, when I've had some red wines from 2018. I go in thinking well, they told me this is a bad vintage. Then I'll have the one which was really quite good.

Lee Hartman Yeah, several surprise you.

Fred Reno

I will say okay, so they've learned how to manage the bad vintages, they've learned how to make the wine.

Lee Hartman

During COVID I got together with some other winemakers, and we decided every couple of weeks we're going to kind of rotate who is sending who wine because everybody gets a better discount at their own place. So, I would send wine to this winemaker and then a few weeks later that winemaker might send me a 2018 Meritage. And it was delicious. And you're like, come on now you're bragging. We did not release any 2018 Red Wine at Bluestone.

Fred Reno

Yeah, I heard that from a number of vintners as a tough one. Well, Lee, I will tell you that this has been a delight. I would say based on meeting you and hearing what you have to say, Virginia has a bright future. Bluestone of course is right there on top. And this has been a pleasure. Thank you for coming to my studio.

Lee Hartman

Thanks for having me. If you're ever out in the Shenandoah Valley, please let us know.

Fred Reno

I'll be visiting. It's been a few years since I've been there though. I've been to your property, but it hasn't been too long. It's a beautiful place. I hope to see you there soon.