

# EPISODE # 42 COMMON WEALTH CRUSH COMPANY; BEN JORDAN, TIM JORDAN, PATT EAGAN.

## **SPEAKERS**

Ben Jordan, Fred Reno, Tim Jordan, Patt Eagan

### **Fred Reno**

Ben, Tim, and Pat, welcome to my Podcast. And of course, we will share a bottle of White Burgundy as we talk about your new venture today. I have a humble bottle of 2019 Meursault, from Joseph Drouhin. Let me start actually with you, Tim. Folks know, Ben. But Tim, I don't know your background. I know you've been in the wine growing business quite some time as well. So why don't you give me a little bit about your background and how you got into wine growing.

### **Tim Jordan**

Sure. Thank you so much for having us today. I grew up not around wine. And really my first introduction to wine was through my brother Ben. I had an opportunity to travel out to California where he was working at the time and visit Sonoma and visit some wineries just on the verge of my 21st birthday. Through that I kind of fell in love with what he was doing out there. We had some family land back in the Shenandoah Valley. It wasn't really being used for anything other than grazing of cattle. And our family at the time were really wondering who was going to take over this farm for the next generation. And that was sort of what Ben and I and our brother and our father and grandfather all came together thinking that well, maybe we can do something with the farm. It was at that time while Ben was in California that I was just starting graduate school at Virginia Tech. And I was studying insects, entomology, and through that I eventually took a position as entomologist that studies insects that eat wine grapes Wow, that's interesting. Yeah. And so, a long program but I obtained my PhD studying

insects that eat wine grapes in Virginia. And through that program, I worked with a number of producers in the state, winemakers, grape growers that really just sort of inspired me to follow through with the passion of growing grapes, which at the same time in tandem, Ben and I were growing grapes on the family farm, just really trying to learn how to grow grapes because I knew nothing from the very beginning. What year was it? Oh, this was 2004 when we hatched the plan and it was 2007 when we planted our first grapes, on our farm and I started my doctorate and the study of grape insects in 2008 and I finished that in 2014 but before I did that, I left academia jumped into a wine cellar with Jake Busching at Grace Estate in Crozet. Jake was very much a very good mentor for me he established my understanding of growing grapes as well as my early formative years of making wines

### **Fred Reno**

Interesting, and Grace vineyard, well I guess it's called Mount Juliet. Is that accurate? Both. Both at the same time, folks for those who don't know it's considered one of the best vineyards out here for grapes for people to buy and make wine from.

### **Tim Jordan**

Yes, it makes some phenomenal Cabernet Franc especially.

### **Fred Reno**

So Patt your background a little bit How'd you meet these guys? And how did you jump into this?

### **Patt Eagan**

So, I first got interested in wine, got the bug from family. My French cousins are now third generation champagne growers in Epernay. And it was part of the collective family history for growing up and I ended up going to undergrad at University of Richmond not knowing at that point that Virginia had a significant commercial wine industry. I then ended up getting my start as a junior, almost to the day I turned 21 with Annette Boyd at the Virginia Wine Marketing office. And fell in love with this idea that Virginia was becoming much larger than it had been

in the past in its commercial efforts and the innovation that was happening, new plantings, new producers coming in. And right up until the point I was graduating was thinking well, how I do this beyond an internship capacity and thinking about opportunities that might be after graduation. And that's when Steve and Jean Case came to the area, and they were looking at throwing their hat in the ring in the wine industry and kind of the early stages of Early Mountain. And so, Annette at that point, connected me with their starting team and I ended up falling in love with the idea. I wanted to be part of a of a startup winery. And certainly, this seems like a team that is shooting for the stars here and would be a great place to learn the craft and cut my teeth. I moved down to Charlottesville in 2012 to do so and ended up working with them for just over seven years. That's where I met Ben when he started in August 2015. So, we worked together for a number of years there and then I ultimately left in 2019 to get my MBA at Darden. And of course, once you get the wine bug, It's been with me ever since. And here we are.

**Fred Reno**

Well, that's fantastic. So, Ben, just a little bit of recap for the audience here. I know that you ended up going out to California, not necessarily with the intention of making wine but ended up falling into it and working for a couple of really cool people like Kerry Damskey.

**Ben Jordan**

Yes, he and one of the partners at Ant Hill Farms who make Pinot Noir on that Sonoma Coast and up in Mendocino Country. Yeah, I moved out the second time to work for an importer, and then ended up wanting to find out how wine was made, work a harvest, and never, never left production after that.

**Fred Reno**

Well, then came back here and started working for Michael Shaps.

**Ben Jordan**

That's right, I had been in contact with Michael for a while. And finally, he had a position that opened up that allow me to move back to Virginia and be closer to

the family project and just be a part of an industry that was really emerging rather than one that was already well established.

**Fred Reno**

Then Jean and Steve Case, at Early Mountain pirated you away from Michael.

**Ben Jordan**

Right. Michael was actually the one that introduced me to them. So, a few years later, after I've really learned a lot through Michael, because so many different grapes from different vineyards come through his facility. But I really learned a lot about Virginia through Michael and then moved to Early Mountain to help them grow their program.

**Fred Reno**

Boy, so this is a big step for you to leave Early Mountain this July and start a new venture. So, who wants to weigh in and tell me who had the brain idea here to open this Common Wealth Crush Company? How did this birth itself.

**Ben Jordan**

It really goes back to one of Tim's connections, someone he was working with who knew of an industrial space that we actually looked at for a while and it never worked out. And then that was like an idea from long ago. And then it kept resurfacing and then really got its wings when the space where we're currently located.

**Fred Reno**

So, whoever wants to, please jump in here, but explain the concept to my audience, what is the Common Wealth Crush Company and what sets you apart. Why it's different than anything that existed before here in Virginia that I'm aware of.

**Ben Jordan**

So, we call it contract winemaking here, which is the idea that someone could make a contract to have their wine made at a facility that is not theirs, that's being done in the state, it's a good way for startup projects to get going and not have to

put all the capital upfront to build a winery. But what we wanted to do was kind of look at the model that you see all over the world, it's in Europe, it's on the west coast of offering a place for a winemaker to do their work the way they want to do it. And there just aren't facilities that were built for that yet, you can do it like I did it at Early Mountain with Tim and my project, Midland. people do it at their, you know, their employers, wineries, and sometimes they can get their friends to let them do it. But what almost always happens is that you grow out of it, or the winery facility grows its production and kicks you out. And so, there's not really a dedicated facility that allows a winemaker to start a brand, do the project, make the wine they want the way they want to and, and be confident that they'll be able to stay there?

**Fred Reno**

Do you provide? I mean, you have the space? Do you provide the equipment? Or do they have their own equipment? And how does this work?

**Ben Jordan**

Yeah, we provide the processing equipment, because that's one of the big capital expenditures, but you know, they need to provide their own barrels, depending on the way they want to ferment, their fermentation vessels. But it's different for every client,

**Fred Reno**

Does it require a dedicated space for each winery client, which is to say, almost like their own bonded space?

**Ben Jordan**

Yeah, so that is not the way Virginia operates. Not to get into the weeds here, but we operate here in Virginia under contract winemaking part of the Virginia code, which means that effectively the winery where the wine is being produced holds the license and then the clients or the winemakers would then have to put a license elsewhere as opposed to at the facility and then the wine is transferred, licensed to license.

**Fred Reno**

So, Tim, what's your role in all this?

**Tim Jordan**

My role initially has always been in the vineyard. For example, I worked with Jake Busching. Then I worked with Michael Shaps at vineyard management services managing a lot of the vineyards that went through Michael Shaps Wineworks. After that, I jumped into three vintages as the winemaker of Barren Ridge vineyards.

**Fred Reno**

Which by the way, those wines are very good. Congratulations.

**Tim Jordan**

Thank you. There's a number of winemakers that have been through there that have made some great wine. Then after that I left Barren Ridge and became a vineyard consultant. And at the same time, I was growing grapes full time for our family operation. I really haven't looked back. And through that time, I developed a lot of client relationships, individuals who are planting significant acreages of grapes, but they had ambitions for wine, but they didn't have a winery to produce it at. And so, a lot of our seminal clients at Commonwealth Crush, for example, are my vineyard clients as well. A lot of the work that I've been doing is just sort of laying the groundwork for these individuals to come into Commonwealth Crush and get their brands started. At the same time, I am planting grapes for our family operation, trying to grow Midland as much as possible. So, while I provide a lot of winemaking support at Commonwealth Crush, currently, I anticipate in time that I will start migrating back out into the vineyards, I'll maintain my consulting, maintain trying to grow those client relationships with the company. However, I see myself focusing more and more on the vineyards, and some vineyard development as we go on.

**Fred Reno**

So Patt, what's your role?

**Patt Eagan**

I'm usually the one behind the computer here. Occasionally, if these guys need "air cover" in the Cellar like in the early days at Early Mountain, the first couple of years I learned being a cellar rat, being out in the vineyard, extra hand out there. So, I can still jump in from time to time if these guys need it. But for the most part, I mean, deploying a lot of what I've done for years with business strategy, and certainly with the Darden angle now having become better in financial modeling and all of the nuts and bolts.

### **Fred Reno**

So, did you write the original business plan and financial Performa?

### **Patt Eagan**

That was our entire group, it was a collaborative effort. And then we refined it over time. I think one of the great advantages of being plugged in to the Darden network is working alongside professors and mentors, and just collectively all of us stress testing that model and the assumptions and we went through a lot of different iterations of it. And ultimately, was much better for it. But yeah, still to this day set up now that we've gotten the facility up and running. And certainly, my day to day has shifted from when we were on the ramping up phase, it was investor relations and fundraising and, of course, you know, still tinkering with the model before its final iteration. And now a lot of Lowes shopping. Yeah, Loews shopping, tank shopping. And we found, you know, since the COVID era and price increase era, we're trying to be as frugal and scrappy as possible and keeping an eye out for everything from the new market to the used market. And so, helping out with all the above in that regard. I think it's the culmination of so much that I've done in the past, but then also being able to spread my wings into new areas, the legal side of a lot of it has been, I didn't get my JD MBA. But now I feel like, collectively, we've all spent a lot of time in the world of contracts for clients and ensuring that hey, how can we write contracts that offer our services in a way that is representative of where we come from as small producers, but also now as business owners and trying to create for this project that is, really, you're recognizing both sides, because we've lived now both sides and having it be of the greatest value and the greatest comfort for all involved.

### **Fred Reno**

Ben, as I understand it, you got a grant from the Department of Agriculture here in Virginia. Talk about that process and how you were able to get them to get behind and fund what you're doing.

**Ben Jordan**

Yeah, so it's called an AFID Grant. And actually, that's another thing that Patt did a lot of so I'm going to throw it back to him because he really was boots on the ground for that.

**Fred Reno**

Patt, talk about that a little bit.

**Patt Eagan**

So, the initial connection and the genesis of that discussion was through Ben's connection with Michelle Bridges, right.

**Ben Jordan**

I reached out to her originally, so yeah, definitely.

**Patt Eagan**

So, we worked with Michelle who is with the VDACS group that oversees the grant initiative and the grant funding and worked with her for the better part of I would say, two or three years just kicking around stuff. She said when you all get to the point where this is really becoming time for liftoff, let's put this into motion. And so, when the time finally came, when we presented this is how much that we anticipate will be spending to renovate at this historic facility, this is how many jobs we anticipate bringing to the area. And the final metric that they're interested in is how much Virginia grown fruit are we going to be purchasing and investing in? And so, we put together all of our estimates for that over the course of the next three years. And that's what we will be judged upon. And we'll have to continually produce reports for them.

**Fred Reno**

So that leads to another question. The clients you accept and bring in, does it have to be Virginia grapes they're bringing in your building, not exclusively, but just primarily or what?

**Ben Jordan**

It's not a rule. It's more about our own investment into Virginia, which we're committed to. But also, because we're committed to Virginia, we're, you know, at this point in time, there's the ability to look at who you want your client partners to be. And so, we look at people that kind of share the same values as us. We really want to be part of the next generation of Virginia winemaking. And so, we're not really interested in someone who's just like, hey, I want to open a tasting room and pour a bunch of Napa cabernet that I had shipped in. That's for someone else. We're running a business, but we think that we can run a successful business by finding people that are like minded.

**Fred Reno**

How many clients do you currently have now that you just really opened? I think was eight this year. Wow, that's pretty damn good, guys.

**Ben Jordan**

Yeah. So, there's Midland which is Tim and me. Lightwell which I do with a restaurant guy in DC. Tim has one he's doing with his wife's family called Star Party. We have one that I think you know, the Robinsons.

**Fred Reno**

The Robinsons? Yep. Sandy and Erin.

**Ben Jordan**

Dogwood and Thistle. So, they have a California brand. This is a really good example of like-minded people. People that are already making wine in California, but that believe in the idea of Virginia as well. And so, they're making a Virginia side of their brand. They'll have these two different parts of Dogwood and Thistle that'll come from two different coasts. Okay. That's pretty cool. Yeah. And then a really neat property up on top of the Blue Ridge called Twelve Ridges, at 3300 ft. elevation, where those grapes are like, they might as well be

in a different state because they ripen so differently than every other grape in Virginia. And then a neat project called Dover Hall. Where is that? They're outside of Richmond, Short Pump area. And Ecco Adesso which is Shenandoah Valley.

**Fred Reno**

Oh, so Ecco Adesso, yeah, sure.

**Ben Jordan**

And then finally, the other thing we did is we wanted to be a kind of nimble company and looking at the way that people operate in California is like, you know, sometimes you have winemakers that they're doing consulting, or they have a project that they're just kind of, you know, trying to get off the ground for one year. So, we're working with Emily from Veritas on a project that she's consulting on, and that project will probably not always be housed with us, but it's neat because Emily's a friend and work with her own on like, just kind of delivering her the way she wants the wine to be.

**Fred Reno**

How large a space is your facility right now?

**Ben Jordan**

So, we just kind of went ahead and built it for our max capacity. We went straight ahead at 16,000 square feet, which we hope to be able to do 30,000 cases at maturity. It's relatively big for Virginia, but not

**Fred Reno**

you're going to grow out of that pretty quickly, I'm sure.

**Ben Jordan**

But it's a cool facility. Part of it Patt mentioned earlier, it's an historical building on the east end of Waynesboro. It's the old Virginia metal crafters building, which was kind of at least nationally famous for brass manufacturing. A lot of people have, you know, doorknobs and candlesticks and different implements.

**Fred Reno**

Is that the facility downtown, it's next to a brewery.

**Ben Jordan**

Yeah. So Basic City Brewery is right next to the Waynesboro folks that was actually part of what made it feel right was through one of a Patt's connections, we'd actually tend to look at the space earlier, but one of Patt's connections said go talk to the owner of Basic City to make sure it makes sense to do business in Waynesboro, he said not only does it make sense, we're having a great time here. But you should come look at the space next to me because I think there should be a winery there. It's all kind of kicked off this new development phase for that entire complex, which is ongoing right now. Just basically rejuvenating an old industrial space and we're going to have probably eight to 10 other tenants within that complex that are doing like there's a coffee roaster that's coming in, and then you're going to have some different spaces that can be studios for artist or artisans. Oh, interesting. Yeah. So, it's going to be a neat kind of Downtown attraction.

**Fred Reno**

Oh, a little bit of a small like Barlow in Sebastopol California.

**Ben Jordan**

Yeah definitely, you know, we look at people in California doing with those sorts of things. And actually, Pax winery is one of the models we looked at as one who is incubating young brands. And that's part of what we want our tasting room to be is we want the people that make wine with us to be the types of people that we want in our tasting room. And so that we have this interesting lineup of producers that we sell wines from,

**Fred Reno**

so, you'll have a tasting room there. And then you'll be able to feature wines from the various producers if they want to have their wine in that tasting room. Is that right?

**Ben Jordan**

Exactly. It'll be a little bit like a wine bar, but it'd be almost like a cooperative tasting room. We'll manage it and everything. But the idea is to have an interesting lineup, because it's an urban winery in effect and so you're not following the same rules as some tasting room out in the country. You can do different things.

**Fred Reno**

So, Tim, let's turn back to you for a second. I'm curious as you're planning your family vineyard, and growing what's the producing acreage at the moment?

**Tim Jordan**

Well, at the moment, we have about six acres of vinifera and about five acres of hybrids. This is all at what we would call the estate just in general. This is the family farm. It's located centrally in the Shenandoah Valley, just south of Harrisonburg north of Staunton, we're on sort of a toe slope of what would have overlooked the Middle River back in the day, probably 1000s of years ago. The Middle River is in the South Fork of the Shenandoah watershed. And the South, which runs through Waynesboro, the middle which runs through the heart of Augusta County, and then the north, all flow together and then makes up the South Fork of the Shenandoah. So, we're in a really unique watershed. Our soils are limestone base, we have a little bit shale, and we have these really well drained soils that are old and eroded and have very poor vigor. And so, our vines really actually struggle to survive. We ended up getting relatively low tonnages, crop yields that end up giving us some really great concentration of fruit. However, it's difficult to farm and do it economically. Yet, the wine that Ben and I make off of this vineyard is just some of the best in the state that I feel.

**Fred Reno**

Well, I will concur with you. I've had the Cabernet Franc. I've had the Chardonnay. You have Riesling there too, right? Yes. What's the hybrids?

**Tim Jordan**

Well, the hybrids are a small sort of side project that I had started a couple of years ago. And I'm really trying to push limits as far as what hybrids are capable

of in Virginia and so I've planted Chambourcin, Chardonel, and a newer variety called Regent that was developed out of Austria. Regent is supposed to be similar to Gamay and I love Gamay. Oh, ditto. But what I'm doing with hybrid vineyard is I'm stressing the vines. So, in all avenues I am not using herbicide. We don't use herbicide with our vinifera. We don't cultivate and I actually haven't sprayed it at all. So, it's been three years this was the first year that I got a little bit of crop. I'm trying to see what hybrids are capable of and what they can withstand in our climate. The Shenandoah Valley for itself is really a remarkable growing region because it has cooler daytime temperatures cooler nighttime temperatures, the growing season is much more truncated than say, Monticello or Northern Virginia. And then also we are in a rain shadow from the Appalachian Mountains. So, we have some of the lowest rainfall in the state. So, all of that combined allows us to grow both vinifera and hybrids much more sustainably. Then other more challenging regions like even let's just say Monticello where there's a lot more humidity and there's a lot more rainfall the soil here is in Monticello areas is clay, a lot of deep clay unless you get up on the ridges where you're on top of granite. It's much more water holding capacity of the soils, whereas over in the Shenandoah Valley, we have these eroded clays that don't hold water very well at all. And much more shallower soils, much more rock content. I can't wait to taste your Chardonel. That should be very interesting, based on the way you're saying you're farming it. And ultimately the way you all make wine and experiment. It should be very cool.

### **Ben Jordan**

It wasn't Tim's Chardonel, but we actually made, so Common Wealth has its own kind of stable of wines and we made a Chardonel from the Shenandoah Valley as one of the first wines.

### **Fred Reno**

you did? Under that brand name.

### **Ben Jordan**

We don't know how we're going to mark it.

### **Fred Reno**

I liked the idea of a brand name wine Common Wealth Crush. I mean, that's got a lot of star power. It feels good. You know,

### **Ben Jordan**

we haven't we haven't figured out the labeling of the marketing, but it'll be playful at the very least

### **Fred Reno**

Here Ben your glass is almost empty have another swig. A little bit more Meursault, Patt. Thank you. And of course, Tim a little top off your glass there? How do you guys like this wine? It's great. Delicious. It is really typical of a really good Meursault. It's got that sort of yeast, bread crumb character to it, but really well knit. For just what they're going to call a common Meursault. If there is anything common about Meursault fellows, right? So Patt I'm interested in your marketing, sales pitch, what's the branding model and branding philosophy?

### **Patt Eagan**

As far as, for your facility? Yeah, for the facility in general or for this specific house wines? Well, both tell me both. I think the main value proposition in the branding of what we're offering is, let us be a platform and a home to the next generation of Virginia wine brands and to grow your brands, as you see fit and engage us as needed based on our experience and our expertise, whether it's Tim on the vineyard side viticulturally. Ben on the winemaking side, oenologically, or myself from the business and strategy side, it's like, what can we do in this ecosystem that we built to help you be better or help drive your brand to higher heights, and maybe someday, ideally, grow to the point where you graduate from the program, build your own facility, and then we fill that slot with another up and comer. And so that's in my mind the proposition or the marketing pitch. For the wines that we're producing specifically, ourselves in house. I think it's like Ben said, still TBD what that brand will take shape as, but I think if nothing else, because we're all kind of weird creatives and are lifelong musicians. Bens a musician as well. And obviously, these guys are artists in the vineyard with what they do day to day I think looking at these wines. And whatever form this brand eventually takes just now having the agency and the autonomy to chart whatever course. This is the first time that we've owned our

own facility and letting this be a direct representation of our collective experiences and kind of the wine nerds that we are and the creative weirdos that we are, and see where that takes us, both in the branding and in the bottle. And also figuring out then as the tasting room comes about, and as distribution takes shape, what do people like? What are they thinking? Are they moving in one direction over the other? And I think in some ways, us being responsive to that is also built into the Vision of this moving forward at just as much as listened to the ground and figure out well, what does this wine grow.

### **Fred Reno**

You will have an advantage because you'll have multiple different wines and brands. And you'll see what people are going towards, and what trends may be developing, in people's taste and flavor profile. Here's a question I'll direct to Tim. So, Climate Change, and let me just preface that by saying I'm not talking about whether it's getting warmer or getting colder. For me what I see is the severity or what I call whiplash weather we have experienced. you've been in the vineyards for quite some time, what have you seen here in Virginia, and is it different? Let's just say for example, in Shenandoah, versus Monticello or Loudoun County, what have you seen?

### **Tim Jordan**

Yeah, that's a really interesting question. And honestly, even though I've been in the industry, for example, growing grapes for 15 years now, I am just a snapshot of history. And so certainly, some of the individuals that have been in this industry from the very beginning like Chris Hill, and Jeanette Smith, and a lot of those individuals that really helped raise this industry could probably address that question a lot better. But for me, Ben and myself and our work we're always looking to the present and then to the future. And so, with a lot of our plantings now we're planting for the next 20 to 30 years. And certainly, climate change is presenting itself on a scale that is perhaps a little bit more compressed than we anticipated. And so, while in the Shenandoah Valley, at least where we are, we could never ripen Cabernet Sauvignon. And there's no reason anybody in our area should ever plant Cabernet Sauvignon. There are other varieties, for example, that are just really challenging to ripen in our area, Petit Verdot, for example, even on our family site, Cabernet Franc is not always consistent right

now. However, we anticipate over time as the region gets warmer, and presumably wetter, growing conditions are going to be more challenging yet, we might have the opportunity to ripen some varieties that aren't really suited for our site currently.

### **Fred Reno**

Well, that is what excites me about Virginia, I look at Virginia and the diversity of wine growing here. I always talk to people in the industry around the country and I say you have to think about Virginia, like you think about France or Italy. Let's take France, for example. They don't grow Pinot Noir in Bordeaux, and they don't grow Cabernet Sauvignon in Burgundy. And that's really what Virginia represents. To me there are just different regions who excel with different varietals, but the quality of the wine is equal to the best in the world. It's just a little different expression because of the varietal itself. For instance, I didn't know anything about Petit Manseng until I moved to Virginia, believe it or not, after 40 some years in the wine business, and I didn't know what Petit Manseng was. When I started tasting Petit Manseng here, I was like, Man, this is cool. These wines are really interesting and the versatility of that grape, how you can produce such different styles of wine depending on what type of grape you're getting and what you want to produce. You also got me excited about talking about this varietal that's like Gamay because I love good Gamay. Good Chambourcin to me really is like a Cru Beaujolais when it's handled correctly. And that's happening increasingly in the state of Virginia as people are figuring out Chambourcin.

### **Tim Jordan**

Yeah, that's a really good point. Sort of back when Ben and I were first trying to understand what varieties grew well, on the farm, we planted a plethora of varieties. We planted Pinot Noir, Malbec, Viognier, Gruner Veltliner a lot of different varieties that really in our area, we learned that some just aren't suited because either they ripen in early August, or they'll never ripen ever. And yet, you go 20 miles away, and you go up in elevation 3300 feet, and you go somewhere like 12 Ridges, for example. While many producers throughout the state can grow Chardonnay and grow some really excellent Chardonnay. Not everyone can grow Pinot Noir. And so, you visit locations like Ankita Ridge or 12 Ridges, and you're seeing the expression of Pinot Noir that is not going to be found

anywhere else. It's going to ripen. And it's going to ripen during that sweet spot, which for a lot of Virginia is like in the second or third week of September. If you can bring fruit in during that period, then you're usually bringing in some of your best quality fruit.

### **Fred Reno**

Well, when you mentioned Ankida Ridge, you touched on one of my absolute favorites. And when I had decided about moving to Virginia back in 2017 and started talking to all these people I know in the business everywhere in the country about Virginia wine, they'd look at me or say What are you crazy? They can't make good wine in Virginia, what are you talking about? And if they would be out in California my way, I'd take him to lunch and bring a bottle of Virginia wine and more often than not it was Ankita Ridge Pinot Noir. We'd be halfway through lunch, and they'd look at me and say that's from Virginia, I had no idea. I would rib them a little bit and go Yeah, you know everything about wine, and you had no idea. But you're right. I mean, that's what's so beautiful about Virginia, there's certain spots, that classic varietals can just really express themselves. And there's other spots where the hybrids, and varietals like again Petit Manseng they're necessarily familiar with, get people excited, so that the diversity is just so damn exciting. And of course, I would be remiss if I didn't touch on my latest passion, which is Norton, any thoughts of planting any Norton anytime?

### **Ben Jordan**

Not to dodge that question. But there is one thing I wanted to jump in on which was getting back to the Regent grape which actually one of its parents is Chambourcin. But this idea of these varieties of which Norton is one of them, that are alternative varieties that might have some resistance to disease challenges that we have in Virginia. And a lot of these varieties either didn't exist or they were kind of shunned, because they were not *Vitis vinifera*. They were not the Nobel grape of France or Italy. And we've seen a real sea change of that, really in the past five to 10 years in Virginia and in the past five years up and down the East Coast and even in the world where people are like, Okay, wait a minute, it's not about this kind of nostalgic look backwards of the great wines of the 1800s, or whatever it's about, we need to look at the future, the climate is changing, we've got a lot of challenges. These are grapes, these are grapes, it's about if the

wine tastes good, the wine tastes good. And so, there's really a younger generation that's embracing that. And I think that's really the ethos of what Common Wealth Crush is about. We really do want to learn from what's happened and come before us. We have a lot of mentors here in the industry, we can look at Europe and be inspired by Europe. But we are our own place. And we need to look at what is right for us going forward. And that's where a lot of these varieties like experimenting with Regent, using an older variety like Chambourcin, using an older variety like Norton, and just understanding it on its own terms and understanding that it may or may not taste like Bordeaux, or Burgundy, it's going to taste like what it tastes like. That's what we want to see from our producers. That's what we want to see Common Wealth Crush do is embrace things that may have either been shunned or just were lost in the background of these famous regions.

### **Fred Reno**

That's exciting. That's an interesting way to approach it. To give that Forward Look, as opposed to a traditional backward look. Exactly. Well, my favorite question I always ask, we'll start with Patt. Everybody has it? What's that one wine in your life that you had? And you went, Oh, my God, wine can be this ethereal, this interesting? And the light bulb just goes off. And do you remember that? What's that one wine.

### **Patt Eagan**

Like my cousin's would come after me if I didn't mention champagne. So, I can remember though, and still to this day, you know, people talk about their desert island wine. And for me, it would be Champagne. It would be Blanc to Blanc, probably Extra Brut or some of the zero dosage wines that I've tried. For me some of the most memorable wines that I've had in my life. I'll say that one of the thinking about East Coast and one of the wines that reframed early on in my Virginia wine career was actually Ankita, it was Ankida Pinot. Then our neighbors to the north in New York. It was a Cabernet Franc from Element Winery from the Finger Lakes. And I think those two wines for me when I think back to 2012, 2013, when I was just getting started tasting a lot. Just getting my palate up and running. IT was like, Oh my God, this this is east coast wine. This is East Coast

potential. And I can still remember where I was sitting, hour of the day I was tasting them. And it's funny how those get locked in.

**Fred Reno**

Oh, yeah. I hear you. Tim. How about you?

**Tim Jordan**

Well, I definitely have my brother Ben to thank for this. But he gave me a bottle of Bordeaux. Don't Recall what Chateau. I know what vintage it was; it was a 1983 which is my birth year. I don't know the producer. But when I had it, it was that ethereal moment that like lights and fireworks going off in my mind. That gives me chill bumps to think about it. But like the aromatics coming off of the perfume, it was flowery, it was it was like a bouquet. And this was very much at the very beginning of our journey into wine. And I was like, gosh, I can't believe that wine can smell like this, can tastes like this. And I just had it with a very simple birthday dinner at home. And it really changed my life.

**Fred Reno**

Isn't that what wine is all about. Well, Ben, I know what yours is. But tell again, it was a Hermitage was it not? Yeah, but I've got a different answer now. Oh, good. Good.

**Patt Eagan**

So wishy washy.

**Ben Jordan**

This, I think more has to do. It's one of those like full circle sort of experiences. And when I was first getting my start in the wine industry, I was in New York, and I had a mentor. A couple of mentors that were showing me the world of wine because it came to New York and there was this one producer that was bringing in these Loire Valley vigneron back in the day when like it just you know it was before the pre-natural wine, or the term natural wine and there were just these small guys making wines and I was so young in terms of my palate that it was basically I'd been drinking California wine and then I was tasting these wines and they were just hitting me in the right way. There were like three producers in

general. There was Catherine & Pierre Breton who produces Bourgueil and Chinon. There's was clos Roche Blanche who produces Pineau d 'Aunis and Gamay Loire, and then this producer called Domaine de Belliviere, which does Pineau d 'Aunis and these wines were just so wild and like different than the wine that everybody else was drinking, that they had this effect on me and I fell in love with them. I moved to California and kind of lost touch with them a little bit. Then in moving back to Virginia, I was reminded of like, hey, there's just a world of different flavors and wine. And these producers started resonating with me again, like, hey, they were doing something different. They were not trying to, follow Bordeaux, they were not trying to follow California, and it was okay. And eventually, because of their approach of honesty and working with what they had, they became, you know, beloved, and so that sort of kind of stuck with me as, it's okay, that people don't understand you at the beginning. And it's okay if people poo poo your region. And so, it's just been a good sort of reminder for working in Virginia, in which we're a bit of an underdog sometimes.

### **Fred Reno**

Yeah, no, we are. But I'm trying to do my part to change that and get awareness for Virginia wines around the country and Internationally. Not here, necessarily in Virginia. Virginians know we have really good wine here. However, it's surprising to me, how little the wine trade still doesn't understand the dynamic nature and the quality of what's happening here in Virginia. It's just stunning to me. Because every time they get introduced to Virginia wine, and they go like, wow, I had no idea. I start thinking where's your intellectual curiosity. Aren't you still stimulated by learning about wine, or you just know everything now? Which, of course, is what I've learned? I learn something new every day about wine that makes it so fascinating. It's an ongoing journey. Well, the Common Wealth Crush Company sounds like it's got a hell of a future. And a really great idea, fellas, I mean, Virginia needs more of these innovative ways for people to produce wine on a smaller scale. So, then they can grow into a larger scale. It's really that simple. You got to go start somewhere. Winemaking is capital intensive, as we know, owning vineyard land is very expensive. Owning a winery is very expensive. So, if you can solve one of those issues for the producers, you are really a leg up out there. Well, thank you for your time. Ben and Tim, and Patt and this has been great episode.

**Ben Jordan, Tim Jordan, Patt Eagan,**

Thank you. Thank you. Thanks Fred.