EPISODE # 3 ALL ABOUT NORTON/FIFTY-THIRD WINERY & VINEYARD

**SPEAKERS**

**Fred Reno, Chelsey Blevins, Dave Drillock**

**Fred Reno**

I have Chelsey Blevins here in my studio. Chelsey say Hi.

**Chelsey Blevins**

Hi. Thanks for having us here today, Fred.

**Fred Reno**

And Dave Drillock, the owner of Fifty-Third Winery & Vineyard.

**Dave Drillock**

Happy to be here, Fred. Thank you.

**Fred Reno**

So, as I like to do, I always start at the top. Dave, if I understand this correctly. In 2015 you purchased what was the Cooper vineyard? Is that accurate? That is correct. Was there Norton planted in the vineyard at the time you bought it?

**Dave Drillock**

They did. They had several Norton plantings, sort of interspersed, five rows here, two rows and another block and one or two others. And there were some of the original plantings when I started in 1999.

**Fred Reno**

Chelsey, you came on board at 53rd. What vintage was it?

**Chelsey Blevins**

It was 2015. I started in August that year, right before harvest.

**Fred Reno**

And you two met at PVCC at some enology classes and viticultural classes. Correct?

**Chelsey Blevins**

We were taking some classes, and I was trying to further some of my knowledge. I happened to sit next to Dave one day and he kind of saw me taking a bunch of notes. He was curious about what I was writing down and started picking my brain about winemaking. And we got to talking and then kind of at the end of our discussion, he was like, I'm looking for an assistant winemaker, would you like to apply for the position? I was, Yes, please. I was very fortunate to meet David in those classes.

**Dave Drillock**

I was very fortunate. But what I noticed first about Chelsey was I noticed the wine notetaking while everybody else is drinking wine and laughing and joking. She's serious, taking notes. And I said, here's a person who has a lot of passion. And if you're going to be a winemaker, or work in that area of the business, you need to have a lot of passion because It's hard work, and its dedication.

**Fred Reno**  Dave, had you ever had a bottle of Norton before you bought Cooper Vineyard and started producing wine? Had you ever had a bottle of Norton yourself?

**Dave Drillock**

Actually, I did but when we lived in New Jersey, we came down here for our nurses’ conference at Central Virginia. And I don't remember the one where I went to, but I tried Norton because they said oh, I'm going to try this wine and it was a delicious wine. And two years later, we came back for the same Conference. I tried it again; I go what happened? I had this great first experience with Norton and the second one was, I thought this wine could have been in a bottle a long time more.

**Fred Reno**

What was the first bottle? Do you remember the producer?

**Dave Drillock**

I can’t remember the producer. It was from central Virginia somewhere. I can't recall who it was. Even my wife and I were picking our brains the other night trying to figure out who that first producer was. But it was a very good wine. To this day. I still remembered how good that wine was.

**Fred Reno**

Chelsey, had you ever had a bottle of Norton before you got involved in producing it?

**Chelsey Blevins**

No know I had been in college before. So, I was really only drinking Boxed Wine and Moscato at the time and then in 2014, I actually started my wine career at Horton vineyards. And that's when I got introduced to Norton.

**Fred Reno**

Oh, well, that's a hell of a place to get introduced to Norton. Right?

**Chelsey Blevins**

We brought in a lot of Norton that year. So, I got very familiar with it very quickly with that first harvest. Oh, okay. My

**Fred Reno**

Michael Heny was the winemaker there.

**Chelsey Blevins**

Yeah, he was the winemaker at the time. And I did actually get to meet Dennis Horton and Sharon and Shannon. So, I got to meet the whole family, which was really cool.

**Fred Reno**

Did they share any stories about how Dennis brought Norton back from Missouri?

**Chelsey Blevins**

Oh, yeah, I definitely got that story a bunch of times. So, it was cool to be able to work with some of the people that were the first to produce it here in Virginia, you know, after Prohibition time.

**Fred Reno**

Dave, you told me a story when we first met about the 2015 Vintage Norton that you inherited, I'd love you to share this with the audience how this wine came to be.

**Dave Drillock**

So, the 2015 Vintage. That was the first harvest, I would have only been here a couple of months. I don't know much about it. And it actually was a pretty good harvest that first one. Yeah. And the wine was quite good. And so, we let it age. And then if I'm remembering correctly, that 2015 vintage, I think that's one wherever it sat in the barrels for a while. Yeah. And we kind of bottled the 14 first, we only bottled half the ‘14 vintage. And we really forgot about the other half of the ‘14 vintage. That was left in oak for almost 40 months. But that ‘15 went for two years in oak. And when we bottled it, Graham had come to me to say this is what the Norton is going to be. And I thought this is this is actually a pretty good Norton wine; I think this be pretty good. He says, Well, we also have this ‘14 I kind of forgot about it. And he was apologizing for it, and I looked at it and said this may be one of the best Norton’s I've ever had. It was smooth. It had a lot more fruit flavor, not necessarily the cinnamon or clove or the other descriptors they use for Norton, but I thought it was a delicious wine. So, when we put the ‘15 came out it sold very quickly, and when the ‘14 came out, that and the ’15 Norton were the first ones under the 53rd Label.

**Fred Reno**

So that's where you get the idea to give you an order extended barrel age.

**Dave Drillock** Yeah, it was so good.

**Chelsey Blevins**

Yeah, we kind of found that doing the extended aging on the Norton really smoothed out the acidity and the tannins in it, it brought a lot more complex flavor. It wasn't quite as abrasive as kind of what we were used to. And it really had mellowed out and found itself. I was convinced at that point in time that, hey, we really need to do our due diligence here and hold on to our Nortons and the cellar as long as possible before we start bottling and releasing them.

**Fred Reno**

I'm curious, so Chelsey, what's it like working with Norton? In the cellar, compared to let's just say Chambourcin or even Petit Verdot, or anything like that?

**Chelsey Blevins**

Norton is its own beast, when it comes into the cellar, it's like these really small dense clusters, there's really not a lot of juice that comes out of them. When you first destem the grapes, like you really have to crush them a lot, to get a lot of juice to come out the first couple of days, you're like, where's the wine at, what am I going to actually ferment here? You have to be patient with Norton. And you have to really, have to do your due diligence to break down that cap to really start breaking down those berries and get a lot of juice to come out so that the fermentation can take off. And then once you get the fermentation going, you really need to make sure you're doing your punch downs at least twice a day, if not more, just submerging that cap and breaking it down, which can be quite a pain because I can literally take my whole body weight and stand on top of that cap, sometimes you really got to put a lot behind it to really get that going. It can be pretty, pretty difficult at the beginning.

**Fred Reno**

I understand these Norton grape clusters are real seed pockets.

**Chelsey Blevins**

Oh yeah, I mean, you can get four or five seeds per grape. It's crazy.

**Fred Reno**

Just for reference folks. It's generally one, maybe two seeds in a grape.

**Chelsey Blevins**

Yeah, it is really not a lot of pulp in the berries. There's a lot of seeds, there's not a whole lot of juice, but there's a lot of flavors that can come out of that skin and then in the pulp that is there. So, there's a lot of flavor there. But there's not a lot to break down at first. Once you get that fermentation going. It does get easier to work with over time. But it can be very, very tannic, it can be very acidic. You have to be careful with the winemaking and to try to keep every aspect of that wine in balance.

**Fred Reno**

So, Dave, in the tasting room when your customers come in, and they ask you about Norton, how do you describe Norton to your consumers? If they've never had Norton before?

**Dave Drillock**

Well, if they've never had it, I tell them that it's a full body, you're going to feel it's a richer wine. If you have it when it's young, it could be a little more acidity. But that, you know, it's a very ageable wine also, which people seem to gravitate to. And the style that we're doing seems to bring forth more of the fruit flavors. And people try it and say, this is Norton. They say I've heard other things about it. And so, if it's brand new to them, and they try it, we've had a very good reaction. If it's somebody who's had Norton before, a sort of rougher Norton, They'll try ours. Because the tasting room sells them and says just try it and they go, Wow, this is actually good they didn't think Norton tastes like this. So, we're slowly but surely getting more Norton converts. And it shows when we put out the release of Norton. Now there's people they'll call for other grapes, but now they are calling for Norton asking when you're going to release the next Norton.

**Fred Reno**

I think part of that, too, is obviously 53rd makes very, very good Norton. But on top of that, there's not a lot of producers of Norton here in the state of Virginia, compared to those producing Cabernet Franc or Petit Verdot. Let’s just say there are limited opportunities for the consumer to really have a chance to taste a range of Nortons, isn’t there?

**Chelsey Blevins**

I've kind of found that, you know, there's a lot of winemakers that don't want to work with Norton because it's very difficult on the winemaking end of things and then also in the vineyard. It's not as difficult to grow, but you need to plant a lot of it in order for it to be worth your time. You really need to put in a lot of acreage to produce Norton because usually I only get like 130 gallons per ton. That's a very, very low amount, you know, that you can actually get from it. We're very fortunate to work with, you know, Chrysalis where they have one of the largest plantings on the East Coast, they can actually produce a lot of Norton we can buy from them and make it worth our time.

**Fred Reno**

But you are replanting Norton, you're planting some more Norton in your vineyard. Right, Dave?

**Dave Drillock**

We're planning to set aside an acre and a half, two acres for Norton and that'll be done in the next two, three years, planting Norton there. I talked to Lucie Morton about Norton and Lucie mentioned that if you're going to plant that, she said there’s a vineyard that you want to go visit because they seem to get better yields under Norton. And the trick was he put dolomite lime, not any lime, but dolomite lime. She emphasized don't put any lime unless it's dolomite lime. And you put that down in the late fall and that will help in harvest. So whatever chemistry is going on in a root system in the ground, the lime seems to be the only thing that person is doing different that gives him a much higher yield.

**Fred Reno**

And what winery was that she was referring to?

**Dave Drillock**

She didn’t tell me the winery. It was a grower. But it was down in sort of southwest Virginia.

**Fred Reno**

That’s interesting, I hadn't heard that before.

**Dave Drillock**

Yeah, she made a point to tell me that, so I said, Okay, so when we do plant our Norton, it's going to get dolomite lime.

**Fred Reno**

That makes a lot of sense. And then your trellis system is probably a traditional VSP?

**Dave Drillock**

That’s correct. I would probably stick with VSP for Norton.

**Chelsey Blevins**

Yeah, we did have Norton planted on GDC, the Geneva double curtain when it was previously planted by the previous owners. And we found there's a lot of issues with just you know with diseases kind of being trapped within that canopy. You can get a lot of issues with the berries just breaking open and rotting before even pulling them in. There were also a lot of issues with bees with that trellis system too. So, you might get more tonnage off of the GDC. But at the same time, it created a lot more problems in winemaking. And once we actually pulled in the grapes, so I think VSP is the way to go with Norton.

**Fred Reno**

That's interesting. Yeah, it sounds like Norton is also supposed to be close to bulletproof in a vineyard, you don't have to do a lot of spraying maintenance.

**Chelsey Blevins**

It doesn't require as much as vinifera, but you do have to take care of it, or else it will fall apart. It does have some resistance to different diseases that we have here in Virginia. It also buds late, so it avoids frost for us. But I would say you have got to take care of your grapes here in Virginia, because this is not an easy climate to grow growing grapes in.

**Fred Reno**

Well, yeah. And I think some of the issues with Norton in the past growers were thinking, well, I'll take the worst part of my vineyard and put it in because it's going survive, right?

**Chelsey Blevins**

And that's where I think Nortons kind of have gotten a bad rap is, you know, people have been planting it in not ideal locations, and they are not necessarily giving it the TLC it needs in the vineyard. They're like, Oh, it's a hybrid, it can handle this. But really, I think if you give it a little extra love and attention out in the vineyard, and in the winery, you're going to make a better wine out of it.

**Dave Drillock**

Also, it mentions it ripens later. Chelsey mentioned that. And by that time, you know, you get into October, people are tired, and you have got to resist that temptation. Just go out there and harvest it. Yeah, bring it in. And you got to say, if I have time to let that sit, we're only helping the grapes get better. So, you have to be patient with it. Then in September's when you got to pull your inner strength and say, I'm going to work this for the next couple of weeks. But that's the right thing to do.

**Fred Reno**

Well, Dave, what is the overall size of your vineyard that you have at Cooper, because I know you have another vineyard, the vineyard here in Louisa, what's the size of that vineyard?

**Dave Drillock**

Right now, we have 12,000 vines planted, I'll go by that versus acreage. Okay, spacing could be all different. And when we're done, we'll have about 21,000 vines planted. You can see there's more to go. So, this was a site, they originally said was 21 acres planted, but the spacing was 10 by 4, 10. By five spacing including the Norton was really spread out far. So, you weren't getting the density that you could get on that. One of the reasons I was pulling out a lot of the vines was just because that can increase the amount of tonnage per acre by allowing you to plant more, you're talking about, you know, if possibly another 500 to 700 volumes per acre, so it’s starts to stack up.

**Fred Reno**

Well, that, you know, can add up to an awful lot. Especially because the agricultural costs and farming costs in Virginia are so much higher than other wine growing regions on the West Coast,

**Dave Drillock**

Yeah, Louisa, is the place where Norton will be. And we already have Chambourcin as you know, and Chardonel and Vidal Blanc. And they're all doing well there. But they do require work there and a little less spray. But if you have a real wet season, it needs to be sprayed, they're going to get downy and all the diseases that come with it, they're a little more resistant, they bounce back a little better, but you still got to give them the care and attention if you want to make high quality wine.

**Fred Reno**

I think the thing that surprised me as I got more into Norton is to learn that it's not prolific, it doesn't give you a lot of tonnage does it.

**Chelsey Blevins**

Like I was saying earlier, the clusters that it does produce they are so small, they're like, literally you take your fist and your ball it up there, they're tiny, especially compared to a cluster like you know, Tannat or Chambourcin and those are some huge meaty clusters that you can get, like 180 gallons per ton. Norton, it's a pretty tiny cluster that really doesn't yield a whole lot.

**Fred Reno**

We'll do the math for the audience here. 130 gallons equates to eventually how many finished case goods?

**Chelsey Blevins**

It's a little more than 50 cases, so about 60 cases. So that's not a lot.

**Fred Reno**

Yeah, that's not a lot at all.

**Chelsey Blevins**

I mean, even if you're really crushing those grapes open and breaking them open, you're not going to get the yield you want off of that.

**Dave Drillock**

That's why when we plant Norton, we will use dolomite lime. I'm definitely going to do that to see if we can make get better yield, but I think would be a good experiment to see if we can really grow there. They did grow Norton at that site in the beginning. But over time, they didn't take care of them as well. And they lost interest in all of it. So, I thought the spacing was wrong and the trellising system was just falling apart and problematic. So, we over time re-planted two thirds of that.

**Fred Reno**

Again, there's so few real producers, let alone growers of Norton in Virginia. It almost is like you're a lone wolf out in the wilderness to some degree.

**Dave Drillock**

That's true. I think Norton just gets a bad rap. And people who only like vinifera don't want to hear about Norton or Chambourcin, these other wines are very good. But they don't want to hear about it. They don’t want to taste it they don’t even want to look at it. And, you know, the fact is, that also means, not everybody realizes you have to put the time into those grapes just like you do the rest, right?   
They won’t come out with really high quality on half effort. You have got to put everything into it. Otherwise, it does just doesn't work. And I don't mean just the vineyard in the winemaking also.

**Fred Reno**

Also, if people ever have an opportunity to enjoy and try a 10-year-old Norton, there'll be stunned and surprised how this wine has evolved. And what it's turned into. Do you still have any of that ‘15 left in your in your cellar?

**Dave Drillock**

No, not even my personal cellar. We actually opened it up to customers in 2019. We had a flight if 3 wines 15, 16, &17. And then before that, we did a 14 15 &16. And they sold out in three weeks.

**Fred Reno**

There's my point. Norton, with good bottle age on it.,

**Chelsey Blevins**

Oh yeah, I really think that's the way to go with Norton, you know, just agent as long as possible. I mean, even in the vineyard, I tell the guys I'm like, just let that hang as long as possible. And the longer you let it hang, the more malic acid you're going to respire out of it. You can kind of tame some of that natural wild acidity. I'm like guys just let this grape hang in there. There like Chelsea, we got to pull it in now. I'm like, nope, give it another couple of days. And then even in the cellar. I'm like let's hold on to this as long as possible if I can age it another year.

**Fred Reno**

What was the inspiration Chelsey behind the wine you made called Arrowhead, which the first time I had, I believe it is 80% Chambourcin and 20% Norton. It is probably flat out the most delicious bottle of red wine I'd had in Virginia up to that point. I mean, the wine is just flat out delicious. I'm assuming you're continuing to produce that.

**Chelsey Blevins**

Yeah, that's become a favorite in our tasting room. I was kind of playing around with different barrels we had in the cellar, and I had, I think it was four barrels that I just was not sure what we were going to do with I wasn't happy putting them in the single varietal blends. And then I was just like, You know what, I'm going to put this blend together. I kind of had in my head, you know, Chambourcin/Norton, I think they would work together. But until I tried it, I wasn't convinced. And then as soon as I tasted it, I was, Oh, this is something special. So, I went to Dave and said, I don't know how you're going to feel about this one. But just try it. And let me know what you think. And how we came to the name Arrowhead was the previous owners had collected a lot of arrowheads on the property. It was to kind of pay homage to the old ownership in the history of the land. And, you know, all the arrowheads that they found on the property, I thought it was cool idea. So, we, me, and the former vineyard manager kind of pitched it to Dave. And it was like, hey, what do you think about this? And he was, Oh, this is great.

**Dave Drillock**

Yeah, in fact, when she first brought me that blend, when she talked about it, I say, you know, the only problem with it is that we're going to have to do it every year now.

**Fred Reno**

Well, you know, when I told Todd Kliman about that wine when I was speaking to him a few years ago, he said, Hey, Fred, those two grapes are made to go together.

**Chelsey Blevins** They really are, it's surprising, you know, Chambourcin, it can't really hold any tannins in it. It's got a great color, it's got great fruit, great body, but it doesn't have a lot of structure or depth to it. And Norton really kind of filled in those holes in the Chambourcin that I kind of find, like the Norton added a lot more complexity, it added more richness, more structure, more age ability to this wine that, you know, on its own it really, it wasn't enough for me. So, I felt the two married together very, very well.

**Fred Reno**

Well, BRAVO Chelsey make more of it.

**Dave Drillock**

Just for the point earlier that you made, so you've tasted the 2021 Norton, which won the Norton Cup Challenge and it also, even in the Atlantic Seaboard Wine Association competition it got best of class and gold medal. But we haven’t released the 2020 yet. 2020 was a very difficult growing season.

**Chelsey Blevins**

Yeah, so we were able to actually get some grapes out of 2020, which was a win in itself. There were three really terrible frost events that occurred here in Virginia. That wiped out about 90% of our crop that year. It was pretty terrible on top of all the other woes of the world that were going on at the time, but we did get in this Norton And when we pulled it in, it came in at a pH of 3, which is something unheard of, for me, especially as a red wine. So just for reference Norton's typically come in at a pH of about 3.5 to 3.8, kind of depending on the growing season, and this one was right at 3, so very, very acidic. And I was like, oh, no, what are we going to do with this, I really didn't want to take any invasive measures into my own hands. You can choose to de-acidify wine if you want. But I was like, You know what, I've seen kind of how Norton has behaved, I'm going to just put this in a barrel. We're going to forget about it for a while, and we're going to let it try to figure itself out. We tasted it, I think about six months ago. And we were actually really pleasantly surprised. I'm like, Okay, this is actually going in the right direction now. So now we're going to plan on bottling that I believe in March this year and finally release that one. But we did go ahead and put out the clean one because we felt like that one was more ready than the 2020 was at the time.

**Fred Reno**

That’s something to look forward to. The 2020 that's been in the barrel for that long. What's your barrel regiment? I mean, as far as new or neutral oak, what's your mix,

**Chelsey Blevins**

I inherited a lot of neutral American oak when I took over the winemaking position, and I've slowly been adding more new French oak into our program. Even for our Norton I tried to add two new French oak barrels into that program every single year. That's something we never did before. Norton was always American oak no matter what when I first got to Cooper vineyards. And then I was like, You know what I want to see what Norton can do in French oak, I want to try to take the finesse up a level and see if you know maybe French oak is the way for this wine. And I've been very happy with aging, our Norton in French Oak. So, I'm giving it as many French oak barrels as I can now, changing it. I think in 2019, I only have like two barrels of new French oak and I've slowly been trying to increase that every single year, Norton can handle that. And it can and I thought the Norton was going to overpower the oak in it. And I think they've really found a nice balance. I'm still using those neutral American oak barrels, in about 50% of the blend at this point in time. But I've actually, I'm happiest with the barrels that are in the new French Oak, to be honest with you.

**Fred Reno** Okay, so Dave, what did you think the day when I let you know that you're 2021 Norton took the 2023 Homestead Norton Cup Challenge and came out the winner on top that day.

**Dave Drillock**

I thought our ‘21 was very good. And I really do like it. And we did a food paring, and we can talk about that a bit. But I was very excited about that. I know you had a lot a of good competition. And we came in on top. That was really a great thing. That was exciting for Chelsey because she puts her heart into Norton, like she does every other wine. But it was just good to get that recognition that all the effort that goes into it that we had been putting into Norton has paid off.

**Fred Reno**

And were those 100% grapes from Chrysalis?

**Chelsey Blevins**

Yeah, it is 100% Norton from Chrysalis.

**Fred Reno**

Do you get the same sort of lot when you buy grapes from Chrysalis every year? Or is it what you have?

**Chelsey Blevins**

It's kind of just whatever they have available at the time, to be honest, I give them parameters of what I'm looking for, you know, sugar level wise, acidity wise, I'm like, this is ideally what I would like, let's get as close to it as possible, and they do a great job communicating with me letting me know where things are at week by week, and then they'll kind of be like, Hey, we're going to start picking our Norton on this day. Do you want to start picking your Norton yet? And then I'll kind of tell them yes or no, I typically like to push it off a little bit longer than they do. Just like I was telling you earlier, I just want to respire out as much of that malic acid as I can on the vine naturally, before bringing it into the cellar.

**Fred Reno**

Have you experimented with producing at least maybe in some smaller lots, Norton in a little different fashion than you do normally, or all of your Nortons produced the same, and then that's it.

**Chelsey Blevins**

I actually did an experiment with the Winemakers Research Exchange this year, specifically on Norton. I was looking mainly at different yeast strains. I have two different yeast strains that I always go to for Norton year to year, I do experiments on it every year to see what I like. And there's two that I'm like, these are my go-to. And then I also try to find, like at least two others every year to see you know, would this work in our program or not? I tried to build complexity through different yeast strains. And I actually picked one that would respire out more of the malic acid before you go into malolactic fermentation, we found it really didn't do as much as we thought it was going to this year, which was kind of interesting. So, I mean, for me, that was a fun experiment, just to try out the different strains on a lot and just see, you know, do I like this? Do I not like this? Is it going in the right direction? For me, that's something I'm always playing around with in the cellar.

**Fred Reno**

Well, it's exciting for me to hear that the Winemakers Research Exchange is going to do experiments with Norton.

**Chelsey Blevins**

I know at first, I was like, oh, no, they're going to hate me. This is great, though. But that's great that I've been like, you know, I personally I want to do the best I can with it every year. I want to keep trying to push the limits to how we can make this a more enjoyable wine for everyone. I want to get it out of the realm of I either love it or hate it. I want people to come in and embrace it. So, every year I try to do a little bit more to improve that program.

**Fred Reno**

I'd like to believe that Joy Ting, the coordinator, and Director of the Virginia Winemakers Research Exchange exposure to Norton as a judge at the Norton Cup Challenge opened her mind to taking a look at it.

**Chelsey Blevins**

Yeah, so she actually helped me out in the 2021 harvest as well. I had pulled my hamstring off my pelvis in a waterskiing accident right before harvest. I don't recommend doing that. So, I had surgery about a week or so before we actually started doing harvest. She jumped in and helped us out a lot and kind of helped fill in some of the gaps where I physically just wasn't able to, you know, process so she got to do some Norton foot stomps for her it was like a first-time thing. It was cool to see her face at first. She was like, not about the Norton. But I think over time, it's kind of slowly won her over, which has been kind of exciting to see.

**Fred Reno**

Well, it's interesting. You bring it up, because she had no idea as a judge in Othe Norton Cup Challenge that wine was in there. And she had no idea that was the wine when it came out on top. And she had been involved in producing that wine.

**Chelsey Blevins** Yes, I think for her, though, that was really cool. That's a great eye opener, isn't it part of that?

**Fred Reno** Well, I'm hoping that the Norton Cup Challenge at the Homestead is going to continue to help promote and get people interested in what Norton can produce. Because it's such a multi-dimensional grape, there's so many ways you can produce it. There's quite a bit about it. And my challenge to the Virginia wine industry, and I've talked to everybody is, can somebody please put a small amount up in Magnums? How about a big bottle of Norton and let go down to the cellar and see what that turns into? If you think about it, because we all know that the larger the vessel that a wine is aged in the more interesting it ends up becoming over time. Changing gears for a second. What do you think about this Chablis Vaillons we're enjoying here?

**Chelsey Blevins**

Oh, this is beautiful. I mean, right off the bat, the bouquet is what's jumping out to me out of the glass. I'm getting a lot of like the yellow pears. I'm getting a little bit of peach notes. And then as soon as you take that first sip, it's just I'm getting like lots of bright lime notes that are coming out of the glass. I'm getting beautiful. minerality but then there's like this beautiful lushness in the wine too that I love. I'm loving the texture on this line.

**Fred Reno**

Dave, what are you thinking?

**Dave Drillock**

Well Fred, when I first taste it, I say what am I going to have for dinner with this? Pork Loin and I might have to have this with that. I think it would be really good with a grilled Pork Loin and some roast potatoes.

**Chelsey Blevins**

I am coming to your house for dinner.

**Fred Reno** Well, Chablis is probably still if that's possible to say a bargain when it comes to Burgundy. I mean, it just is a bargain. And I hope it stays that way. Listen, this has been delightful. I want to thank you. I'm going to close on that note, but David has been kind enough to bring some Norton from Stone Hill here. And another one from his winery that we're going to taste. What vintage is that of your Norton?

**Dave Drillock**

We brought our ’18 vintage which was the first one that Chelsey bottled when she was head winemaker.

**Fred Reno**

Oh, is that right?

**Dave Drillock**

Yeah. She put the barrels together. I thought it'd be interesting to try the very first one that she did on our own. And Stone Hill from Stone Hill, Missouri. We've got their 2017 Norton, not Cynthiana and it was recommended to me and given to me by Lucie Morton. So, I thought we would have to get that shot.

**Fred Reno**

Well, I'm going to pause Alright, folks, we're back and we just open the 2018 53 winery and vineyard Norton, Chelsey’s first vintage, that Dave was so kind to bring here, and I can tell you the first aromas are classic Norton, just Bramble and wild. Chelsey What do you think?

**Chelsey Blevins**

Yeah, I'm getting a lot of like cherry tobacco notes kind of jumping out of the glass to me. First off, I'm getting quite a bit of oak on it. This was done. I remember all in American oak. This was before I started introducing the French Oak into our program. So that's what I'm predominantly tasting right now. But like you said, I get a lot of like brambles, I'm getting a lot of black cherry on that as well. So, it definitely needs some air. We have to let it open up a little bit. But I think it's really starting to get to a point where you know, you would start opening up the ’18 vintage.

**Fred Reno**

Damn, that's good. That's really good.

**Dave Drillock**

Considering that was the season of the biblical floods, the rains that we had. And I mean, at one point, at our vineyard where we live on the border of Albemarle County and Greene County, We had 18 inches of rain in that 24-hour period.

**Chelsey Blevins**

Yeah, it was insane. We were literally just picking grapes in between rain showers and just trying not to pick anything that was rotten.

**Fred Reno**

Oh my god, that's amazing.

**Chelsey Blevins**

It was a difficult year for making wine. So, to get this from that, the amount of concentration that I'm getting from the glass, I'm pretty proud that we were able to pull this off to be honest with you, because usually, I remember that the ’18 vintage were very, very light and color. They were really light in flavor. I remember I didn't want to extract anything for too long because I was worried about picking up a lot of herbaceous and green flavors on top of just like you know, a lot of extra watery flavors too with all the rain. So, to have a wine this flavorful I mean this far out. I'm pretty excited.

**Fred Reno**

Oh my god, I'm stunned how good this wine is. Yeah, I really am. It's everything I would want from a Norton. We were talking a little off audio a minute ago about foods. That lamb shank you were talking about Dave's I think would be pretty good with this wine.

**Dave Drillock**

Perfect with this because has just the right acidity, to cut through that richness of a lamp shank. And this would be perfect for pairing for something like that.

**Fred Reno**

Chelsey, Bravo. This one is. I mean, it's delicious. Thank you. It's so expressive of what Norton can be, exactly. The purity of your wine. is remarkable to me. All the Norton's I've had from you. There's a purity to the Norton grape that seems to really sing through. And it really shows in this wine, just five years, right? Despite years old, you know, in a disastrous vintage for red wine in Virginia. Right. A lot of people never even

**Dave Drillock**

A lot of people never even produced red wine.

**Chelsey Blevins**

Yeah, a lot of people only made Rose that year.

**Fred Reno**

Okay, have you ever made a Rose out of Norton?

**Chelsey Blevins**

I attempted to make one. I attempted to make a Norton Rose in 2015, that was not the year to do it. 2018 would have been a more ideal year to do it. On the issue of Norton is it's such a dark and Inky, just black grape. Like when you press that juice, it is just so dark from the get-go. So, it's very difficult to make a Rose out of it, you'd have to pick it very, very early. And for me, I have a little hesitation doing that because I just feel like you're going to pick up way too much herbaceous flavors. And for me, that's something I like to avoid as much as possible in our cellar. And it's something I would like to intend on at some point in my winemaking career though, just because I think that would be a formidable challenge to my winemaking skills.

**Fred Reno**

Well folks, go buy some 53rd Winery and Vineyard Norton. You will not be disappointed and throw in a bottle if you can find a bottle of Arrowhead as well because that will stun you how delicious that wine is.

**Chelsey Blevins**

Thank you. That's our Chambourcin Norton blend that we came up with a few years ago.

**Fred Reno**

Chelsey and Dave, I want to thank you again for sitting for this interview. (pause) Damn this wine is good. This one's good folks. Go buy it.

**Dave Drillock & Chelsey Blevins**

Thank you, Fred. Thank you for having us.