

EPISODE #41 CHRIS PEARMUND/OWNER PEARMUND CELLARS

SPEAKERS

Chris Pearmund, Fred Reno

Fred Reno

Chris, welcome to my Podcast.

Chris Pearmund

Good morning, Fred. Thank you very much. And there's nothing like a beautiful glass of White Burgundy to start off the day. Honored to be here with you your name I've read about over the years and it's an honor. Thank you, sir.

Fred Reno

Well, no, thank you. So, as I like to always begin, let's start right there. Let's start at the beginning. What's your story? How did you get into this thing?

Chris Pearmund

Well, jokes aside I guess the reality was, in my teens, I enjoyed cooking and took a lot of cooking classes and became in the restaurant industry in the back of house. When I went to Front of House found prettier women and more money to be made, and a better restaurant with better money and prettier women always had a better wine list and fell in love with wine in my late teens and early 20s. In the 1980s, I was wine geek for the Clyde Restaurant Group at Tysons Corner and decided to open my own restaurant in DC as a wine, owner, which had winemaking experience. At that time, there was no restaurant in DC that was run and owned by a vineyard manager winery, winemaker or anything else. And so, I went to a Virginia winery to learn how to make wine. And in my first year in 1990, we won the Governor's Cup as the best wine in Virginia, the second year, became the beginning of the first mobile bottling line. So, the second year in my wine production history, we ran the Filling Station, I worked for 40 wineries in 10. states in 1991. Did that for six years.

Fred Reno

Let me stop you there because I'm curious. I started my career in Washington DC. So, what was the restaurant? Where was it located Clyde's? You said you open your own? No, I was going to Oh, you were going to I'm sorry.

Chris Pearmund

I wanted to have my own restaurant. I had worked in restaurants in London and in California and in Northern Virginia and wanted my own restaurant and thought that one of my calling cards would be not just a good wine restaurant, but somebody who had wine experience. So, if I became a winemaker for a couple of years, I would then be able to have that as one of my shingles.

Fred Reno

So, I understand now so you got sidetracked. And then the wine business lassoed you in right,

Chris Pearmund

It just kept on going. I mean, the mobile bottling line was an amazing experience working with the different wineries and winemakers up and down the East Coast, they would have to tell me all of their secrets. And if I had anything valuable to say I certainly would and became the conduit of information of a lot of wineries, which helped having me be instilled into the politics of Virginia wine and knowing a lot of the players and learning a lot very, very quickly. That put me on the path to the Masters of Wine program.

Fred Reno

Well, so then, as I understand that winery, you were referring to in 1990 in Virginia was Naked Mountain, correct? Yes, they came out how the hell did you get them they hire you with no experience?

Chris Pearmund

Six bucks an hour. So, I said I will work with you for two years. Under one circumstance. I need to do everything. Show me everything. Let me do everything. I want to do everything. We started with 1700 cases production, and I left within three years and became 5500 cases and opened up a lot of distribution. Had a wonderful time at naked mountain made wonderful Chardonnays back then. The largest independent vineyard in Virginia was the source of Chardonnay called Meriwether vineyard, and I bought that vineyard in 1994. So, Chardonnay was kind of my thing.

Fred Reno

So, you just bought the vineyard, but you really didn't have a winery. So, you must have just been selling grapes.

Chris Pearmund

Correct, selling grapes mostly to Naked mountain. 15 acres of grapes sold mostly to Naked mountain. I was running the filling station till the end of 1996. I was still winemaker at naked mountain, and also the president of the Virginia vineyards Association at that time.

Fred Reno

What was that like in the early days?

Chris Pearmund

Well, the one of the fun stories is, I had brought in Dick Smart to give a talk. And we stayed up all night drinking and talking and learning. At the time, Virginia had 1200 acres of grapes. My introduction to him was help us double our production from 1200 to 2400, in 10 years, and Tony Wolf followed me by saying that'll never happen. Chris, you're dreaming. And Dick smart was awesome in his talk for the day. It took 12 years, not 10 years to double our production of which now we have 5000 acres of grapes, which is not a drop in the bucket in the world, but it's measurable. I did math. I'm not saying my math is brilliant. But the math is Virginia has one out of every 100 bottles of wine on the shelf, which is measurable, there is a drop in the bucket, maybe not three or four drops, but we got a drop in the bucket

Fred Reno

is the Merriweather vineyard which, as I understand, still producing and you live on the property there. What's the oldest vines there?

Chris Pearmund

1976 So the vineyard was planted in 76 with 10-foot rows and six feet between vines we've doubled up that spacing. So now we have three feet between vines and started planting up a higher density 20 years ago, and in doing so added in far more different cultivars, or clones of Chardonnay. We now have 14 clones or cultivars of Chardonnay, some of it is cordon, some of it is spur pruning kind of depends on what the vine wants to do. But the vine is very, very healthy. We're making beautiful sparkling wine out of it as well as table wine.

Fred Reno

So, you have 46-year-old Chardonnay vines, oldest vines in Virginia, and what rootstock where they put on originally,

Chris Pearmund

mostly 3309 We had a couple on five BB, and then we kind of transferred over to one on 114. Wow, but there's a lot of one on 114 back then as well. We got it from Amrhein Herman the German up in New York. Foster's back in the day. Yocum. Hollerith was very good in helping us get going. Lucie Morton lived on our road a couple of miles down up the hill, and she helped with the vineyard installation.

Fred Reno

You had the early pioneers who knew what they were doing.

Chris Pearmund

Yeah. Well, we all we all weren't afraid.

Fred Reno

So, talk a little bit about your retail days. How'd you get started with Total Wine? If I recall, that's pretty close to the beginning of Total Wine.

Chris Pearmund

There were only five stores back then. And the two in Maryland. So, seven stores, I believe. One in Delaware,

Fred Reno

This is 1996 to 1998. Yeah, correct. Right

Chris Pearmund

Yeah, correct right before the Troons bought it. I left Naked Mountain and the Filling Station after six years, went to Breaux to be general manager there that lasted two hours, then went to Total Beverage to get a nice bottle of wine. And they hired me on the spot. I went to see the back office with the executive department. They hired me on the floor as a wine specialist. And I walked out as assistant store manager. In six months, I was store manager and corporate trainer for all stores and brought in the Wine & Spirit Education Trust program to teach the wine staff with the help of Mary Ewing- Mulligan. We were the second class in the country to teach Wind Spirit Education Trust, which is now the leading authority of wine education.

Fred Reno

Right? And for good reason. Absolutely. Well, what really piqued my curiosity, if you will, was, I saw you did some time at Country Vintner, so you got a taste at the distribution side in the middle there. And those were the earlier days of the Country Vintner.

Chris Pearmund

The portfolio that the Country Vintner had at the time was twice the price bottle average of anybody else, the quality of wine diversification, it had more imported wine than California wine, which is probably one of the few distributors that would do that. We were tasting 15 wines a day. I had a laptop computer, nobody had laptop computers, people go in with his phone books have inventory updated weekly. And I had hourly updated inventory, which was rare, representing a great portfolio. And the great thing about Country Vintner then was they

dramatically respected wine education. So, if you were to go on to a wine trip somewhere, you would have your full pay, and they would pay you \$1,000 to go on a wine trip. My first year with the Country Vintner I had five wine trips and continued my wine education through reading and travel after being now in 30 countries in the wine industry. And I like your wine book collection. I've read about 600 Wine books of the 1000 I have in my office. It doesn't end.

Fred Reno

No, you never can get enough wine education. The thing I've learned a long time ago, I learn something new about wine every day.

Chris Pearmund

That's right. The book I'm reading right now is called 10 tomatoes that changed the world, the history of Italian cuisine. I've read so much about Italian, and I still don't know anything. MY culinary roots need to grow up some.

Fred Reno

I have to back up here thinking about these Country Vintner and these wine trips. So, David Townsend would sign these expense reports.

Chris Pearmund

Yes, he would. He would sign them and Ted Picard. Ted Picard was my direct boss and Mr. Townsend was great. It was a very wholesome company representing wonderful brands of wine and had integrity. And I think the industry has certainly changed. And we can talk about that all day off microphone.

Fred Reno

I'm going to jump forward to something that caught my interest as well. When I was reading about you and your career. Talk a little bit about this. It said it was 2011 when there was a law change that allowed for corkage of wine in Virginia. Right. And apparently you stepped up and said well, I will pay 50% of anybody's corkage up to a certain amount. Even if it's not my wine in a restaurant.

Chris Pearmund

I thought it was 100%. But yes, I did and printed it statewide.

Fred Reno

Wow. How did that work? I mean, that's fascinating.

Chris Pearmund

The concept was to bring awareness that it's morally acceptable to bring in a nice bottle of wine, don't pick a cheap and cheerful one. I won't mention names and bring in a very nice bottle of wine. and pay the restaurant their profits on that wine. If you want to bring in something special, and the concept is across Europe, it's been around a long time and to bring awareness to that as a way to have people if you bring a bottle of Virginia wine, any Virginia wine into a restaurant, show me the receipt of that corkage that's probably not going to say Virginia wine. Just show me any receipt of corkage though I will refund you that completely. And it brought in a lot of people bringing in Virginia wine to restaurants where the restaurant industry really wasn't supportive, all that much of Virginia wines for a whole host of reasons, mostly accurate.

Fred Reno

So, let's talk about your wineries. Pearmund Cellars was the first?

Chris Pearmund

No, it was the first vineyard I owned. I bought it 28 years ago. The first winery opened actually was Unicorn winery in 1999. And went from there and re did Farfelu, Christensen Ridge; opened up from day one Rappahannock Cellars

Fred Reno

You were involved with John Delmare in the beginning.

Chris Pearmund

From day 1. John Delmare bought a farm called Glenway farm and he was going to name a Glenway winery, and I would make fun I'm saying we want to get a shot today from Quinnway winery and no one's going to want to drink it because he can't spell Glenway with a W and so I came up with the name Rappahannock Cellars. He looked at me and says spell Rappahannock. I go Damn it, I can't spell Rappahannock. I had to go look it up. Because Rappahannock cellars is actually the headwaters of the Rappahannock River.

Fred Reno

Right, exactly. Brilliant Branding.

Chris Pearmund

And we kind of argued about that as we did many things with full respect. I love John Delmare. He's such a gentleman. Yeah, from day one there and 18 wineries in Virginia. I've had the opportunity to be part of from basically conversation one.

Fred Reno

But then Pearmund comes on the scene.

Chris Pearmund

In 2002 was our first vintage I was, I was winemaker for five wineries. And I would spend a day at each winery, maybe half day at each winery going around. And I had a lab girl, Brianne Moore, who ended up buying Loudoun County vineyard, she was my lab person go behind me. So I would leave notes, do some work, she would come behind me the next day, and do work that I had intern Andy, she had a master's degree in winemaking from Hungary and she worked with me for a year and had Pierre from France and different people who would do the detailed lab geeky wine work as I will go help develop and build different wineries. And when I opened Pearmund cellars, it was just winery number six that I consulted for basically.

Fred Reno

Well, then talk a little bit about your vision for Vint Hill Craft winery. And what was behind that, how did you get the sort of light bulb went off and said, Oh, this will be interesting.

Chris Pearmund

Vint Hill has an amazing military history. And I was asked by the Economic Development Authority to build a winery there. And we spent half a day looking it over and they said there's money available to make it happen. And after kicking every tire there, I couldn't see it. And then about two weeks later, driving down the road realized everything that a winery has in Virginia, is what Vint Hill doesn't have. It doesn't have pastoral views. It doesn't have a glorious entrance; it doesn't have a lot of the things that you would expect to have at a winery. So, what if we mirrored Vint Hill to make the winery everything that a Virginia winery doesn't have? Make that an attribute and everything that a traditional winery fails at, make that the calling card? So instead of having one Chardonnay, we'll have five Chardonnays. Instead of having one Cabernet Franc, we're going to have five Cabernet Francs and educate you on Cabernet Francs. Instead of having the wine process unavailable to the public. We are going to invite and require participation in the winemaking process, we still do winemaking classes. Mark Ward does amazing job with the winemaking classes that Ashton Lowe started and having the public involved in the wine production, winemaking wine design of labels.

Fred Reno

Do they own the brand itself.

Chris Pearmund

Yeah, So the brand of Vint Hill we have 17 or 18 different labels that we have. But we make 40, 50, 60 different labels a year that are owned by the participants who make wine, and they can make a half barrel of wine make a barrel of wine. At the time we were designing this is when Crush Pad was coming from California. Oh, so we talked a lot with Crush Pad, what they were doing, we did what they were doing as a first urban winery on the East Coast in our way.

And I think it would have been huge it was inside the beltway. We were too far outside the Beltway to get the real money. Our first year of 2009. We had 61 Barrels contracted individually sold as winemaking experiences. At \$6,000 a barrel.

Fred Reno

Interesting. So, what was the most popular, if there was one, varietal that people came in said, Hey, I'd like to make a barrel of this.

Chris Pearmund

Reds, not too many of the blends. One guy from Leesburg came up, and I would offer bring a couple of bottles of wine you like and I'm going to bring what I like, and we're going to sit down and take them apart in the glass and then we're going to craft what we're going to make and what vineyard sourcing we're going to use. Gentleman from Leesburg came up with a bottle of Rombauer Chardonnay. I go, Oh, you kill me with this one. It's one of the best Chardonnays around. And I know Koerner Rombauer and the complexity what they do in their barrel program and their vineyard sourcing. I'm going this is going to be brutal. And we did it and at the end of time we compare them, and he was a long term involved with the winery. So, for us the challenge was, I think of myself as a wine geek and at Vint Hill we did not limit ourselves to Virginia fruit. We use Washington State fruit, we use California fruit. We would get one ton Zinfandel from great vineyards, one ton of Syrah, one ton of Grenache and make beautiful rose A's. So, our calling card there was this winery is everything in Virginia winery isn't. So, Virginia wineries growing their own or using 100% Virginia fruit. We were a lot less than that we had a commercial license and did things that Virginia wineries didn't do that that made that a lot of fun.

Fred Reno

Well, you also opened up the world of wine to the people who were participants.

Chris Pearmund

Right when people want to spend \$6,000 In a year making wine and they end up with 25 boxes of wine. You have Christmas gifts for the next two years. And you have a wonderful personal thing, and 6000 bucks is you could put on a credit card and people spend that of the country club. So, it wasn't out of line, and it gave us the opportunity to invest well and make the people take it seriously and for us to take it seriously.

Fred Reno

Talk about how you ended up buying Effingham Manor and now a winery.

Chris Pearmund

Effingham is built very much like the Winery at Lagrange and bought in similar situations. The winery at Lagrange in Prince William County was 25 years of uninhabited house with great history of the house going back to the 1700s we made that into a successful winery and sold it to a Chinese publicly traded company. Winery Effingham, the development of a large tract of land was broken up to 10-acre houses, million-dollar houses. That developer went bankrupt, the bank took back the note, the banker came to us to ask us to build a winery. So, we would have an independent HOA complex that would support the community as well as help him sell the last of the 20 or 30 undeveloped lots into something more valuable. So, he was in it, to have his lots sell for more money. If we can make a nice winery. There's no vineyard there, though. There is a vineyard we have Chambourcin we're going to pick up this coming Sunday, is that what else is growing there besides just Chambourcin we're going to put in a 15-acre vineyard and then run into some problems with land use, that you couldn't grow commercial agriculture on some of this land use that was given to conservation.

Fred Reno

It was Effingham that brought us together because my latest passion is Norton. And I'm a big, unabashed Norton fan, which we can talk about all day long later on something fun we can disagree about. And the thing is that Norton that I bought from Effingham is outstanding. So where does that fruit come from?

Chris Pearmund

We work with several different Norton growers. And my thing with Norton was because of the invert relationship of malic and tartaric acid, people who like Norton, I can tell you what candies you like. And I can tell you a lot about your palette and I'm not of that palette structure. So, we would tend to co-ferment Norton with of the different Bordeaux red, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon. Generally, Merlot, not Cabernet Franc, it didn't work as well. And by co-fermenting 20% of vinifera Bordeaux red in with the Norton, it downplayed some of that high malic content. And so that was kind of our secret, but we there's a lot of Norton out there to buy.

Fred Reno

Well, that wine is terrific. And I'm going to say something here that ties in all this, an aha moment I had, which is, I believe Norton, is every bit as noble grape as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, you pick your poison. In Bordeaux, they don't make 100% Cabernet Sauvignon wine, they blend. And so, Norton, whether it's the dominant percentage in your blend, or whether it's blended as a minor percentage of Chambourcin for instance. It's a noble grape. And I think it's got a bad rap. And I think the messaging about it is and what you've done with that wine, to me is really one of the top Norton's in the state of Virginia. I'm sorry, but it's just one of the tops.

Chris Pearmund

Thank you. And I think, you know, we have these analogies about wine descriptors. Somebody said that talking about wine is like dancing about architecture, you're taking different senses. And in in crafting a great wine. Whether you talk about analogies of facets on a cut stone, or the similarities between the bouquet of flowers. If you take a singular flower, and the aroma and the color and the texture, the intensity as a singular aroma, singular entity. When you take several different species of flowers and put them together, you have a bouquet of complexity. And so, the word bouquet comes from multiple entities within that wine, whether it's a singular varietal multiple. And when you have multiple varietals, multiple barrels, multiple yields multiple lots, multiple vineyards, multiple vintages, you can then create a much more diverse palette, of a bouquet of texture and flavor. And we try to do that in even within a single vineyard or 14 cultivars at Meriweather vineyard with Chardonnay, or with Norton by CO-fermenting with other red wines, different barrels, different things you can do within the industry in the production side, to make that as complex as possible and balanced as a good bouquet of flowers should be.

Fred Reno

That makes too much sense. Come on, you're not supposed to make too much sense.

Chris Pearmund

It was a holiday last night.

Fred Reno

So, the favorite question I like to ask every vintner. Very simple, and everybody usually has this moment, although I've found some who didn't, which surprised me. So, what was that one wine that you had at one point in your life career where you put the glass down and you said, Now I get it. That time wine can be that ethereal.

Chris Pearmund

There are several answers. One is my birth year of 1961. Having with my dad in England, on a steak on the grill on a Wednesday night with ratatouille that he had made and I'm cooking a nice steak on the grill. And just really enjoying that time with my father. One of my first years in winemaking, I had a very nice wine cellar, and I had these interns and everything was going wrong and it was hot and the bugs were stinging us and somebody ran over the hose with the forklift truck and somebody pushed the wrong buttons and emptied a full press into the pan and everything was going to hell. And I was just beside myself. I stormed off and sit under a tree 100 yards away. My buddy comes up and sits down. And he says what drives you. Why are you here? Why are you helping us? Why are you doing this in Virginia? And I go; Got it. So go to the wine cellar and pull it in 1975 Chateau Latour, come down and say you go to the computer printout what Robert Parker says, you get six wine glasses. You do this, you do that, pop that cork and pour it around. And I had him read what Robert Parker said, and the book

Bordeaux, as you know, and said we will never grow grapes this good. We will never make a wine this good. We will never have the respect that this bottle deserves. And we will never give up trying to get there. Wow. That was my true story. And so even though to answer your question fully, there are previous bottles with epiphanies. I think that kind of encapsulates that.

Fred Reno

That's a great story. Absolutely. Great story. So, jumping forward, because you have a lot of years' experience. What have you seen in the vineyards? And how is climate change really changed things itself for farming?

Chris Pearmund

Well, hope you got a long tape. In 2002, 2003. I wrote a paper and presented it at the Merriman Science Museum in Washington DC comparing those two vintages on this subject, and I used 2000 to 2003, Napa Valley, Virginia and Bordeaux, very opposing vintages. In 2003, you remember Bordeaux, 16,000 people died across France. It was horrible. In Virginia, we had diametrically opposed vintages of three-degree days above 90 versus 47-degree days above 90 in Virginia. So those two vintages show, diversification of weather patterns. And I took it as how does the industry individually create a homogenous house style when Mother Nature throws curveballs at you? So, my take on Global change is not the slow curveball. That is decade to decade but the fast curveball that we have hurricane, drought, cold, hot. This year we're about 10-degree days later in harvest than usual. So, it's the creation of house style. It's the maintenance of sustainability with your agricultural land and trying to adjust what Mother Nature throws at you. So yes, global warming is a huge conversation on its own, but I look at the vintage to vintage and what we can do with it. Because I think there's a lot of tools in the vineyard and in the cellar that we can do to maintain house style.

Fred Reno

Yeah, I call it whiplash weather is what we seem to be experiencing. Yeah.

Chris Pearmund

But we've always had whiplash weather.

Fred Reno

The severity of it though.

Chris Pearmund

When people talk about the bad weather. Now. Yeah, in 2011 was very, very difficult. In 2018, I call 2000 hate teen. And for people who've been around a long time you talk about 1996, and I call it 1990. Sucks. And then when people talk about that, I got to 2000 to 1988. And everybody's quiet. I said, Well, here's what happened in 1988. And I explained it and here's

why it was unusual. And here's how we learned from it. So, I think those wisdom dots of how to adapt in the vineyard and in the cellar to maintain your house style. Which burgundy does. Bordeaux does? Yes, you can plant new varietals. Yes, you can adjust your leaf canopy management philosophies. Yes, you can adjust nutrition to a certain point. There're things you can do. But at the end of the day your looking at hangtime, especially for any wine with texture. If you go to the grocery store and buy a peach, why did you do that? To play baseball? If you go to a farmers' market and buy a peach, it's soft and delicious, and local and yummy. And we know what to do with it. If you go to a peach tree, and you kick that peach tree, and that peach naturally falls into your arm and it dribbles down to your elbow, and you put it in your mouth. I mean that's one of the best things in the whole world. And that difference is hangtime. So when we can manage our vineyard to extend hangtime, we're developing a lot more textures and flavors and attributes other than the fruit itself that come from the fruit, which is a great thing about Viognier from Condrieu, when you have these textures of seed, and skin, and pulp from a white wine, or red wine, you have these dissolve flavors and textures into the wine that is much more complex. And so, our goal is to find the varietals, site locations, to allow hang time of 100 days from flower to bloom. I mean from Bloom to harvest.

Fred Reno

Well, that is a universal sort of measurement isn't, hangtime,

Chris Pearmund

And that's what a lot of people fully don't understand. And the grower who grows grapes and sells those grapes wants to minimize hang time to benefit the pocketbook. And the winemaker wants to look at numbers of bricks and TA and pH and what not, and a wine consumer wants Hang time, and that doesn't translate well sometimes.

Fred Reno

So, let me touch on something because you seem to be also very astute brander, what was this project Ameritage?

Chris Pearmund

Oh, that was fun. So, I'm a former Air Force, and always respect military across the world for September 11, 2001, the that we all remember, I was making wine at Rappahannock cellars, and other wineries and wanted to put together in American wine. So, I got a barrel of wine from 10 Different states. Blended that wine together to make an American Meritage, or American Meritage. So, I put a in front of Meritage to make a Meritage for 2001 in respect of 911. In 2002, the first vintage Pearmund Cellars wanted to keep that tradition going because it was a cool project to make a Meritage as a wine that was in American Meritage not a California Meritage. And so even though it was 100%, Virginia fruit, the concept of Meritage in California is American heritage, the concept of Meritage on the East Coast, which were more

Francophilia, I call Minaj Vin dodge, it's a blend of the harvest in French. So, an American Meritage is kind of the hybrid of we're in the United States of America. We're making a wine and it's not a California Meritage.

Fred Reno

Do you control that trademark or, mark?

Chris Pearmund

I have a trademark and several other wineries use it and I say thank you when I hear about it. Interesting. And Veramar was the first one to do it to my memory. I think a couple of years after we did, and other wineries are using the Ameritage and I'm going that's cool. Thank you. I'm honored.

Fred Reno

What was the CAMEO series all about when you were highlighting women in history?

Chris Pearmund

Oh, Cameo was a lot of fun. I'll give my wife full credit on that one. 1920 was the year of the women's suffrage movement, the year that women were given the right to vote in the United States. An important year of women's history in Virginia. 2020 was the 100th anniversary of that movement and went fairly unnoticed because of the pandemic and other issues going on. So, we made a wine to represent the 12 most influential women in Virginia's history across all genres, music, politics, banking, money, arts, whatever. So, my wife had found 12 Different women, highlighted each one of them, and made an independent brand. And there's 12 bottles in a box. Every bottle in that box portrays and highlights a different Virginia woman. And if you go to take your cell phone and put your cell phone up to the face of that label, it will take you automatically with the NFC code to the website. We were the first winery to do that as well, to embed in the label, a code that directly goes to the website. 19 crimes is really cool as a concept, but you had to download the app, this automatically will take you there without any downloads already embedded into your cell phone. So, we had a lot of fun putting that project together representing Virginia, representing the history of Virginia wine and education where you know, certainly representing women and their benefit and hard work in our community and our state in our country in our globe. For those reasons we put this together.

Fred Reno

So, you have, and you've had to deal with them. You have an influential person could be media, could be a SOM, could be a wine personality. They're coming to Pearmund Cellars, and you want to impress them, and they've not had your wine before. What's the one wine you pull on said this represents who we are.

Chris Pearmund

Here's how I do that. I'm almost did it with you today. I would ask you what your passion is. For you it's White Burgundy. What vintage are you pouring, a Chassagne-Montrachet 2017 I believe. I would have brought it 2017 from my vineyard and say let's compare the attributes. So, I want to compare what you know, what you appreciate, what you identify with, and what your passion is, and let me bring you something I made that I grew. Then we can talk about the similarities, talk about the differences, why those differences exist and give respect to both bottles. That's interesting. That's how I do I don't want to tell you I like Petit Manseng, because if you're not an acid head and you don't like Sauvignon Blanc, Petit Manseng is wasted on you.

Fred Reno

I love Petit Manseng. In fact, when I got turned on to Petit Manseng as part of moving to Virginia, I'd never had a bottle in my 40-year career before that. And when I had some, I thought wow. To me, it was like, I am talking about dry Petit Manseng, was the best of really top Pinot Grigio and Sauvignon Blanc combined. That was my flavor impression that I had. And I love Petit Manseng. To me, that's the thing that's so unique about Virginia, is the diversity here in Virginia, and I try to explain this to people who aren't familiar with Virginia wine industry. I see. You have to think about Virginia like you do France or Italy. Let's take France for example. They don't grow Cabernet Sauvignon in Burgundy and they don't grow Pinot Noir in Bordeaux.

Chris Pearmund

Nor can you buy either one of them there either.

Fred Reno

And so, Virginia's like that there's just certain varietals that do much better in certain locations within the state. And there's this huge diversity of Virginia and the wines that come from Northern Virginia and Loudoun County in that area, Middleburg, Shenandoah.

Chris Pearmund

It comes down to hangtime

Fred Reno

Central Virginia, I mean you have Rosemont down there in the southern part of the state and no AVA. And their Albarino is beautiful. And they are making incredible wine. So, the diversity here is so amazing.

Chris Pearmund

Look at Petit Manseng from a different aspect which is the retail side the value. There's a lot of great Pinot Grigio at 10 bucks a bottle 12 bucks a bottle, Virginia can't do that. We have to

make a wine that's going to be like a Sauvignon Blanc or Pinot Grigio at 30 bucks a bottle. What do we grow Sauvignon Blanc from California, New Zealand, parts of France can still be very inexpensive and very, very good. And we're going to lose on that competition. People don't do Petit Manseng. It fits our climate. We can make a beautiful wine. It has pedigree, it has heritage, and it has something here's what a great Petit Manseng is about. And it's worth 30 bucks a bottle. And that's how Virginia has to think and evolve about the varietal game, which is why I also brought you a bottle of Cabernet Franc because you can't get good Cabernet Franc in California. We tried to 25 years ago make good California wine and we failed miserably in Virginia. What we had to learn was regional identification and have a certain cohesiveness in the vineyard and in the cellar to make something that's unified as a Virginia Viognier, Virginia Cabernet Franc, Virginia Petit Manseng, that we can share as a unified identity with their own individual accents of Charlottesville, Northern Virginia or King family or what Stephen Barnards going to make. So, we need this regional identity, and we can't do it with Cabernet Sauvignon.

Fred Reno

Well, that ties in a question I'd always curious about from somebody like yourself, especially who has the breadth of experience you have here. What's the next step here for Virginia? How in a world are we going to get this recognition on a national basis, forget International for a second, on a national basis, because I feel like this is the most exciting wine growing region in America today. There's a moment here right now for Virginia to seize what's it really going to take?

Chris Pearmund

Well, I have to take my hat off the state of Virginia for decades now, Dr. Tony Wolf, Bruce Zoecklein, and several other people and the state because we pay 30 cents per bottle to the state of Virginia as an excise tax, that 30 cents per bottle comes back to the Virginia Wine Board. and it's disseminated to help research development for us as an industry to make better wines. And also, a path has been made by the Virginia wine marketing office to get our wines in other states and other markets. We sell our wine in Canada right now, purely because of Virginia wine board and their help and putting that together. Our industry's ability to get our wine into other markets is squarely as a thank you to the Virginia wine marketing office, our job has failed to not follow through with the paths they have made because we are getting full retail at the winery door and we're not going to invest in the cellar for wine 10 bucks a bottle and follow through that way. And here's my analogy, you know Bonefish Grill. Yeah. I love Bonefish Grill, love their Bang Bang shrimp, up and down the East Coast, what they're known for, I go to Bonefish grill, grab my Bang Bang shrimp, I know what I'm going to have. They don't have that in the grocer's freezer, you can't go and buy bang, bang shrimp and take it out of the grocery store and put it in microwave putting it in the oven and make it because the ambiance is different. Virginia's ambiance has evolved to where you go to a winery for the

music for the cat juggling for the balloon rides for the tractor poles for the weddings for the events for the scene and be seen. We have failed to get it well distributed of quality wines in the stores and restaurants to augment what we offer well at the vineyard experience. So, when our wines are invested into enough production to sell across the state and across the country, our 5000 acres just isn't enough right now. And it's expensive to grow grapes, a California winery will have 20% of its sales in the tasting room at a wine club in 80%. Across the country, were the invert to that. And so how do we do that is a conversation.

Fred Reno

I think it's important. Personally, I believe it's very important. I've said my entire career. Every producer of wine needs to have a footprint, however big or small. In the three-tier system. And you describe it so much better than I could but you're not going to bring that ambience to the people, but you are going to get a brand recognition that people are going to get curious and wonder and then they're going to seek you out.

Chris Pearmund

So, a Virginia wine gifted to you. I'm coming over for dinner, here's a bottle of wine, thank you. Here's a bottle of Virginia wine that I can relate to. And here's a story about why I like it. Fantastic, best gift in the world. We need to have people when they leave a winery, take a bottle with them, take three bottles with them. One goes in the fridge; one goes in their cellar, and one is going to be gifted the next time they go to somebody's house. That is how we need to market Virginia wine to say I believe in our industry. Of all the wines sold in Virginia. Only six bottles of every 100 bottles are Virginia wine. There's more French wine sold in Virginia than Virginia wine, there's more Italian sold in Virginia than Virginia wine, and I'm embarrassed to say we're still at that ratio.

Fred Reno

Yeah, I continue to be amazed at all the people I know. In air quotes, know everything about wine in the business. And I talk to him about Virginia wine, and they think I'm nuts. And then I send them some Virginia wine and they try it and go I had no idea. And I say, you know everything about wine, you had no idea.

Chris Pearmund

So, here's the question. Virginia wine is expensive. All the wine sold in Virginia that I'm talking about that huge slice of the pie are grocery store wines in the six to 12'15 bucks a bottle Virginia doesn't compete there. Got it. So, we are adding minority before the gate is even open at the 30 \$40 retail. Virginia has a very significant footprint. I forget the numbers but they're very strong. People say Virginia wine is too expensive. Is that Chassagne-Montrachet we're having right now expensive. Is a nice Chateauneuf du Pape expensive? Yeah. Is a California

Cabernet from Napa Valley. Napa Valley only makes 4% of the wine of California. And they're very expensive.

Fred Reno

You know, Chris, you're absolutely right. I tell people all the time that a \$30 \$35 bottle of Virginia wine is equal quality to what you're going to pay for 45 to \$65 in California,

Chris Pearmund

And that's what I tell our staff. So, when our wine classes that we do all the time, I want to drink \$50 bottles of wine that are well recognized in the media. And I want to compare that to my bottle of wine. Because I want to know what that tastes like. The texture, aromatics, complexity, longevity and the palate, marketing, what kind of cork they're using everything manageable, and I want to compare myself against them. People say Chris, you're such a snob you don't buy this wine on sale the grocery store for 12 bucks a bottle, I go, I don't want to relate to that bottle of wine. I want to be a value at 30 bucks a bottle compared to a \$50 bottle of wine. If I'm drinking a lot of great \$10 per bottle wine and get accustomed to the palate structure of oak alternatives and mechanical harvesting and things that we don't have and don't do. I'm going to lose that game.

Fred Reno

Well, Chris, I know we can go on all day. I'd love to as the bottle is only half empty. Well, we'll empty that off of audio folks. And we'll get into some really interesting subjects I'm sure but again, thank you for coming to my studio. I really appreciate having you here with harvest coming on. I can't thank you enough.

Chris Pearmund

Thank you, Fred. It's been an absolute pleasure.