

EPISODE # 43 ARTERRA WINERY/JASON MURRAY FOUNDER & WINEMAKER

SPEAKERS

Fred Reno, Jason Murray

Fred Reno

So, Jason, welcome to my Podcast.

Jason Murray

Thank you so much for having me. It's really an exciting opportunity to be here speaking with you.

Fred Reno

Well, as you might have known, if you listen to some of the prior episodes, I like to start at the beginning. What's your story? How did you get involved in wine growing?

Jason Murray

Well, I'm going to give you the briefest possible nuts and bolts version of what led to this point. And then we can go more into the philosophy and wines and all that. So, my background is really I just grew up in an agricultural environment. So, I was in Central Maryland and was with a 4H family, we raised sheep. And I was fortunate to work with local farmers. I just grew up driving tractors or my bicycle to work and working as a farm kid. I really enjoyed that. That then led to moving on into college at the University of Maryland, where I got a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in horticulture. After school, I had a wonderful opportunity to work in Loudoun County as their commercial horticulturist, in association with the Cooperative Extension Service, so you worked for Tony Wolf. I did not work for Tony. But I worked in association with, so I was a county employee. But the way that it worked was as long as I provided my expertise beyond Loudoun County's borders, where it was needed by the State Extension Service, they would provide all of their resources to me of expertise. So, I worked with all of the grape growers up in the northern part of Virginia. And then within Loudoun County, I worked with fruits, vegetables, nursery crops, all of that,

Fred Reno

all of that. Okay, so just all agriculture.

Jason Murray

Yep, and it was commercial horticulture, meaning I was production assistance for businesses, not homeowners. And I was there to either help these businesses get started, or to help with any issues that came up with existing businesses. What year was that? I started that in 2001 and stayed in that

through 2005. So it was during that time that I started, and we were living at the time over in Maryland growing some Christmas trees because it was an affordable, something that you could start up and partway through that started growing grapes on the side, which eventually transitioned into both full time grape growing and winemaking down in Fauquier County, Virginia,

Fred Reno

So, I see your entry into the wine business and wine growing is through agriculture or through growing through farming when you grew up was wine part of your family at all?

Jason Murray

No, absolutely not. And that is one of the life lead here components is it was one aspect of agriculture led to another and I didn't even have the concept of vineyards in the mid-Atlantic region until I got that job in Loudoun County and was exposed to it.

Fred Reno

Oh, interesting. Well, you started in an era when Virginia was just starting to blossom and its wine quality.

Jason Murray

Yes, I was right there at the moment in time when it really took off as an industry. So, the easiest example of that is going to be that in Loudoun County, when I started, there was maybe 12 wineries. By the time I left there was probably 18 and a handful more in the works. And now I think we know there's 50 Some wineries up there in Loudoun County.

Fred Reno

What makes that area so attractive to winegrowing?

Jason Murray

Well, there's a few different features between Loudoun and Fauquier. A lot of it is going to be the Northern Virginia climate is exceptional. The way that we have our warm growing season conditions, followed by a nice cool autumn season for longer ripening in the northern part of the state. I think that is a prime area. There's also a fabulous assortment of soils. The topsoils of which I think are right along the East slope of the Blue Ridge, which is right where Arterra is located. But also, there's a lot of granite bases and very well drained Greenstone soils throughout Loudoun County and Fauquier County. So, we have great soils in that region and ideal, I would say fall ripening conditions.

Fred Reno

When did you start working directly for a winery, as opposed to just giving advice or horticultural experience?

Jason Murray

So, I started in 2003, was the first vineyards that I planted, and it was in 2005 that I left working for the county to full time set up, run, and operate, another winery of which I did for nine years full time. And

then we transition to combining a business for my wife and I which is our Arterra wines and Hawkmoth arts. What winery was that? That was Chateau O'Brien in Markham.

Fred Reno

So, you started Arterra in what year now again?

Jason Murray

We actually opened the tasting room in 2015. The first vintage wines were 2013. And we started a good bit before that in terms of the business plan, and making it all happen, because we're not the conventional startup where there was an asset base to draw from. This is all from hard work, and then collaborating with the USDA on a partner farm bank to take out an agricultural loan. That is a really impressive opportunity for people that the USDA feels have a place in agriculture to be farmers and preserve agricultural land, but that otherwise may not have had the ability to launch it on their own.

Fred Reno

How much acreage Do you currently have under vine.

Jason Murray

I have eight and a half acres on my property. And I'm very fortunate to work with another grower. This is the Seven Oaks vineyard, not the Seven Oaks winery that you may have heard of in Virginia, but the Seven Oaks vineyard is a partner of mine Mark Skinner, that I have been with using his vineyard exclusively since 2005. And those were actually the first grapes that were used to start our Arterra wines until my vineyard that was also planted in 2015 became productive.

Fred Reno

What varieties does he have versus what you have in the ground right now in your own vineyard.

Jason Murray

Currently, what's being produced at that site is Chardonnay, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot. We've been through a few iterations of other varieties on that site based on dealing with elevations and winter episodes. So, at one point there was Syrah we lost that then we had a decent run of Malbec and Tannat and we lost those. And we've replanted that to more winter hardy Austrian varieties. So right now, there's Gruner Veltliner. This is my Zweigelt and Lemberger.

Fred Reno

Oh, interesting. So, you have some Lemberger.

Jason Murray

We do and the first real batch of it is on the cellar right now. And it's looking pretty exciting.

Fred Reno

That sounds very interesting to me, personally.

Jason Murray

Yep, and we have if you want to jump into it now an entirely different set of grapes and wines coming off of the Arterra Estate Vineyard. And this is based on the environmental conditions that affect which varieties are suited to which locations and the Arterra Estate Vineyard is beautifully located in the thermal inversion layer right on the side of the mountain. So, we're not down in the valley sites where the colder air settles, we're not on top of the mountain where it also gets cold just from atmospheric conditions. But we have a nice warm thermal band to where we're able to grow more different grapes that not all sites can support. So, some examples there are that all of my Tannat production is currently on that property. We have Roussanne we have Petite Syrah, we have a good bit of Petit V, but it is applicable to a lot more sites in Virginia and does very well all over Virginia. And then we have some other trial blocks. We have Chenin Blanc, and we have Albarino in the ground right now as well.

Fred Reno

Well, your Tannat is really interesting wine. You know, I tasted the 2018 Tannat because that was supposedly not a very good year. And that wine is fantastic. And then the '17 I had from your winery at Arterra was really dynamic. Roussanne as I mentioned to you when you came here, I just finished last night and that was very good. So, it must be an incredible site for winegrowing.

Jason Murray

It really is a fabulous site; we have several attributes to it. One of them is that the elevation is quite ideal. Another aspect of it is the soils. It really is a granite-based soil on a pretty reasonable slope, not extreme but reasonable. And this really facilitates drainage conditions. So, it does not hold water. That really favors quality. It is a weaker soil that is very rocky, very gritty, there is not a high proportion of silt in it, which would lead towards more moisture content and more fertility. There are different aspects of clay mixed into it, but I would just describe it as a gritty soil. And what this means is the conditions in that area do not favor high yields and high productivity. They favor lower crops. And it also definitively shifts the vines into that classic stress we always talk about during the ripening season, which tips the scale over towards focused concentration as the vines are ripening.

Fred Reno

Well, you have a marketing slogan, and I want to dig into this because I've heard a lot of slogans over my career. And sometimes I'm confused by them, but yours happens to be Clean Wine. So, explain to my audience what you mean by Arterra makes Clean Wine.

Jason Murray

I will happily do that now and we can sum that one up. But I will tell you that I didn't go into this with the intention of making Clean Wine, I consider it to be a default result of the way that the wines are made. So, it's an attribute that happens to show up. The way that it shows up though, is following the same exact philosophy that produces what I consider to be a true terroir wine. And that is what we present as producing a true Virginia style wine. So, the basic concept or approach here is that we're producing every wine with spontaneous native yeast fermentations, we're using native ML. We don't do any bleed offs or any manipulation of weight, body intensity or character. There's no new oak, there's no fining agents, there's no balancing agents, there's nothing done to adjust or change the wine. I do use sulfite. And I use it in a very low level. And that's partly facilitated because everything is sealed under the tight stelvin tin lined screw caps, so I don't have continued breathing in the bottle. I actually have found that

I'm forced to use significantly lower sulfites based on that closure. So, when I talk about these aspects, I went into making wine this way, because it was a quest to make the most distinctive, highest quality wine possible.

Fred Reno

I wanted to stop me on one thing, because when you're talking about using native yeast, is this in the cellar, because don't you have ambient yeast in the cellar at some point? Or is it just your own yeast starts to develop and take over?

Jason Murray

Native yeast is naturally occurring on the skins of the grapes out in the vineyard and comes in with the fruit. So, this is all been researched and documented in modern times, according to one researcher up at Cornell, so this is all legitimate in terms of the way that yeast functions are in my experience, you can do native yeast fermentations in the same cellar that has used commercial yeast all along and you will get distinctly different wines. Furthermore, when I first entered the Arterra facility when it was built, not anything had ever been used before. So, this was new Crush equipment, new fermenters new everything never touched, never any yeast in there, and they all start perfectly fine. So, what I understand is that yeast actually clings to surfaces, it is not necessarily readily going to be floating around the ambient air in a cellar. And this can be understood through human gut biology research, but it's also going to be evidenced even though maybe people don't understand it in winemaking. Winemakers are trained from the start that when you're starting fermentation, you don't want your wine to gunky, thick, and cloudy, because that can cause some problems, but you also can't have it clear. Okay. And the reason for this is yeast does not float free in a solution. Yeast clings to something, to some surface. And part of that cloudiness that's required for fermentations to proceed is that is the particulate matter that the yeast is actually clinging to. What I have experienced quite consistently with native yeast fermentations is when you ferment on the skins, for example, red wines, they start quite easily and consistently. Whereas if I do whole cluster pressing of whites, then we have a situation where there is significantly less yeast in the juice, and they can have a tendency to start much slower. And then you enter and as soon as you're ready, we can talk about the philosophical differences of how you would approach winemaking and what your goals are in the wine in relation to doing native yeast fermentations. So, we're already kind of in a circle in terms of clean versus philosophy.

Fred Reno

Well, when you went into winemaking and you started this, what was your model? In other words, you must have been looking at some wine growing region. Some producers, somebody says, okay, they make wine in such a fashion that I like, was there any kind of example you had in your own mind, or was it just, you're just going to follow the path of where the grapes you were growing led you.

Jason Murray

It's a little bit of both. And the story goes that when I started making wine in 2005, this was my first vintage making wine. And I was making it on my own. And I would say it took me three years, '05,'06'&'07 to get to where I was making wines that I thought were high quality wines. And the interesting phenomena was all I was using was commercial yeast, some new oak, sulfite, nothing else because what the higher quality fruit I find you don't need any of the other kinds of additive based

winemaking. But what happened is as soon as the wines were generally being recognized as good wines, they were being recognized as good in a way that they tasted like everybody else's good wine, you hit that standard that they were good, but normal. For me, that rapidly became uninteresting. So, I was also finding that growing high quality grapes, there was so much more character in the grapes than was being unlocked with this commercial yeast and basic conventional type of process. I think we've all heard and known at least those of us that have been in the industry long enough that the greatest Wines of the World historically have all been made with native yeast fermentations. This was the way the wines of Burgundy have always been made. This is the way that the classic Bordeaux's had always been made. This is the way that all wine was made prior to the 1970s. And so, the people that have been in the industry longer than me, remember the time with the wines that were vintages, 60s and early are these classic amazing vintages that had so much complexity, depth, character, intrigue to them, that now wines made, are simple. They're consistent. But they're simple. So, I was on a quest to actually produce the greatest possible wine simultaneous with producing a wine that really showed what Virginia is and what it has to offer.

Fred Reno

I have to stop you here, because you made me think of something here, Jason, which reminded me, going back to California now. And I remember in the early days when I was at Sonoma-Cutrer in the late 80s. And I used to stand up in front of audiences. And say, let me make something very clear here. We do not make great wine at Sonoma-Cutrer, and people would be aghast. They would go. Here's this guy telling me they don't make great wine. What is he talking about? And I'd say, I like to use the adjective great, as it relates to wine, to 1/10 of 1% of all the wine that's being produced in this world, that is truly great. I said, our challenge. And I think the industry challenge and what you've just touched on, in my opinion, is to make interesting wine. And if you make interesting wine over a period of time, you might have a shot at great wine. What do you think about that?

Jason Murray

That's exactly how I feel. And there's several layers and thoughts to this, which is this is part of why I like to work with single varietals, and I don't focus on blending. Because if you apply this minimalist approach, it's intended to unlock what that grape actually tastes like here in Virginia if you did nothing to try and recreate any other wine from anywhere else in the world. So, I like the varietals because they are distinctive and unique, which means one person will love this one and another person will love the other one and that's fine. But the individual varietals will show their unique characteristics that different people will gravitate to. I am looking for a wine that is yes, sound good, high quality. But it has to be distinctive, fascinating, thought provoking, it needs to give more otherwise I'm not satisfied. When I talk about how this fits into the state of Virginia and its point in evolutionary time, I consider that I am currently the second generation of Virginia winemakers. I am blessed to have an entire set of pioneers come before me to get to a certain benchmark that then we can take that foundation and move from and what I want to help Virginia transition is away from the current pride factor of being put in a lineup of a Virginia wine, a California wine, an Australian wine and a Bordeaux wine. And they say we have made it because in the lineup you couldn't tell which one was Virginia. Whereas my feeling is if you put a burgundy producer in such lineup and you said Hey, Mr. Burgundy, you did great because no one could tell which one was the burgundy. They're going to be really upset because the whole point is to

taste the place. So, I want us to show that we actually can produce that quality benchmark that we're looking for. With that truly distinctive, Virginia aspect.

Fred Reno

Well, you now walk down into a room that I'm going to grab here because you're talking passionately about something that I think Norton lends itself to and Norton has become my latest passion for the last three months. I'm just Over the top about Norton wine. When I tasted your Norton, this is really good. Talk a little bit about your vineyard, I don't think you have but an acre plus a Norton in the vineyard right now do you.

Jason Murray

I'm actually collaborating with a partner grower, that's only a half-acre, and it's a short drive from the winery property. And this was started as a proof-of-concept venture to me that if we actually put it on the right soils, and we tend it properly, like we tend, very meticulously the vinifera vines, what it's capable of in this minimalist approach. And so, if I take one step back of why Norton is significant, it ties to the same aspects of what grape varieties makes sense for the region. And so, we're dealing with this warm, damp condition, we're dealing with really cold winters, we're dealing with rainy falls with wet soils. And so, in the land of red wines, we need things that can handle this consistently. And the top grapes, in my opinion, are going to be the ones that can produce the top quality consistently in the vineyard, because I don't do anything to change it in the cellar. So, if you're not going to fix a wine in the cellar, it has to be spectacular every year in the vineyard. This is why I prefer with vinifera to work with Petit Verdot and Tannat because they both have this amazing ability, that sometime in September in the northern part of the state, they're queued that the growing season is over the vines shuts down growth and water movement, the berries actually start to dehydrate. And we get great concentration, even in the wet years, even in the worst years. That's the story behind that 2018 Tannat that you mentioned. And that's because in the worst year we've seen in Virginia, the right grapes can still make an amazing wine. And this is critically important because a wine region to have a reputation and move forward needs to have good years and great years. And that takes the right grapes, you can't have good years and bad years and sometimes nothing years. So, Norton fits right into this. And I think Norton fits in spectacularly in a changing world, which is an amazing asset and attribute because a lot of the European grapes are starting to have a little bit more of a challenge under climate change issues. Whereas Norton is actually becoming all the more of an ideal fit here. It used to ripen almost on the too late side and have that strong acidity and kind of that really intense flavor and some people loved it and some people did not. But the ripening was almost borderline in terms of getting the balance right in the grapes. Whereas Norton now like everything else is tending to ripen a solid 10 days earlier, depending on the year, maybe 14. And this is bringing its ripening right into an ideal spot as the climate shifts to produce a perfectly balanced wine. And that same more advanced ripening is mitigating and balancing the factors of acidity and that quote, Norton flavor,

Fred Reno

which I tend to like. I'm curious so you said was a proof of concept. venture when you first planted with this partner. What are you doing differently, if anything, in the vineyard with the Norton versus what was traditionally how they put it on trellis. How they grew it? Is there anything different you're doing with it?

Jason Murray

Well, there's all different people approaching growing Norton in different ways. So, I don't want to make a statement that's going to broadcast or say anything across the board.

Fred Reno

What do you do though? I'm curious about what you do because to your point, Jason, I noticed that everybody does something different with their Norton.

Jason Murray

While the tendency and definitely not everyone is doing this, but the tendency is that it is so disease resistant, that it tends to be left neglected in the vineyard because it will be fine anyway. So, all the time, effort and attention are going into the European vinifera vines. And if you don't tend Norton with that same precise care, you won't have the ripening that you need to bring that wine into balance. So, I am interested in having it on an ideal soil, not just any old site. And I am interested in tending it to the same shoot density we look for in vinifera, the same lower yields to focus and steer the vine focus towards ripening and balancing the grapes.

Fred Reno

Well, that makes too much sense.

Jason Murray

Simple like that cliché is that the wine is made in the vineyard. But when you're a minimalist, the wine really is made in the vineyard. Because if you're not changing it in the cellar, you either start with really good grapes or you're going to end up with bad wine.

Fred Reno

What do you think of this Chassagne-Montrachet we're having here this morning. 2018 Roux Pere & Fils.

Jason Murray

I am absolutely a fan based on the concept of Burgundy which holds true in this wine I am what I consider to be a true terroir winemaker which means, one you taste nothing, but the factors that originated from the grape in the wine. That's what I believe wine really should be. And then it has a lot of the features to it that I find in all of my wines, the way that my process carries through. And if I can sum those up very quickly, what I'm seeing in this wine is the same thing I see in my wines. The spontaneous native use process produces a much rounder, wider, broader profile to the wine. It is this outwardly expansive volume, you feel it connect to the sides of the palate, it's this added dimension of width, whereas we've all heard wines described structurally as front, mid, back palate, that's a linearity. This is a whole nother dimension that shows up in Burgundy and shows up in my wines.

Fred Reno

Well, I agree. In fact, let me tap your glass off here a little bit. I'm finding this very delightful for a morning beverage, but it is growing and changing in the glass just in the last half hour.

Jason Murray

Yeah, it really is a wonderful experience to try other wines that have this wide profile to them. This really rich texture that comes through which I describe as a viscosity, even in wines that are dry wines with the native yeast process have this more viscous character that you'd normally associate with sweet wines. Really clean finish that shows up in my wines too. Because quality fruit, minimalist process, you don't get astringencies built in. So, there's depth, there's layers, there's character, and then you can see this quest for greatness showing up in a wine, when you can see they're riding those fine lines, they're pushing those limits. So, you can sense that longer lees aging that gives you that little flinty kind of gun smokey character, but not out of balance to where it's going to subdue the bright, vibrant fruit character that's going to come through all these different layers and aspects are what I look for. And I'm fascinated by in wines.

Fred Reno

Well, I like your wine a lot, Jason, I haven't had enough of it yet. But what I have had, I've really enjoyed. I've just done the back of the napkin math here. And your production can't be much more than 1500 cases annually.

Jason Murray

Well right now we're doing about 17 acres of vines that actually between the two sites.

Fred Reno

Okay, 17 acres that changes the Math.

Jason Murray

That does change the math of which it's only as of this year that both vineyard sites are approaching full productivity. Meaning we've gone through some replantings, some from winter kill some from preference decisions. And the vineyard has the ability to produce up to around between the two sites, 2400 cases. Right now, I am within my facility and capacity focused on right about 2000 cases a year.

Fred Reno

I only zero in on that to get the folks to understand there's not a lot of this. So, if you can find it buy it, it's really good.

Jason Murray

That's somewhat intentional because the way that we run the business is the classic family business. So, my wife and I run all the business aspects. I am the vineyard manager. I'm the winemaker. We share the tasting room, we share marketing, we share administration, all the operations we are the key leaders of and when you run it that way, you only have so much capacity for wine production, because you can't let the other sides of the business lapse either. And you can't grow the business enough to where the quote, business sides of it are going to distract you from focusing on the wine. So, this is right about the right scale. And you see this historically through top Chateau and top producers historically, that 2000 case number is right about the point at which you can really dive in and with your full soul focus on every wine.

Fred Reno

So, my favorite question I ask every Vintner sitting in that chair, at some point in your career there was that one wine that one bottle you had, where you went, Oh, okay, I get it. Now, wine can be this ethereal. Can be this interesting, this compelling? What was that one wine in your memory bank that you think oh, that's it?

Jason Murray

Well, I can tell you the one that I actually can name conceptually, whereas it was a series of these experiences that led me to this. And the one that comes to mind was a Brunello di Montalcino, if I'm saying that perfectly Yes, and there were a few others that were French and over the course of time though this has been reinforced by other small natural wine producers through Spain and Austria, mostly and a lot of Georgian wines. But it was starting with finding wines that were so well balanced, so clean on their finish. So dynamic in terms of the aspects that they would reveal, while you retain them in the palette. There was nothing simple about some of these wines. And it absolutely opened my eyes to the potential of things, and that these great wines were in an entirely different place than what at the time we were producing in Virginia. And a great example of that is, as I was saying, when I started to produce what I think was being regarded as higher quality wines with the 2007 Vintage. And then I switched over to these native yeast productions, I was still going to the little winemaker roundtables up in Northern Virginia. And one of the aspects of them was this wonderful clean finish in these wines. And so just for one example, as the winemakers in the room seemed to be a little bit confused about why I was so proud of this wine, and all they kept telling me was there's no back palate. And my response to that was the greatest wines I've ever had all finished so pleasantly clean and smooth. I don't understand the problem with this. So, I learned kind of early on that in order to do things different, you have to maintain a certain level of confidence that you're not necessarily going to get approval from the other people in the room or some of the other people that came first. Because as soon as you change from what they did, you may have crossed beyond the comfort zone, or the approval.

Fred Reno

What I've gotten out of your wine, as I said before, I find your wines interesting. And to me, that's the most compelling thing after 43 years in this industry, I want to enjoy and try interesting wine, not just wine, that's wine.

Jason Murray

Right. And so, if I circle this back around, my whole quest in winemaking was to produce distinctive, interesting, fascinating wines. All this approach that I've developed is to produce that to show the potential that we have here. When I said it is by default, a clean wine. It is just because when you're using the naturally occurring yeast, you don't have some of the byproducts that are derived from commercial yeast, you don't have people that have issues with new Oak, you don't have certain people that have sensitivities to certain fining agents. And this is not again a primary focus because this is something that is significantly important to one person that may have reactions to certain wines, it may not be at all important to someone else. But the concept of a clean wine is simply that regardless of what your personal issues may be with various wines, these wines are safe and making wine according to this process for 15, 16 years now, I've never had a customer say I reacted to your wine the same way I react to all these other wines.

Fred Reno

Well, I have to ask you this question because it was confusing to me when I had the 2019 Petit Verdot that you would produce. I thought the wine was terrific. However, I was trying to understand dry table wine at 16% Alcohol. So how does that wine end up with such high alcohol and thought the wine is well made. Reminded me quite honestly, of one very famous wine which was a 1968 Mayacamas Vineyard late harvest Zinfandel, which was an incredible bottle of wine, but I couldn't drink it all in one sitting because of the alcohol. What drove the alcohol levels in that particular wine to where it was at?

Jason Murray

That is going to follow my philosophy that each wine expresses that grape on that site in that year. So that's what a true terroir wine is. So, what I did was I captured the characteristics of that year. Most wines that are made to be sold on retail store shelves for very and perfectly good reasons strive for consistency year to year so that a customer knows what to expect. That's what I would do if I were trying to sell on store shelves to, so I respect this. I'm in a tasting room as my primary avenue where the customers try the wines so I can let those differences of vintages show through, while still preserving the style that Arterra is. So, we have consistency and style. We have nuance of seasons. That specific year was one where the weather patterns defined the wine such that we had a very dry early summer and mid-summer season that was so extreme in terms of the drought stress on the low water retention soils that I have at the Arterra Estate vineyard in Delaplane, that instead of the vines shutting down their water movement in mid-September, they were shut down by early August. And that means that this dehydration and desiccation cycle started a month, maybe five weeks earlier than normal and progressed all the way through the fall. And that simply dehydrated to a point whereas water is lost, sugar concentration is up, produce these wines with these really high alcohols. Now an interesting aspect to that, again, is how varieties match the region, something like Petit Verdot or Tannat will naturally also concentrate the acids and balance and that deep, dense purple rich full character and the wines balance perfectly naturally. And that's necessary for minimalist in the cellar. Whereas Cabernet Sauvignon we often struggle with during the wetter years that it doesn't have the concentration and so winemaking would do bleed offs to intensify it. Whereas in what was a quote, good year being 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon also ended up technically close to 17% alcohol when I picked it, but the acidity absolutely fell out at the bottom and you had a flat wine, hot. And it doesn't have that same dense dark purple concentration without cellar work which is common with Cab Sauv. So, I have come to that understanding that a year where there's that level of intensity and alcohol. The good year, a lot of people would say some grapes still handled it and others didn't.

Fred Reno

I'm curious, do you have a varietal you enjoy working with over any of the other varietals that you'd like to get the expression out of the grape?

Jason Murray

Well, I'll tell you, I'm having the best time just like you are with exploring Norton. And I think it's just an endless load of fun. But that's a more recent phenomenon to me. And I get full respect to the people who saw the light, they're way ahead of me. But I have historically really leaned towards Petit Verdot. And tonight, and my staff has always joked with me as to which one I liked the best. And the way that I

sum it up is tonight's the one that seems to get the most recognition because it makes the most complete powerful wine. That's impressive. Whereas Petit Verdot now has this lovely profile that it's big up front big volume dark, but it really just kind of like smooths out as it finishes and that's its profile. And most winemakers would want to blend in to compensate for that. But I embrace that character. And the way that I describe it is and I had to drink one wine every day for the rest of my life. That's Petit Verdot

Fred Reno

No. Okay, what's the oldest wine you have from Arterra in your cellar?

Jason Murray

I have the wines right back to the initial vintages. So, we've got 2013. 2013 Tannat is probably the star coming in here. So, but I've got Petit Verdot I've got Chardonnay.

Fred Reno

I'd be kind of curious, 10 years, 15 years now to taste some of those wines under this enclosure you're using and see what kind of development in tertiary flavors and aromas it gets. I was against screw caps for the longest time myself for red wine just because they seem to be reductive. And then I was in Australia at Yangarra vineyard some years ago. And Peter Fraser, who's wonderful chap, pulled out I think it might have been a 15-year-Old Vine Bush wine Grenache he had made, and I taste it. And I was like, Peter, you're right. This wine is developed. It's beautiful. There is no reduction here. This is under screwcap. Okay, I'm sold now.

Jason Murray

Yeah, it's been really interesting to see this evolve over the course of time, and I understand why it has struggled because the majority of wines that we find in the US are still cork closed because big wineries had that infrastructure prior to screwcaps coming along and they want to hold ground that that's a superior way of doing things. This makes perfect sense to me. The reason I changed was for consistency and quality control. So, I was really looking at bottle to bottle variations. I was looking at cork taint. I was looking at, you know, as the wines aged, I wanted the wines all to be good wine. So, the way I look at it is if I sell you a \$40 bottle of wine, for some people, that's an expensive wine that they're going to hold for five or six years until their 25th wedding anniversary, and that's their one-night special wine. And I've got other customers where that's like Tuesday with pizza. I don't care which one it's got to be spot-on high-quality bottle wine and consistent. So, this is why I went with screwcaps. But we had to learn. And I think the industry embraced right away that for a bright, crisp young drinking white, works great no problems, seal it up. Awesome. Whereas reds took a little bit of learning. And I am learning that you really had to adjust the status of the wine as it was getting to be bottled. And for me, that was several iterations over vintages of reducing sulfites so that the wine wasn't shocked, because it has a harder time coming out of that shock without the oxygen coming through to mitigate the sulfate. Yeah, so the way that I see it now is there's enough producers in screwcap, aged red wines. And this is coming from, again, people that are looking for this consistency in a world where there is a lot of wine being produced. And so emerging regions like South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, you're seeing a lot more screwcaps because it's a consistent closure that they can access. And what we're really finding is, to me, it's a win in terms of how the wines develop, if you have your sulfites down and you bottle them right for aging under screwcaps, that they both develop the

polymerization over the course of time that we look for, for evolution in cork closed wines. But also, they don't have the decline factor associated with oxygen over the course of time, meaning they don't go over the hill and they don't brown, and they don't come down and they don't lose that vivid fruit. They retain the aspects that are positive of youthful wines. And they combine that with the aspects that are positive of aged wines.

Fred Reno

Very interesting. So, your branding, was this just natural that you fell on Arterra, Art of the Land, or did that take some skull session to all of a sudden is like, Hey, this is going to be our brand name.

Jason Murray

Well, it took a little while to get there. And it was an evolution. And the name Arterra means the art of the land. So, it is Terra because it's a true expression of the land since the native yeast grapes all come from that vineyard site and the process means you're tasting nothing that did not come from that land. So, no new oak, none of that. Okay, it's art for Arterra because it's an artistic expression of the land, meaning that the wines are made based on intuition and perception. As the vines evolve, the wines evolve. So, the decision making is all perception, it's not analytical. So, for example, there's not a single analytical measurement made prior to harvest in any given year because those numbers might influence what I'm tasting in the wine. (Of course, your wife is an artist), my wife is an artist, she goes by Hawkmoth Arts and there was always the conversation about whether or not Arterra was an appropriate name for her to switch to because her artwork is also very earth natural theme based so the name does fit. But she actually came first and looking for an independent next step for her was what led to developing the business plan. And ultimately, after several iterations, it became apparent that we were going to end up in one location together. And we wanted to maintain the integrity of both aspects. I did not want to be a winery that had some artwork. And I did not want to be a gallery that had some wine, we wanted to have the integrity of both. And then in terms of a, quick circle back to the name, Arterra and the philosophies that are behind it. We actually started with a name Precipice to be wines on the edge that the greatest would be achieved right at the edge of disaster right before you fall off the cliff. Push those limits we eventually found out it was already in a trademark dispute, okay, and found out that we eventually created the word Arterra and found that it was a much more comprehensive fit for what we are trying to do. And there is a T.S. Eliot quote etched onto the door of my cellar which Sandy's the one that etched it, my wife. And it is a quote that if I get it right says, Only those who may risk going too far can possibly find out how far one may go. And that's how I live. And that that is the philosophy behind which the grapes are grown, and the wine is made. You have to push a limit. Every once in a while, you're going to cross a line, and you got to learn from it. And then you dial back, but if you don't ever keep pushing limits, you're never moving forward.

Fred Reno

So, 2022, real early, just in the barn. What's your prognosis for this vintage right now?

Jason Murray

I'm absolutely excited about it because it was the rarest situation where we had good crop levels, along with top quality. A lot of times on the East Coast, you kind of go one way or the other. So, we had earlier season rains through the summer that I kept saying This needs to stop some time for things to

come out. Okay, right. I remember. Yep. And fortunately, they did. So, the fruit itself was a little on the heavier side, but then the season dried up and our soils really facilitate that. And the ripening came in absolutely perfect. So, I'm really excited about it.

Fred Reno

So, what's your 2022 Norton look like right now?

Jason Murray

I think we are probably looking at the best I've produced. But I'm going to say this is only the third.

Fred Reno

Well, Jason, I think we could have gone on here for another hour. This has been fascinating. I can't wait to get this Episode up and Running for everybody. But I want to just say thank you for your time this morning and come down my studio. Thank you.

Jason Murray

Absolutely. This is wonderful. As you can see if you give me a chance to start talking about my wines, it just could go on and on and on. So good job calling a stop.