

EPISODE #7 JASON MURRAY/ARTERRA WINES

SPEAKERS

Jason Murray, Fred Reno

Fred Reno

Jason say Hi to my group.

Jason Murray

Hey, Fred, thanks so much for having me here today. I'm really excited for the opportunity to participate in this ongoing dialogue as Norton evolves here in Virginia.

Fred Reno

Before we get into Norton Jason, let me ask you a couple basic questions for my audience. How long have you been wine growing?

Jason Murray

I have been growing grapes in Fauquier County and making wine for 19 vintages,

Fred Reno

And you were in Maryland before?

Jason Murray

I grew up in Maryland, went to University of Maryland for a bachelor's and master's degree and then started working in Loudoun County up in Northern Virginia as a commercial horticulturist, right after school, and that led right into the wine industry.

Fred Reno

What was the first time you had a bottle of Norton yourself?

Jason Murray

I'd be right back to having started in Loudoun County as the horticulturist, I would guess this was 2001 that I first encountered it at the latest would have been 2002. And it would have been the

wonderful world of the excitement of Jenni McLeod at Chrysalis Vineyard.

Fred Reno

Of course, in those days, it was absolutely the place to try it. Right. So, what did you think the first time you had a bottle of Norton?

Jason Murray

It really fascinated me and I guess I came to it from a little bit different mindset than other people, because I was interested in learning at that time, what was working in the area and what wasn't. And it was pretty clear that Norton was one grape that made sense and worked with a whole slew of justifications behind that. And so, I was wide open minded as to the potential of it and just saw that it is an incredible grape if the people managed it properly.

Fred Reno

Okay, you have brought three interesting wines here today, this first one we have in our glass talk about this wine a little bit.

Jason Murray

The first one that I have here is 2020. Norton. This is the first Norton that I personally have ever produced. It is from a small partner block about a half hour away from the winery, I work with a grower, an owner named Mike Macey. We're a team effort there to grow it as well as we possibly can, to really see what the potential of Norton is. I came to this with a little bit of a unique perspective, because the reputation of Norton had always been that there was a strong acid and kind of this like, strong, interesting flavor characteristic. And there's always been talk about how to deal with this, I had a little bit of experience with a couple vintages prior with Petit Verdot, of producing wines in amphora,

with skin contact of somewhat extended or a lot extended. I tried that because I found that that has a tendency to soften wines, especially your perception of the acidity, this was my mindset going in, so this is a wine that was about three weeks in the amphora. And then it was pressed and moved to a neutral barrel, simply because in that first vintage, we didn't have quite enough grapes and or wine to be able to top up the amphora and eliminate the headspace. But we come out with I think, a beautiful classic Norton, meaning we have just a hint of the character of the clay vessel coming through. But otherwise really pleasant Norton flavor and character to it. Really nice balance.

Fred Reno

Let me interrupt here for a second. So that's interesting, because when I first met you well over a year plus ago and got you to enter the Norton Cup Challenge at the Homestead I oversee, and when I first had this wine, I thought it was just beautiful, was elegant and graceful for a young Norton. And here I am tasting it a year later, and this wine tastes just as beautiful structurally, as that wine did over a year ago. It doesn't seem to have shown a lot of bottle development, but certainly enough to where it's slightly more elegant than it might have been a year ago.

Jason Murray

Thank you. I really appreciate those comments. The feedback that I have in terms of a takeaway, with hindsight as a 20/20 type of thing, is we've always had this understanding that Norton has really high acid and is somewhat challenging to deal with. And I've learned a lot from this wine and the following couple of wines that we're going to try in relation to that. The story on this particular wine, the 2020 Vintage was for Virginia, and at least for my area it was a relatively cool vintage. So, acids especially in the Reds were really quite high. And this is because

I'm dealing with some high acid retention, late ripening reds like Tannat and Petit Verdot and that's usually what, especially with Tannat we're waiting for that acid to come down. So, the acid really showed in a number of the reds in the 2020 Vintage in their youth kind of this dominant, acid driven characteristic. The fascinating thing was it never really showed up in the Norton. This was the block that was most ideally balanced coming out of that vintage year and high acid conditions. And I think I understand why.

Fred Reno

I have to ask you. So, this particular vintage, how old were the vines?

Jason Murray

This would have been the first crop off of vines that were, I believe, four years old at that point,

Fred Reno

So essentially just coming into production.

Jason Murray

Yeah, exactly, which normally has some influence, but depends on the grape itself, you kind of jump right into one thought that I'm having behind this wine and the acids and how they're balancing is once we really focus on sound, grape growing, growing it with the same attention to detail that we put into the vinifera vines, following through with sound winemaking, I'm finding a lot of the difference is going to be the site in terms of the best approach to mitigating the acid in these Norton's. You've already heard that so many Norton's are planted in the lowest worst spot in the vineyard because it handles the winter where other grapes won't. Your basic physics, especially in mid-

Atlantic vineyard sites, those are the cooler sites. They're especially coolest overnight, which is when it really has an impact on the metabolism of the acids. So, if you have these lower sites that are cooler overnight, they're going to have a more significant retention of acid.

Fred Reno

That's interesting I hadn't heard that. Let's try the second wine you brought.

Jason Murray

All right, so we're going to go right into 2021 Norton. Alright, I'm going to get myself some in this glass. This is going to be a totally different ballgame Fred so get ready.

Fred Reno

Oh, I can tell just from the nose immediately, it's completely different type of Norton. So, this is 2021, Correct?

Jason Murray

2021 Quick story is this one instead spent 10 months on the skins in a clay amphora, which has a very high porosity, high breathing significant oxygen influencer clay amphora.

Fred Reno

Wow, wow. I don't know if that's vintage variation or your production technique. But this has a lot more expansive flavor on the palate, and just a lot more texture early on.

Jason Murray

Yeah, there are several factors that we see with that extended time in the amphora. We do see that typically there's a softening or a rounding or a mellowing of the wine definitely changes that it's almost beyond micro-oxidation, as we think of it in winemaking. But a long, slow steady influence and were also longer on the skin. So, there's more extraction from the skins at the same time.

Fred Reno

How large is this Amphora as far as gallonage, how much can it hold?

Jason Murray

This is a relatively small amphora. So, this is 350 liters. Which means if we were to ferment in it and then go to a barrel, we end up with around 25 cases, if we were to be able to stay in it, we can get it up to around 35 cases of wine.

Fred Reno

So appreciably more than a regular barrel, but not that much more.

Jason Murray

No, not really. I'll tell you a couple of the things that I picked up in this, which is interesting. And we just went through a small focus group of Norton in our cellar with some of our customers, which was a great experience. We kind of concluded that this was one of the least Nortonee Norton's most people have had, what do you think about that?

Fred Reno

I don't disagree with that. But then again, I felt that way about your 2020 when I first had it. I thought this wine has a certain level of

elegance, or what I'm going to call breed. And now what I'm surprised about is how young the vines are.

Jason Murray

Well, there's a couple of things that come to mind right then when you bring that up. And one of them is going to be the choices that I'm making in the cellar, which in this case was a longer time in the amphora intended to mitigate some of these Norton characteristics, which we're going to get to is not necessarily in my opinion, the right thing to do at this point, but was a great trial and learning experience, but at the same time, I produce everything with native yeast fermentations and no fining and no adjustments and just enough sulfites so that they'll bottle age, which means we always present to our customers this is how the grape really tastes. This is how the grape really smells. We talked about this with Cabernet Franc and all the other grapes that we produce. And so, I always have to wonder if my wines stand different than other versions of the same thing. If there isn't a Canon, if that's the right word from Art History type classes, have a style that comes out from modern yeast selections and modern techniques that is a little bit more ubiquitous across wines that are produced with those techniques.

Fred Reno

I'm curious when people come to your tasting room, and you pour them your Norton for them. If they've not had Norton before, how do they respond?

Jason Murray

We've had really positive responses; I do my best to educate people that some of this has been experimental to find the intersection at this

point between ancient technique wines and natural winemaking type things. We have quite a number of people that have said, I never really liked Norton and I love this. We have another whole set of people that do like Norton and appreciate the difference between this and other Norton's. People that like Norton tend to like Norton and the question, and part of my thinking was, how do you get the people who don't love it, which is usually a preset bias as opposed to an actual experiential basis? How do you get them to come over that that divide?

Fred Reno

I have got a question for you. So, when I was talking to Shep Rouse, recently, and we were talking about areas to grow Norton he said, something I'd never heard, he said, he felt that Northern Virginia, in some cases, was a little bit too cold to grow the kind of Norton he likes. What do you think he was referring to there?

Jason Murray

Well, I don't know if I'm going to be able to say it the way that he's saying it, but he's onto something here definitively. And that's what I'm getting at with site selection as it's relating to Norton. So, if Sheps down a little bit in the Shenandoah Valley a little bit warmer, you're going to have accelerated ripening, you're going to have little warmer days, warmer nights, you're going to have all those features go to exactly what he was referring to and it makes perfect sense to me. Northern Virginia, I think there's another layer to this, which is simply elevation. So again, if you're in those lower sights colder, I think it's harder to ripen it past this acidic dominant characteristic, whereas the site that I am working with is getting just into enough elevation of this thermal inversion layer where it is warmer days, warmer nights, it doesn't swing to those cold temperatures. My site which it has not yet

been planted on is another step higher mountain side planting. And that's where we typically have much quicker acid drop and ripening compared to lower sites. We see this with Tannat across the board. My Tanat's ripen earlier, drop acid faster. You get high enough, you get cold again, and you're back into the cold situation. But in Northern Virginia, I think you overcome the cold issues with Norton, with elevation.

Fred Reno

That's interesting. Well, I'm going to have a little taste of this Chablis I poured for us. We've got a little 2020 Premier Cru Montmains Vieilles Vignes. That's a good palate cleanser for Norton, isn't it?

Jason Murray

Yeah, that's really nice. And as soon as you said everybody that comes down to the Podcast gets to enjoy some White Burgundy with you. I was like this guy might be okay.

Fred Reno

Thank you for that, you know? What you just talked on as far as elevation climate This ties to something that I don't think we talk about, at least I haven't heard it about Norton, in Virginia. And that is what there's no talk about terroir. But you're starting to touch on it here in this interview. And we've got, are we not advanced enough with Norton growing and sophisticated enough to talk about terroir as a component of quality Norton? Or is that just out of the question at this moment?

Jason Murray

I think we're right about to get there. And I think it has a lot to do with getting past having to fix things. As soon as you're having to fix things.

The concept of terroir goes out the window. This is where I'm backpedaling from putting this in the amphora because I was trying to fix something that I don't think needs to be fixed at this point in time. And we can get away from that and get back to a true pure expression of terroir. This is what I think Shep was talking about, and this is what I'm saying if the viticulture is right, you have the right grape in the right place at the right elevation, you no longer have to fix anything. Then you're going to make truly expressive top tier wines, which as soon as you're ready That's what we're gonna look about and a barrel sample that I brought with me also.

Fred Reno

Oh, interesting. So, on topic, but a little bit of a diversion. I'm assuming you read the Wild Vine.

Jason Murray

Absolutely.

Fred Reno

What do you think about Todd's chronicling and what he captured?

Jason Murray

I really find it fascinating to get a kind of comprehensive in one place version of things. And that is, let me pour your glass here, Fred. There's so much mystique and mystery behind this. And that's part of what's fascinating. And what I like about the Wild Vine is it tells as much of the story as was currently known, but it still doesn't answer all of the questions.

Fred Reno

Exactly. Those have yet to be answered. Are they not? That's what this is all about.

Jason Murray

That's exactly right. Because I've talked to people in Arkansas and the stories of why it's called Cynthiana. And the differences of is this truly American? Or is it bred American? Or is it a hybrid with European or was it just selected out of nature? We still don't know. And that makes the story kind of fun.

Fred Reno

You may or may not be aware of this. But Lucie Morton is on that trail right now. Categorically she believes Cynthiana is a different grape than Norton. But they're siblings. She's working with the Extension Service at the University of Missouri, and a professor in charge there who's doing a number of really in-depth DNA sequences to try to get to the bottom of what we're talking about here.

Jason Murray

Yeah, it's fascinating. And I will be really excited to actually have somebody come out and say, This is what this is. The only thing that I can contribute to it with any legitimacy is that there's differences in vine stock. Not all Norton from all nurseries is the same. We have two different vine stocks growing side by side in the Norton vineyard that we work with. They're notably different. One was sold as Cynthiana from Arkansas, one as a Missouri Norton. That's what we were told, Do we really know now? But can I tell that they're different? Yes.

Fred Reno

That's a fascinating fact. Recently, Shannon Horton had been listening to Lucie. So, for this vintage 2023, they kept some Cynthiana that is in their vineyard and some Norton, and they barreled it separately, and then she gave me right out of the barrel without any preservative a half bottle of each to take home and taste side by side. And I did taste them side by side. There was no question there was a difference in the wines with the Cynthiana being, or what was purported to be Cynthiana, being a bit more elegant, it was lighter in color, and noticeably, very elegant. Whereas Norton was this big brute of wine, and really expressive of all those characters in Norton, we associate it with. I kept them overnight. I put them in the refrigerator right away when she gave them to me because I wanted to preserve them. And the next day, they had diverged again. I poured a little Cynthiana which was left into the Norton. And boy it changed dramatically. It calmed the Norton down, and all of a sudden, this wine became more voluminous, if you will just, it was really fascinating. It was an honor of her to give me a bottle leach to try at that stage. I mean, they were still in a barrel, they were just barely finishing fermentation.

Jason Murray

Yeah, it's going to be really fun to see what actually is Cynthiana what actually is Norton, my suspicion would be, we're still going to have multiple versions of at least Norton because I don't know if the two pieces that I have in this vineyard I work with are one Cynthiana and one Norton, or they're both Norton's, but they're different.

Fred Reno

That makes sense. So, let's talk about this wine you just poured Jason.

Jason Murray

This is 2023. So, you're super young. This is a barrel sample that I just pulled yesterday before driving down this morning.

Fred Reno

Hey that's delicious, folks. That's delicious.

Jason Murray

I'm really excited about this one. '23 was a really good vintage overall. So, we got that going for it in the first place. But second, this is a change, a spin, a pivot for me and the Norton program. I went back to my core belief system of don't do anything that will change it from what the grape is naturally going to express. This was fermented in a 500-liter puncheon which is the great big barrels just turned on its side, older, neutral puncheon. It was basically used because it was the right size for the amount of fruit that I had and was used as a benign fermentation vessel. After it was on the skins about three weeks it gets pressed it goes in the barrel. Nothing done different than the way I make any other of the red wines, which is meant to be 100% true terroir, no new barrels, no yeast added, no malolactic added no adjustments in any way, shape, or form.

Fred Reno

So, four vintages of Norton, under your belt, what has surprised you at this point, working with Norton as say, working with Tannat or Petit Verdot? What is the difference?

Jason Murray

Well, it actually gains similarity to my favorite grapes, the further I go with it. If you're a minimalist the way I am in the cellar, and you're not going to ever fix anything, you have to base your consistency of quality

on the right, grape for the region. So, I had always worked with Petit Verdot and Tannat, this is just ranking right in there with as ideally consistent for the region as a basis of quality. And what I'm finding and why I brought this '23 Younger barrel sample is because the best thing we can do is grow it as well as we can on the right site. And then it takes care of itself.

Fred Reno

I would say this one is evidence of that. This is beautiful Norton.

Jason Murray

Yeah, absolutely no evidence here that there was an acid issue. Acid was not corrected. Again, 2020 Vintage acid was not corrected. If we can ripen things properly. There is nothing wrong with Norton and the better we can produce, expressing that grape to unlock its fullest potential. I think that quality factor in and of itself is what's going to get us across that threshold of the naysayers of Norton to become believers, because I don't care what your preferences have been. If you appreciate a dark, rich, concentrated but smooth wine. I don't know how you couldn't like that.

Fred Reno

I have to agree. As I've said to many people before, I find Norton to be a serious wine. It's an intellectual wine to me. You don't quaff Norton. And you know people quaff wine these days, which is fine. But you don't quaff Norton, you sip it, you ponder, then you go that's interesting. I find so many nuances in it. It just keeps me coming back to it. It keeps me curious, keeps me wondering. When you have a 10- or 20-year-old bottle Norton, it blows my mind how good and what the

wine has transformed into. It's just remarkable. I can't believe enough people haven't discovered that yet. I'm not sure what's the point there?

Jason Murray

Well, other than a handful of really brave pioneer type people, most of us haven't caught up to that. And by the time my first vintages are 20 years old, I'll be lucky if I'm down to one or two bottles left because I probably will have drunk them.

Fred Reno

This wine has really got a beautiful balance of sweet fruit. Just layers of sweet fruit, but very well balanced now for just a 2023 right now.

Jason Murray

Yeah, for something so youthful. And partly that's characteristic of my style. The native yeast is going to bring out these really rich, vivid fruit characteristics. Definitely smooth it is definitively a dry wine. But the native yeast gives you a more viscous, richer characteristic that brings what you described as sweet fruit as opposed to sweet wine. It's just got that rich character that fascinates me.

Fred Reno

So, what's your favorite food dish to have with Norton?

Jason Murray

Well, that's probably depends on the Norton that I'm drinking. If I had something once it ages out this barrel sample, I'd probably want to actually just sit and drink it by itself. Most Norton's though I'm fine to go with what classically goes well with your red wine pairings. Meaning if you have those like richer, more robust red meats, but they're also

going to go extremely well with things that have a strong acid component to them. If you really like red sauces, pasta type sauces, something that has that extra zip to it, that's really going to offset the acid that you're going to find in a number of Norton's.

Fred Reno

I was surprised when I interviewed Michael Heny. And I asked him the same question. He said he likes actually Asian food with it. spiciness?

Jason Murray

I guess that would make a lot of sense because then the acid and then is going to balance across that really quite well. Really when it comes down to it. I grew up in agriculture in the livestock world and we raised sheep as a family and I had lamb all the time, and I come back to just lamb for this type of thing, oh,

Fred Reno

I can see some lamb. As I said, son Super Bowl Sunday I made lamb burgers, which is my tradition with a little sirloin and lamb sirloin ground up and had a 2010 Horton Norton, and it was just beautiful, just beautiful.

Jason Murray

You're a lucky person to have had a 2010 Horton Norton,

Fred Reno

I must say that Shannon Horton has been very generous and opened up her cellar to me to purchase some wines. I have, I went and saw her the other day, I actually have wines back to, I'm going to say oh from the late '90's .

Jason Murray

And you have to show appreciation to the Hortons, they did a lot for the Virginia wine industry. That's a lot of where I discovered some of the first Tannat's that I had run into also, when we had tried Malbec for a little while it was based on the quality of things that they were producing. So, they've really opened a lot of doors for a lot of people.

Fred Reno

I still think Dennis Horton doesn't get the mention, or the acclaim, if you will, for what he did for Virginia wine growing. I mean, what he did, how many varietals he tried, he just doesn't get the mention I think he deserves.

Jason Murray

I think he was a really good businessman. And I think he connected to the customer really well. And there was a good number of customers that wanted a fruit wine and something fun or something lighthearted, and he provided it and those people were happy. And he also provided serious wines to people that were looking for that and I think he found success with it. But that does create a kind of divergence.

Fred Reno

Yeah, I understand what you're saying, Well, not having been here in Virginia, in the earlier days of the growth here in the late oh, let's just say going into the 2000s. Go back to the 1990s there was a lot more of that fruit wine and more of that being produced.

Jason Murray

Yeah, things have evolved a lot. But again, his pioneering spirit is what pushed things forward. And that again, I have to give full credit because that led to situations like Jenni McCloud, at Chrysalis pioneering and moving forward like she did and providing a benchmark and a basis for us all to see the potential and just try and work with it from there.

Fred Reno

I'm always surprised when I talk to people, I respect in the wine industry, in the trade who haven't had Norton before, and I send them a bottle of Norton or we taste it, and some of them talk about it being Foxy. And I think, what are you talking about? I don't get this foxy thing. Where do you think that comes from?

Jason Murray

I've always had a little bit of a hard time with that term, too. And I think that's a little bit of a term from the reviewer angle of I don't know what word to put to this. So, I'm going to use this word for it. Because I can't really peg what the word means. But I think that goes back to the era of a lot of Norton's that were not grown properly, not on the best site not tended properly, not picked with any type of ideal ripeness, and then you've got a real kind of a slant or an awkwardness and the potential of it.

Fred Reno

How do you deal with the Norton berry in the cellar? It is my understanding unlike other grapes, especially vinifera, it's a seed pocket, you're going to get 2,3,4,5 seeds in a berry. How do you deal with that when you're pressing and everything.

Jason Murray

The way that I approach these things is if the fruit is truly fully ripe and your seeds are ripe, your skins are ripe. You don't have anything hide from. Our point of view has always been extract as much as you possibly can. If the seeds are ripe extract from them, no problem. Just make sure that things are handled gently so we don't use must pumps or anything that's going to grind up or chop up seeds or stems and induce that bitterness. But as long as the ripeness is truly optimal, there's nothing to hide from.

Fred Reno

That's a good explanation. I have to agree with you. So basically, once seeds taste like Grape Nuts.

Jason Murray

You want a seed that if you keep it in your mouth for a good long time. It's doing interesting things, and it isn't unpleasant. Every aspect of the grape when it's picked should be a pleasant moment.

Fred Reno

So, you say you're working with a grower partner for this Norton. Have you plans to put Norton in your vineyard?

Jason Murray

Yes, when I don't know because we are a very small family scale survival economics winery so we can only do so much so fast. And when we started, we had to start with something. Things that we knew were going to work. And this was a bit of an exploration because when this person came to me, and brought up a few different options, and one of them was Norton, I just saw an opportunity to have a risk-free

opportunity to produce Norton to its top potential quality to verify that when the time comes, this would be the next candidate to go in the ground. And that could be an expansion just proactively, that could be another block goes into decline, and we need to decide what's going to replace it.

Fred Reno

What type of trellising are you using in that particular vineyard for the Norton?

Jason Murray

We have everything grown on a single high wire, so not the double curtain that you might have heard about, but a single canopy and we manage it in a downward pattern, the exact same diligence that we would manage the vinifera in an upward growth habit, which means shoot thinning to where we maintain shoots three or four inches apart, so there's nice spacing, so we don't have crowding, we don't have dampness trapped, we don't have shading. And then once the canes are about 18 or so inches tall, and they're really lignified the connection, so they're not going to break off when we move them, we have a Catch Wire that positions them downward, so then they are downward, vertical, parallel, and kept thinned, of laterals, and anything else that's going to clog it up. So, we want good air circulation. We want good light penetration, and an ideal canopy situation for focusing on the ripening.

Fred Reno

Do the birds like Norton?

Jason Murray

Absolutely love it. Yes. So, it gets bird netted. The very first few grapes the year before we started picking it, they went after it like crazy. And that taught us the lesson right away. They get netted, Absolutely.

Fred Reno

Well, I'm excited about what I see for the future of Norton. Talk about the sustainability, and how this relates to undeniably climate changes happening and the lack of spraying and everything that may not be needed in farming Norton. What is it like, just from a growing perspective?

Jason Murray

Well, there's two answers to that question. One is the ripening, in terms of climate change, and the other is the sustainability. So, the ripening is with the right management becoming all the more ideal under climate change. Because I've seen most things move up at least a week, if not 10 days in ripening, and Norton used to ripen what I would describe as a little too late, at least for Northern Virginia. And now with climate change, it's coming into an ideal phase and balance for ripening. And it does so without any rot type pressure or decline pressure on the fruit so it can hang however long you really want it to which is really nice. In terms of sustainability, this was one of my interests in it, because not only is it very winter hardy, and we have more volatile winters at this point in time, we are really looking at sustainability being something that is a better fit with less external inputs into it. So, it takes your spray program down to almost nothing. We're pretty much looking at some years, maybe needing to put a natural product like neem oil or an organic pyrethrin on it for the Japanese beetles. We're doing organic trials for a couple of black rot sprays right at bloom time. And that's all it takes. Whereas with

vinifera, even if you are spot on as good as you can be, you're still going to be spraying at like 12 times, which is what I do have, which from the middle of June on is an organic equivalent program. But even if you were to be organic, spraying 12 times versus organic spraying once, twice. That's a big difference. And part of the quest we had for this long term, just fantasies going on in my brain right here is how could you make the end all most sustainable, most truly natural wine and it comes down to something like Norton, because at the scale that we're at, it makes sense to trial managing it with a backpack. We don't drive a tractor through this field. It's walked through with a backpack, and we can spray the whole half acre block with like six gallons of water from the backpacks. And you're done. Which at that low level requirement of spraying it you actually could scale that up commercially without having to use fossil fuels.

Fred Reno

That really is fascinating and talks to a bright future for Norton for those who are going to take it serious and grow it in the right places and handle it like they should.

Jason Murray

Yeah, we're going to see at some point in time a divergence between some of the grapes that we stubbornly hold on to because we really want them but they get harder. For me that's going to be like Tannat, it's never going to be an easy thing. Whereas there's going to be things that just slide in and absolutely make sense and make awesome wine. That's going to be things like Norton and some of the other hybrids, especially coming out of Europe. And then it's just the customers adapting. And this is all necessary in due time because vines have been propagated clonally, for hundreds or more years, their genetic

profiles have been absolutely stagnant while the diseases have evolved and evolved and evolved and evolved to where the diseases are winning. So as soon as we go into breeding programs, and using naturally occurring resistance factors, the more that we catch back up on the sustainability front.

Fred Reno

I love that conversation, simply because when people go what, hybrids almost like it's the redheaded stepchild, and I think I always look at and go, you don't Cabernet Sauvignon is a hybrid. And they go what are you talking about? Right?

Jason Murray

Yeah, and there's, there's, in the US, we're exposed to one version of hybrids. And that's mostly what's coming out of the Cornell breeding program, with full credit, they're breeding for upstate New York and cold climates, and they're doing a great job for their region. It's not necessarily directly applicable here. And in Virginia, there is now started up a breeding program, which is super awesome. It has incredible potential, but it takes time. Whereas the Italians just put out their first product lines that have been 20 years in the making, of what I've tasted, I really love the whites more so than the reds, which is why something like Norton is important. But there's some incredible things coming out and in Europe, if you actually think about what they're breeding with, they don't have to take a European wine grape and cross it with some random wild American vine that is so far from being wine. It's ridiculous. Instead, they can take *Vitis vinifera* domesticated and effectively cross it with *Vitis vinifera* wild and you're actually breeding things that are much more similar and produce some

amazing products. And then we just need to adapt the customers over time because the quality is there.

Fred Reno

That leads to something that kind of scares me a little bit. In the trade, especially right now, the wine trade, I see. So different than when I started 45 years ago, there seems to be a lack of intellectual curiosity, where people are just following trends, and not really have the intellectual curiosity to dig deeper and learn more and understand what is happening out there.

Jason Murray

I think that's a good point. And I think it's pendulum swings. And I see it a little bit differently, because I am quite focused on exploring wines within what I call the natural wine world. And the natural wine world is focused on true terroir, expression, and clean and traditional winemaking techniques. But it also with terroir ties back to well, what are the grapes that great great granddad used to have here before phylloxera wiped all this stuff out, but you know what, there's still two of them over there on the side of the field, let's propagate those, and unique and distinctive starts to come back. And this is an important pendulum swing, because there was a time when, in order to sell in the market, you had to abandon your unique local or regional vines, and go with the big names, Cabernet Sauvignon, everywhere, Chardonnay, everywhere, and not that they can't make good wine. But that's what you had to do to sell until the market was flooded with those and then all of a sudden, you can't sell it. Whereas if you've come up with something that is unique and distinctive, all of a sudden, that's giving you an advantage. I think the natural wine world is at the forefront of this. And it's the beginning of the pendulum swing.

Fred Reno

That's a really good segue for an epiphany I had at one of our dinners at the Homestead. We had DuCard as our featured vintner for the month and we finished the dinner for the guests with a bottle of Norton. Now, nobody in that room had ever had a glass or a bottle of Norton, these are all consumers, no preconceived notions, and I'm watching the table. And by the end of the evening, that was the wine everybody wanted more of. And I had that proverbial aha moment where I go. Oh, I see. It's the trade in the press that are the issue here, not the consumer. When the consumers are served well made Norton, serve correctly, I mean, I had the wine decanted for about an hour and a half before we served it the wine because it was a young Norton, they love it. They had no preconceived notion. They loved it. They wanted more of it.

Jason Murray

I see that absolutely, that the customers, consumers are, for the most part quite exploratory. They're curious, they're interested to try and learn and see new things. I find an exact analogy in terms of the Virginia wine market outside the tasting room. So, we've always had a hard time getting into stores and restaurants and those owners will say, nobody wants to buy the Virginia wine. Whereas in reality, when they stock it, it sells, and it sells great. And the customers do want it, we just have to get over this hurdle of this kind of wall in between.

Fred Reno

I'm always surprised when people tell me Virginia wine is too expensive. And I'm thinking to myself, the sweet spot for Virginia wine these days is 25 to \$40 retail. To get the equivalent quality from let's

say, California, you're talking about 60 to \$85. So to that point, Virginia wines are a value, right?

Jason Murray

I feel exactly that way. And I've actually always felt that the potential quality of Virginia wines is really high. And to me all the more interesting, complex, approachable, and flavorful than so many of the other big name wine regions, and I think our wines are absolutely reasonably priced for the quality point they are in reference to the market.

Fred Reno

I'll end this interview on this note, because I've been quoted as saying, "Virginia wine has Soul".

Jason Murray

I absolutely agree. And thank you so much for supporting that.