

JENNI McCLOUD/HORTON INTERVIEW

SPEAKERS

Fred Reno, Jenni McCloud

Fred Reno

Jenni, welcome back to another of the Fine Wine Confidential Podcasts. This Episode is to put a memorial to Dennis Horton and what he meant to the industry here in Virginia. So, thank you for your time today. Well, I know the story of how you met Dennis, but I'd like you to retell it briefly about how you stumbled into that conference at the Omni here in Charlottesville. And that led to where you are today, right?

Jenni McCloud

It did Fred. First of all, thank you. I'm pleased to be able to participate in honoring Dennis and telling some stories about him and his outstanding and sometimes outlandish personality. So, I was transitioning from business to a new life as I was investigating viticulture. Two weeks to the day, after I sold my previous business to what I'm doing now--Chrysalis vineyard and Locksley Farm Cheese. I had heard about a conference, the A S E D conference, the American Society of Enology and Viticulture, and the theme was alternative grape varieties. That really interested me because I had started getting a little ABC. You know the anything, but Chardonnay syndrome. And so, I blew in there, signed up and went into the auditorium and went right to the front row or second row, because I always like to do that. So, I could really see people's expressions and I have bad eyes. There was Dennis along with Alan Kinne sitting on the dais, talking about Viognier. The morning session was white wines. And then there was a break for lunch and then we would have an afternoon session that included the reds. So, this stuff Viognier got poured around. And I was vaguely recollecting, Viognier, somewhere in the Rhone. I think that was really only probably the second or third time that I tried to Condrieu. I was like, holy smokes, man, this is really good white wine. I was watching Dennis talk about irrigation and coming into

production faster by the use of irrigation instead of dry farming it to start with. And that made sense, because you could pay for the cost of your irrigation systems by bringing production forward by a year and basically pay for the irrigation system and then have an insurance policy in the event of any kind of a drought happened. I say that because it was kind of the first time that I had been exposed to the more scientific and practical or engineering side of grape growing as opposed to the flavors and, you know, the beauty of the countryside. I thought this is some practical stuff that I was hearing. And I remember that. So, at the lunch break, I just globed on to Dennis and following him. He sat down and I sat down right next to him. He looks over and he sees this person they're on the right and, and then after a minute or two, Alan showed up and a bunch of other people and we had lunch. After lunch now I was really fascinated because it was going to be the red wine. And again, alternative varieties, folks from Atlas Peak are there with their Sangiovese. We had participants from a number of different states who are attending who wanted to taste other alternative varieties. Just to back up for a second the morning session there was Rkatsiteli never even heard of that. You know, we had the Viognier and then the afternoon session came and after a couple of wines, this deep, Inky stuff came out called Norton. And I'm like, What the hell is this stuff? And the color was just intense. The aroma was a little wild but Vinous and you know what?

Fred Reno

I'm curious, let me stop you there. What was the reaction in the room from the other people that were in the room? In a lot of cases, they might have been tasting Norton. If not, for the first time, not that rarely, right?

Jenni McCloud

Well, to be honest with you, they were all behind me because I was sitting up front, so I'm not really quite sure. And honestly, I really didn't give a hoot what others were thinking. Well, as you know, I've been collecting and enjoying wines for a couple of decades by that point, collecting classified growth Bordeaux so I wanted to see what Virginia had to offer. Remember, this is my first foray into anything related to grape growing and winemaking. (This is 1996?) no 1995. So, two weeks prior, I just sold my previous business. That was very intense, you

know, all the due diligence and that stuff for a public company to acquire our company. And then it's like, oh, then it was over.

Fred Reno

You're at this conference now. And the conference is over. What's the next steps for you?

Jenni McCloud

I engaged Alan Kinne as a consultant, and I became Dennis friend that day.

Fred Reno

And Dennis was fine with you engaging Alan Kinne, no problem at all. Was Alan working for him too, at the same time.

Jenni McCloud

While he was but also Alan was working for Piedmont Vineyards also over at Ingleside Vineyard. Yeah. And you know realizing it was Dennis who owned the winery. It was Dennis, who had introduced Viognier to Virginia, it was Dennis who brought back Norton. I thought, My Lord, I'm drinking some really delicious white wines with complexity and balance, and boldness, Viognier. And then this stuff Norton, what the heck is this? And when I found out that it was native, and like super disease resistant, I'm like, holy smokes, what a great game to play. So, speaking of Dennis, he was one of the most generous people with his time, outspoken, but not a pussy willow. He was pretty bold, opinionated, and at times, but very generous and deserves a lot of credit. You know the story, do I have a story? I have a number of different stories. But to me, the biggest story is his risk taking and his innovations to bring Viognier into Virginia, to bring Norton back. You know, he grew up in Hermann, Missouri, where Norton was a mainstay of their industry. There were Stone Hill Winery and a number of others. Dennis inspired me to do the same as a result with Albarino, Petit Manseng and Fer Servadou. So, we share that in common and I'm honored to share that aspect of being involved in the introduction of grape varieties. I would call Dennis at least a couple times a week for probably two years. He never failed to answer my questions. He never failed to come to the phone. And he was a friend.

Fred Reno

On that note, I am curious. When you start telling Dennis Okay, I'm going to plant Norton and I'm going to end up planting the largest vineyard of Norton. How did he react to that? What did he say?

Jenni McCloud

Well I said, Hey, Dennis, you know what, I'm just kind of like going to do what you're doing. Anyway, and he goes, You know, I think that's very smart Jenni because I don't understand why they don't teach copying 101 in college, go find a successful action and company. Go do it, start and then you can segue and branch out once you learn the ropes. I think he was, in addition to his generous personality, I think he was flattered in a way and I was fine with that because he was making some really fine wines have some really unusual varieties. And I thought that was an exciting game to play. You know, instead of doing the same old, same old that everybody else is doing, let's explore the varieties that we can test in our climate, test in our soils, and see if we can't get some new varieties that can differentiate Virginia from, well, from the West Coast in particular. And we've done that.

Fred Reno

He seems to have been very innovative. I mean, what you said earlier in the interview surprised me about the irrigation. Because I haven't seen that here in Virginia at all. He was really forward-thinking businessman as well as a wine grower wasn't he.

Jenni McCloud

He was and he maintained a very successful business throughout the entirety of his developing Horton Cellars, as well. I do remember a funny little quote, that he told me one time because it hit home and he said, you know, generally, here's what you're gonna do with your water, you're going to, you know, drip down eight gallons every week, blah, blah, blah. And, you know, they're going to tell you that you're probably over watering your vines. But you know, what they sure like it. Like, you know, I'm listening to this guy, because I'm looking at his yields. I'm

looking at the health of his vineyards in the care of his vineyards, and his, mate, Sharon Horton, one of the great viticulturist in Virginia to this day, I thought, wow, this is a good example, to follow. This is a seasoned individual who speaks his mind and won't sugarcoat anything and just tell me the way it is. And that's what I wanted.

Fred Reno

You touched on this a little bit before, but how do you feel he was viewed within the community, the wine community itself?

Jenni McCloud

I think that in general, he was highly respected and as witness to that just look at a lot of the accolades and attention that he got, I think, on occasion, he rubbed some people's, ruffled some feathers a little bit because of his directness. I saw that as a quality, not a not a flaw.

Fred Reno

Was he a joiner? Was he involved in any of the early organizations like the Virginia wineries Association, anything like that?

Jenni McCloud

Oh, yeah, he was pm the Virginia wineries Association. I don't know if he ever sat on the Virginia wine board but was very engaged in in the industry and had opinions about how that industry should be developed. Most of what he said, in fact, I can't think of anything in particular that he may have said or any advice given that wasn't good advice, and it wasn't reasonable.

Fred Reno

Do you think he had any idea the impact he had made by bringing Norton back into the state of Virginia?

Jenni McCloud

You know, that's a good question, because he never made Norton his flagship grape variety, because he had broad interests in bringing in Touriga Nacional in

making his flagship Dionysus, his flagship wine, he had the Rkatsiteli, the Viognier, Tannat a variety. And so I think that he felt that it was a natural. I mean, this came from Virginia, why on earth, is that not being grown here?

Fred Reno

From your vantage point from afar what was his management style like with his staff, and the people around him?

Jenni McCloud

You know, I don't know, I wasn't there where I witness interaction management interaction, but I don't know of anybody who had any bad words to say about Dennis as an employer. And, you know, most people who had been employed there and he employed a number of people that have gone on to become, you know, important industry personalities and winemakers who remained his friend. I think if any feathers were ruffled, it was usually with other winery owners or people who had different perspectives of how the organization or the Virginia wine industry should develop and he wasn't shy to express his opinion.

Fred Reno

I was wondering about that because he passed away before I moved here to Virginia I always lamented the fact and never had chance to meet him. The reason for doing this interview with you and several other personalities who knew Dennis was to chronicle this and get his legacy into the overall story here in Virginia. I don't think I've seen enough written about him, to be honest with you since I've been in Virginia,

Jenni McCloud

I think that that's reflective of sort of how industries evolved, that those that are, you know, made fundamental steps in the industry wound up becoming a little bit forgotten as time goes on. What does that saying go, you know, the now belongs to the young.

Fred Reno

Yeah, I guess it's true.

Jenni McCloud

We have a lot of young bright winemakers that, if I had a criticism, don't appreciate some of the pioneers that took the risk to grow some of these grape varieties, and to experiment with how to identify them, and how to trellis them. You know, there was no, there was no book to pull off the shelf and read about this stuff. As much that there is now to look back, you know, but I'm thinking, you know, shoot, that's just what old people say anyway. Right?

Fred Reno

Well, you mentioned earlier in the interview itself, but you were in constant contact with him very early in your development of your vineyard, weren't you?

Jenni McCloud

Oh, yeah, regularly for years. And it was a very, very appreciative of that, which is I can tell you is he set an example as well that whenever I get calls from people asking about Norton or Viognier, or Albarino, or Fer, I make a point of trying to emulate Dennis and his generosity with his time to the best of my ability and help people. I receive that support and I feel that it's appropriate to provide that assistance and guidance if I can.

Fred Reno

Well, that's one theme I've caught in several of the other interviews I've had was, his generosity always seems to come forward with his time and his knowledge. In fact, Mike Henny said to me in my interview with him, and I didn't realize Mike had worked with him for 20 years, during that course of his career. And he basically said Dennis thought that secrets were stupid. And they held everybody back. And that's why he was so open, and so willing to share.

Jenni McCloud

I absolutely agree with that. And I never had heard that statement that he said, secrets are stupid. But I certainly I suppose, understood that to be the case, because he never held back anything and gave me every single bit of advice. And whenever I had a question, there was an answer. And if there wasn't he

would say, Well, I'm not sure. He was not one to bullshit me. But to pretty much tell it straight up. But one thing that I think is worth repeating. And I've said this coming at it from a little bit of a different angle from Dennis, that we're an open book here about how we make wine, it doesn't do any good to hold it back. Because it does potentially stunt the growth and development of the crafting of fine and unique wines in Virginia. And besides, it's the implementation, not the knowledge, you can tell somebody to do something, the real trick is actually doing it and doing it properly and having that attention to detail. So, the knowledge should be open in my view of all of these topics. Effort should be put forth, as Dennis had demonstrated into helping others implement this knowledge.

Fred Reno

Yeah, it sounds like he was just open, willing to share and whatever you needed if he had it, he would give it to you.

Jenni McCloud

That's right. And he liked talking about his wines and drinking his wine. I don't know how many times I went into the Horton cellar. It was just, if ever I was anywhere near the area it was always fun to stop in. Dennis would always come out and we'd be talking wine, and drink wine and he liked to drink his wine.

Fred Reno

You know, and Bruce Zocklein had said to me that his first vintage of Viognier he made which took the country by storm and nobody expected that. He said it was the first and maybe the only Virginia wine that was ever on the wine list at French Laundry in Napa.

Jenni McCloud

I did not know that but I have a story about that wine. And I want to say 1995. I was out in Napa. I was at Mustards Grill. I think it's on 29. Right? Yeah. And so I've got a bottle of the 1993 Horton Viognier. So, some folks, a friend of mine, Phil Burton from Barrel Builders, and the assistant manager of Mustards who I think was in charge of the restaurant that day, stopped in his tracks and basically blurted out, where did you get that? I bought it at Horton Cellars. Let me tell you

about that. Why? He said we did a big tasting of Viogniers. We must of had 25 different Viogniers, we had big muckety, muck palates and guess which wine won the tasting that wine. They had California Viogniers, French Viogniers, then they had the Horton 1993. Again, being so impressed with Dennis's wines. I came to Virginia in no small influenced because of Dennis there is no doubt about that. I came to grow Norton, I came to grow Viognier. And, of course you know, Alan Kinne was helping Dennis. Alan, you know, crafted that Viognier, and Dennis had the good sense to engage in.

Fred Reno

Interesting. All right, Jenni I really appreciate your time and these stories. I'm going to stop the recording and then we can catch up from he

LUCA PASCHINA/DENNIS HORTON INTERVIEW

SPEAKERS

Fred Reno, Luca Paschina

Fred Reno

Well, Luca has been kind enough to give me a few minutes of his time and we're gonna talk about Dennis Horton. And so let me start with asking you, I realized that Dennis was getting started in the wine business here in Virginia right about the same time that you came here to Barboursville?

Luca Paschina

Yeah, it is those years you know, there were a few pioneers back then and he was one of them.

Fred Reno

When did you first meet him and where I'm curious.

Luca Paschina

I met him. First time, I cannot recall exactly the location. And then, subsequently, I met him even more times, also, because they opened their crushing facility just across the road from us in Barboursville. And they had their vineyard in Madison County, and then subsequently, they planted more vineyard in Orange County. So, we became neighbors. And as I recall from the very beginning, we stayed connected. The year they did the first crush at their new facility I recall, Dennis coming over to our vineyard saying; Luca I have a problem, you may be able to help me. I have some equipment that came in with European fittings, but I need a fitting to connect a certain size pipe, I believe it was like a four-inch pipe, I have to connect it to a two inch pipe. So I know that I needed something to convert from one size to the other size, but it is European. And I was glad to say hey no problem, I have those fittings. So, I gave the fitting and he went back and they did their first crush in their new cellar.

Fred Reno

Was this '94/95, something like that.

Luca Paschina

It was back then. Yeah, it was a little bit after they plant their vineyards. Yeah, we go way back. We met and also, we stayed very connected in those formative years. For Virginia as a whole. We finally were able to put.

Fred Reno

I didn't mean to cut you off. But I'm curious. What would you say, because you got to know him was his approach to wine growing in the vineyard because I heard he would try almost any varietal, it seemed like.

Luca Paschina

He is definitely remembered as the person that planted more varietals that anybody in Virginia, I would say, probably the East Coast, if not the United States. His Spectrum was going from Italian, to French, to Spanish, Portuguese

varieties, you name it. And then even some varietals from Russian varietals like Rkatsiteli. So, he really was very interested in experimentation. And thanks, you know to his wife, Sharon, she was the one that was implementing all the planting and taking such great care of their vineyard. They were a very effective team and able to not just plant but to execute. So, I really think he was the one that brought the most diversity of varietals for sure. And that's where he planted some Viognier. The 92 Vintage, the first Viognier produced, it was good that inspire myself to plant Viognier as well.

Fred Reno

Oh, that's interesting. That wine just kind of took the country by storm at that time, didn't it?

Luca Paschina

It did. It did for sure. Yeah. In fact, Bruce awkward

Fred Reno

had said to me in my interview that he thought that the DNA from Horton was probably the first if not the only Virginia wine ever on the wine list at French Laundry in Napa. California.

Luca Paschina

Is correct. Yes.

Fred Reno

Wow. That's pretty amazing. I wish I wonder if there's a bottle of that around somewhere.

Luca Paschina

Who knows? The one thing I think there may be a bottle somewhere. I don't think I have any in my cellar. I may have some bathroom of your year from Horton, maybe from the late 90s.

Fred Reno

It'll be kind of interesting. But yeah, well, you know, do you think he understood the impact he made on the Virginia wine industry? What by bringing Norton back here by pioneering Vrbna by just being willing to go out there and try all these different varieties, see what would work. Again, any sense of the impact you would end up?

Luca Paschina

I can guarantee that he did because a lot of people never tasted Viognier, never even planted it or even tasted it in Virginia. And so he really helped to, to bring in excitement and a lot of people would closely follow what he was doing with Sharon. And at the same time that also failed to produce great wines from certain varieties, like in particular some Portuguese varieties that they planted like Tinta Cao and others that he admitted, you know, he would say I wish I could grow with more consistency, make some great wines from some Portuguese varieties, but in some vintages that were very much suffering. So he also helped with his experimentation, to keep other people from planting certain varieties, because he was also very honest in admitting what did well and what didn't, in fact, he said, I probably have removed more vineyard than I have planted. Let's say, right now, I don't know how many acres they have in planting, but let's say they have 100. And he probably planted two or three hundred to get down to 100. So he was plant, try it, it didn't work, pull it out and try again. So, he never stopped.

Fred Reno

How was he viewed within the wine community here in Virginia in general.

Luca Paschina

In general, he was he was viewed very well, some people may have not have liked certain aspects of his personality he was a bit short at times with his opinion and very colorful language, but I always consider him as a very intelligent person. And I rather talk with some people that maybe I have a difference of opinion. But I want people that are intelligent that you can conversate and expand of why you see a different way versus just being very firm and not open for conversation. So, I really liked him for that.

Fred Reno

Well, it must have been interesting to work with him, because one of the things I've heard in these interviews I've been doing is I'm hearing the same story from different vantage points. But everybody says he was pretty direct. He knew where he stood, and what he believed. Absolutely. He left a legacy behind. In fact, I don't think there's enough written about him to be honest with you about his contribution.

Luca Paschina

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Fred Reno

So, if you if I was to ask you, what would you say is your favorite if you have one or two, Dennis Horton stories.

Luca Paschina

Oh Gosh, I don't have one to single out. But the highlight was he was always himself. You knew when he was in the room, the room was gonna be more colorful and more electrified. There was a vibe, there was a vibe around the room when he would come in, especially where we're debating about winery members, about some challenges we had for legislations for many things. He was very, very loud, not meaning by just the sound of his voice, but loud in the content, he had very strong opinions and he would voice them with no sugarcoating. Let's put it that way. And, I liked that, you know, because that was who he was and he wouldn't change his attitude, he would just maintain it, and you know, what you're gonna get from him.

Fred Reno

Was he a joiner? By that I mean, was he involved early on in a lot of the organizations like Virginia Wineries Association?

Luca Paschina

Very much. Yeah, very much. In those years, I was involved with people like Lou Reeder from Burley vineyard and Horton and then you had Archie Smith from

Meredyth vineyards so, it was a much smaller the industry back then. But he was very much present and dedicated a lot of time for the good of all of us.

Fred Reno

I have heard such great things about Sharon from everybody about how she just took the role as the vineyard and absolutely ran with it and self-taught almost, I assume.

Luca Paschina

yeah, she did a lot of a lot of self-taught, and she attended a lot of industry seminars and she really had a really a Green Thumb. She was really tough herself, and still is involved with vineyard operation. She was in the field with the workers almost every day showing and working and doing. And she just loved it. And the two of them were a great couple, they both share this, this tremendous passion for the vine and for the wine. And you know and they were fun to watch.

Fred Reno

Well, that's good to hear. What I'm trying to capture here and you're helping me is this idea of early on in Virginia and how people were collaborative and how people were helping each other and really moving the ball down the field. I mean, Mike Heny said to me that Dennis thought that secrets were stupid. That was his words. And that it just held everybody back. And that's why he was so open and sharing.

Luca Paschina

Absolutely. You're right. That's exactly what he was doing. And I rarely heard him talking about anything else but vineyard.

Fred Reno

Oh wow. That must have been fun. And also, I'm sure he enjoyed drinking wine.

Luca Paschina

Yes, he. It was it was very gregarious as a person.

SPEAKERS

Fred Reno, Lucie Morton

Fred Reno

The well-known Ampelographer Lucie Morton is in my studio this morning to share her thoughts and stories about Dennis Horton. Lucie, Welcome and good morning.

Lucie Morton

Good morning, Fred.

Fred Reno

And of course, folks, we're enjoying a nice glass of White Burgundy a Premier Cru Chablis. It's a beautiful morning beverage. Isn't it?

Lucie Morton

A beautiful morning and delicious wine?

Fred Reno

Well, thank you. Okay, let's get started. So, where I always start is very simple. How did you meet Dennis Horton the first time, and what was your impression of him?

Lucie Morton

Well, let's see. Now, by the time Dennis came on the scene, it was the early 1990s. And I had planted my family's vineyard in 1973 and had been part of the early Virginia industry in the 70s and 80s. By the

1990s, Fred, my career actually was more involved with client in California than Virginia. I did meet Sharon, and Dennis at the VVA meetings and he was a larger-than-life person and a lot of fun. So, I always enjoy talking to him. The thing that I most wanted to keep an eye on what he was doing as he was introducing all these different varieties to Virginia winegrowing. As I remember, he introduced a number of different varieties. He tried out a lot in the beginning, and then hone down on a few. So mostly our conversations were Dennis which grapes that you're trying work, remember he had more Petit Manseng, Norton, Viognier, all kinds of Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay plus a lot I don't even remember. I think for me, my interest whenever I talked to Dennis was, so what grapes are working for you, and why or why not?

Fred Reno

Interesting. His wine growing was really home taught wasn't it. He didn't really have a background in that.

Lucie Morton

He didn't but Sharon did every single thing that Virginia Tech told her to do. Right from the beginning, Sharon and Dennis knew the value of hiring help. They had Alan Kinne make wine. They had consultants, not me, but they had other consultants, to tell them about nutrition and spraying and they very much got behind the viticulture of the 90s in Virginia, which included the Lyre system as I remember. I can't remember if they did Geneva Double Curtain, but they very much bought into better winegrowing through canopy management. In those days. It was Richard Smarts sunlight into wine approach, big vines trellised and trained and Sharon did it beautifully. So that was another thing I was interested in watching how they did it because it wasn't how

I was evolving. For my clients, it was more close spacing, your European VSP, they were going a different direction. But as we all know, in viticulture, there's more than one way to skin a cat. And they did it well. And so, for me, I loved visiting them and just seeing how it was going.

Fred Reno

It was his bringing Viognier back from France, which propelled him because the wine he made in the early 90s, I believe it was his '93 Viognier that took the country by the storm. In fact, Bruce Zoecklein said to me in my interview with him, he believed it was the first and only Virginia wine that was ever on the wine list at the French Laundry in Napa Valley. So that's a pretty big deal for Dennis to come out of the shoot and be able to do that, wasn't it?

Lucie Morton

It was and I'm not sure exactly where he got the plant material. Better not to tell me Fred? Because I don't know either. Yeah, I don't know. But anyway, I remember though, there were tastings where the wines from Dennis, Virginia wines in blind tastings by professionals or in competitions, I can't remember exactly, came out on top. And what that did was put Virginia on the map. People were like, ah, Virginia Viognier. Now, to me, that's a little teeny punctuation mark in what really is our Virginia wine industry. And to me Viognier is a very difficult kind of fickle grape to grow. However, it put us on the map, which is important.

Fred Reno

Well, yeah, exactly. To get people to pay attention. So, I had asked this earlier. Do you think Dennis had any idea what his impact had putting

the Viognier aside for a second, which got all this acclaim, and his planting so many varietals, but for him to bring Norton back to Virginia? Because he just happened to be from Hermann Missouri and happened to have played in the old wine caves of Stone Hill winery. I know you just came back from there during your filming recently. Do you think he had any idea of the impact and what motivated him? Did he realize the impact that would have ultimately in Virginia, bringing Norton back here from Missouri?

Lucie Morton

I think that is probably the coolest thing about Dennis. And what makes him different is he really was curious. He was thoughtful. And so yes, on the one hand, he knew that Virginia needed that in order for Virginia to be known for wine, it had to be vinifera, and particularly an interesting and kind of exotic variety, like Viognier fit that perfectly. But to bring Norton, for him. It was personal, because he was from Hermann, Missouri. He grew up with Norton, he knew it was the number one wine grape there. And more importantly, he knew it was one of two wine grapes that were important that were born in Virginia. The Norton and its sister Cunningham. But that's another story. But for him to bring it to me showed that he wasn't a wine snob, because sorry but a lot of people were po poing the French hybrids, much less a Heritage variety like Norton. And so for him to do that just was very special. And to me, that's what set him apart. He wasn't just about making fine wine. He was about let's make Virginia wine. And he understood probably better than anybody that Norton filled that bill, in an historic and in a generic way.

Fred Reno

That's a good springboard for me to ask this question. So how do you think he was viewed within the Virginia wine industry, in the wine community during the 90s? And through the 2000s, early 2000s?

Lucie Morton

You know, Fred, as I said, my career was mostly in California during those days, because of phylloxera. And I kind of was Mrs. rootstock at that time. And I was going to California a lot and had very few Virginia clients. I did have some and we were starting, so I don't know. But I do know, going wine shopping at the grocery store and seeing those wonderful Horton labels. With the Horton Norton and the botanical drawing, I remember the Mourvèdre. I was like I am not sure that's going to catch on, Viognier Yes. Mourvèdre, maybe not so much. So, I would always buy his wines, taste them, and see where they were going. I always like Dennis Horton personally and Sharon. But I don't know, you know, in a greater industry context, I have to say, I wasn't much in the Virginia industry myself.

Fred Reno

Okay. No, I understand. To me. It was like, when I first moved to Virginia, I'm looking at this label going, what is this? This is not representative of what I would consider to be a label that would get my attention. But then when I interviewed Shannon, his daughter and Sharon and realized that those labels were photographs he had personally taken of the grape varieties, and then had blown them up for the label. Well, then in that context, I understood him,

Lucie Morton

Right. And plus, the historical ones that he did the sort of 19th century lithographs. It was perfect because it captured the history of the Great.

Fred Reno

Did he ever come to you for any advice?

Lucie Morton

We did talk about things, but I think there's only one time that he hired me to come straighten something out in the vineyard. And that came about because Dennis, wasn't he one of the early adopters of Cabernet Franc, Pretty sure Dennis was.

Fred Reno

He claims to have bottled the first varietally labeled Cabernet Franc in Virginia

Lucie Morton

So, to me bottling a Cabernet Franc and the Norton were the kind of triumph of what really was the essence of Dennis's contribution. But anyway, so he was all excited about making Cabernet Franc in Virginia. He recognized that he was a pioneer and he reveled in that. However, his winemaker at the time, Alan Kinne said to him, you know, Dennis, these Cabernet Franc vines, I don't know, there's something wrong with this vineyard. You need to call Lucie Morton. So, he did. I went over and looked at this Cabernet Franc block, looked up and down and said, Dennis. There is some Cabernet Franc in this block. But may I say there's also Cabernet Sauvignon and Zinfandel. And he didn't miss a beat. He goes, Lucy, I've been Californiacated. By a nursery, I guess I don't need to mention given Dennis's reaction. But that really summed it up. Dennis was not shy about giving his opinion, in a pretty down to earth graphic way.

Fred Reno

Was he a joiner at all? And by that, I mean, like the early days of the Virginia Wineries Association, the early days of the Virginia Vineyard Association, was he involved in those organizations? Do you know?

Lucie Morton

I don't know. Because by that time, I wasn't either. Right. Okay. I was in the early days very much involved with the founding of the Virginia Vineyards Association. I did all that stuff early, but I myself wasn't so I'm not sure.

Fred Reno

Understood. I'm just always curious if somebody who's a maverick like that, and someone who's out in front and willing to be out in front as he was, I might get this quote wrong. But he was quoting, I believe, saying that he had ripped out more vines and other different varieties than other people had even planted in Virginia,

Lucie Morton

Which is wonderful, which is what I loved about him. That's what you have to do. If you're a pioneer. You have to try it. But as they say, in poker, you have to know when to hold them and when fold them. And one of his great strengths was he understood that he was in it for the business, too. He wasn't a research station. He needed to be because we needed to learn but great Friday is gonna work here. But he also knew if it didn't work for him there and for his business goodbye. Well, he was a businessman too and that what was a great strength of his.

Fred Reno

Totally businessman was part of that what overall he was trying to do.

Lucie Morton

Right, and we all benefited.

Fred Reno

So, give me a good Dennis Horton story.

Lucie Morton

Well, the only one I have is about when I went and told him that his grapes were wrong. He had a MIS identification, the nursery had given him the wrong plants. Dennis and I always met kind of in a professional setting. So, the way you get good stories is when you're at a wine conference together and a couple of bottles later, you get good stories, but I don't have any for that.

Fred Reno

Well, obviously you didn't know him as well. But this question, I'm curious. We're having a nice glass of Chablis this morning; how do you think he would react to a good glass of Chablis?

Lucie Morton

He'd love it. He was a wine connoisseur. Dennis loved good wine. And I'm really sorry that well, I'm sorry that he wasn't there physically. But I think both Sharon and I would say he was with us spiritually. When this summer or last summer of 2022, Sharon and I were looking at the Cynthiana grapes that she had planted next to the Norton grapes which Dennis had planted that he had gotten from Hermann, Missouri. And I was able to tell the difference between the two. They are different. And thanks to Sharon, in the spirit of what Dennis would have done. experimenting, trying something new seeing well is the

Cynthiana different from the Norton. She suspected that it might be I was certain it was. And because she did that, I was able right there in Dennis's vineyard to confirm that there are different varieties. So, I think he'd be all over that. And I think he'd be saying, okay, Sharon, Shannon, Caitlin, you better now make a Cynthiana wine and a Norton wine. But this is early days, I'm not sure how much of his Norton is Norton or if it's a blend because those two grape varieties had been mixed up for 100 years.

Fred Reno

Well, the imagery in my mind of what you just described, even makes me more lament that I never met him because that's my kind of guy. Like, Okay, let's try this. Let's try that. Let's identify. Let's keep them separate and understand what we have here. You know, instead of just throwing it all in one big bag or box.

Lucie Morton

Right. He was just wonderful that way.

Fred Reno

He would have been a great interview.

Lucie Morton

You bet, Fred. We're all trying to channel the inner Dennis for your interviews, but nothing would have compared to having him do it.

Fred Reno

Yeah, I bet that is case. Well, Lucy, I want to thank you for this time you have given me. This is a perfect segment to meld in what everybody's done so far. So, thank you.

Lucie Morton

Thank you, Fred.