

## EPISODE # 18 NOKESVILLE WINERY/DUSTIN MINOR

### **SPEAKERS**

Fred Reno, Dustin Minor

#### **Fred Reno**

He's a newcomer to the Norton scene, aren't you Dustin.

#### **Dustin Minor**

I am. Hello.

#### **Fred Reno**

So, as I like to do let's start at the beginning, what's your story? How did you get into this?

#### **Dustin Minor**

I'm originally from Connecticut. My wife and I are from New England. I moved down here in 2003, and my full-time career is a professional firefighter, and my wife works for the military. When I moved down here, my wife would go with her friends to these wineries, and I was just a beer and vodka drinker at the time. Pretty much all I drank. And then I was like, We were living in Arlington at that point. I didn't want to hang out by myself. So, I was like, I'll go with her. And obviously, you know, in 2003 there weren't that many wineries around. So, then we would go out and I remember having all these Virginia wines and having my first wine intoxication. It was something that was very exciting, a lot different than my beer or vodka intoxication. And then, really, just the way my mind works, I always wonder, what makes a \$5 bottle, a \$15 bottle, \$100 bottle, you know, if you're talking about the same varietal at that point, even if I didn't know about varietals what

makes these wines different? And then really just understanding and really learning about wine at that point I really just kind of dove, you know, into the deep end. So basically, you got bitten by the wine bug. I mean, I loved it. I love the aspect that it's farming. Once you really get into it the elements of different the kind of grapes and different kind of wines and vintages. It was a lot more complex than beer and I loved that. And that's how I got into just drinking wine. When my wife and I moved out to Nokesville from where we lived in Arlington to Manassas, and then we moved out to Nokesville, we bought this property as five acres. There was just a bunch of grass. There was nothing here. I was like, would it be cool to have some grape vines?

**Fred Reno**

When did you plant your first vines?

**Dustin Minor**

Our first vine was about 12 years ago when we bought the property. It was actually Chambourcin and Cayuga. Those were the first two grapes. Being from Connecticut, I actually had an ex-girlfriend whose father had vineyards up in Connecticut, who's growing Cayuga. And I was like, what is Cayuga? And I just fell in love with that. I mean, again, something totally different. That wasn't Chardonnay, you know, or Merlot. It was something totally different that I fell in love with the idea.

**Fred Reno**

Was the idea that you were going to grow grapes and sell them?

**Dustin Minor**

No, I just wanted to plant some vines. I think I planted two of each on the same trellis system, and I had no idea about trellis systems. This is

actually where it gets crazy. I just planted them. I think one Chambourcin died the Cayuga I was able to actually replant a couple Cayuga, with no plan ever making wine. Just thought it was kind of cool look like. And then when our first batches of grapes actually came in, like, three years later, I was I'll try making wine. It was horrible. I mean, I have buddies that drink moonshine, pretty much just straight ether, and I wouldn't even touch it.

### **Fred Reno**

How did you get hooked up with Chrysalis and doing an internship there with Jake?

**Dustin Minor Well** we were back up in Connecticut at that point for a wedding. A friend of mine was getting married. It was a Thursday. It was a special day for him. And my wife and I were like, let's go visit some other Connecticut wineries. When I first started getting that wine bug, my wife and I were actually at Disney, at Epcot. And I sat down, at this point my wife and I had a little extra money, and we're in Italy at the park. I was talking to the waiter, and I said hey, what wine would you recommend with this? I'm sorry, I'm starting to learn wine. And he's saying I have this Chianti. I'm like, What the heck is Chianti? It's Sangiovese. I don't even know what that means, but sure, I'll buy a bottle. So, he poured this bottle of Chianti with Sangiovese, and it blew me away. It paired well with the lasagna. I think we had some calamari as an appetizer. The acid on it complimented the acid from the marinara sauce.

### **Fred Reno**

So, that's what I would call that aha moment.

## **Dustin Minor**

Yes. I was oh my god, I love this. That's when I really started getting into, you know, learning more about wines and Sangiovese, which we actually grow here. We're using it in one of our blends. It's not the best growing here, but we do grow it, but I always do make a single varietal Sangiovese, which we'll try. Fast Forward, I'm in Connecticut. We're at this winery in Connecticut, it's Thursday morning. I think they open up at 11. We were there at 10:58, walk through the door. I go to the bar. Guy comes from out the bar. God, your name is, um, I'll remember here in a second. So, I say his name, and he goes, How do you know that? You were my waiter down at Disney. Oh, my God, yes. You poured me this Sangiovese that was fantastic. And he says Yes. So, I found out his story. He's majored in viticulture in Italy, did a six-year program all the way from soil, to bottle, to production, to sales. He wanted to learn English. You want to become a Napa wine maker. Napa. So where do you learn English? You go to Disneyland. He worked at Disney and was learning English, met a girl whose father was starting a winery, a vineyard up in Connecticut, moved up there to help him, fell in love, got married. Obviously, it's a Thursday afternoon in Connecticut. No one was there. He and I probably spent three, four hours drinking wine, talking about how I was growing my grapes, how to actually produce the wine. What I should have been doing during fermentations. I still have the notebook today of things that I learned. And that's when I came back here, and my wife saw this thing in my eyes, like I want to do this better than anybody else, okay? And that's when I started really focusing on the vineyard. Our first initial row of vines left is still the original Chambourcin and Cayuga vines. And then from there, we replanted and actually restructured our vineyard correctly.

## **Fred Reno**

Is that when you put Norton in.

## **Dustin Minor**

So, when I started planting, I was like, hey, what else can really grow here? And I started drinking Norton's. We were actually members at Chrysalis at this point and that's when I reached out to, I think Jake through the main email, and I got a hold of Jake. And Jake says I could sell you some Norton vines. I'm like, okay, so I bought some Norton vines, I think in 2019 and planted those. Jake was very helpful and let me know how you should plant them. 2020 comes around and I go to buy my second batch and COVID hits. Yeah, it was at the end of 2020 you know. Then when COVID hit, Jake had no help, like Jenni and Chrysalis had no help. They couldn't find winemakers to help with the harvest. At this point in my career in the fire service, I was working almost every day, and I needed some time off. I was like, Hey, can I just take three months to get my mind off of all of this and they're like, yes, you've done great job. So, they let me take pretty much three months off. And I was the assistant winemaker, and I did it for about a month in between my regular rotation at work, and then I took three months off, did the whole internship, and then worked another, you know, two months after that, on my days off in the fire department, long day. Yeah, I would get up in the morning and I would go to work, you know, go to Chrysalis, do my punch downs, and then I would come back here, because at this point, my wife and I applied for our commercial wine license in 2000, so we got our LLC in 2021 we got our ABC license.

## **Fred Reno**

That must have been difficult back here to get this license.

**Dustin Minor**

Being a firefighter, and what I was doing at the time as a fire marshal. you know, I was learning codes. So, I read all the code sections for the ABC for everything that I needed to know. When you read code, you understand how things work. So, our first 2021 commercial wine license was actually in our basement. We converted our whole basement to a commercial winery. We had a storage room with locks. I had everything correct. When the ABC agent came in, she saw everything. I had a press, I had a crusher, I had vats, I had some barrels, I had some small tanks. Everything was obviously very small. But she's like, I remember, she laughed. She goes, Well, you have everything you need, check. Here you go. And we got our commercial wine license. So, I would work at Chrysalis during the day, and then I would get back around eight o'clock at night, and I would work my own harvest from nine till about two.

**Fred Reno**

You really got lucky, because I think Jake Blodinger is one of the best, hands down.

**Dustin Minor**

He and I are obviously still good friends. I help them out. I mean, we lease some property out from Jenni. I always like to say Chrysalis is our big sister company to us, and if it wasn't for them, there's no way I would have ever been successful. And when I ever had a hiccup or I needed something, Jenni knew the answer, or Teri, her manager, or Jake, would know? I mean, it was one of those things where it's a beautiful partnership, where our goal honestly, is to better improve our Norton.

## **Fred Reno**

A couple quick questions on that line, what are the challenges that you now see in the vineyard in growing Norton?

## **Dustin Minor**

So, it's initially the starting the vine when you first plant it. We buy our vines from Chrysalis. Obviously, they come as little vines. They're about one year old give or take and it is getting those roots established, something that when we redesigned our vineyard after the first two plantings of Norton didn't really take off for us. It was because of the water. We couldn't get enough water on the root system. And when you have a tractor and you're going around trying to water each vine, you're trying to get eight gallons per week on them. It was three hours, if not four hours a day, just watering vines, and it wasn't practical for us two years ago. When we reestablished the vineyard, we actually dug trench lines. So, we have a creek behind us, and we got approval from the EPA that we're allowed to pump from the creek because we actually jumped on a one of the turf Farms that has the same contract. We just jumped on theirs and we got approval. We were able to pump water from the creek. We put in new lines and got a big pump to siphon water from our creek, and we are now able to turn down each row, so each row has its own valve allowing us to water each row specifically for how much water we want, because the Norton needs a lot more water than our Cayuga ever did. The Cayuga either we replanted, or we get it from a vineyard up in New York, and the root systems are very big at that point. So compared to the ones we get from Norton which are very small, so the Norton needs a lot more water to start growing.

## **Fred Reno**

What type of soil do you have here?

## **Dustin Minor**

Here we have Virginia clay and shell, a lot of shells, which is actually fantastic. We noticed in our vineyard, especially on the left side, where it's very Shelly that water sticks in the clay, but then gets to the shell and runs right away. It's kind of like the best of both worlds. At the top, soaks in that water, holds it, but then it gets to the shell and the spreads out a little bit.

## **Fred Reno**

So, now let's take the grapes to the cellar. Well, of course, you were at Chrysalis, so you started to learn the techniques. But what are the many challenges in the production of Norton?

## **Dustin Minor**

Obviously, if you're growing fantastic fruit, and I always say, I'm going to use my Norton and Cayuga, they're easier to grow than our Tannat that we have back there, than our Sangiovese. And we also grow Pinot Gris back there. Tannat, Pinot Gris, are very difficult to maintain in the vineyard, right? Gotta spray them a lot. But once I bring it into the winery very little where I mean, pressing off is super easy. Cleanup is easy. Norton, on the other hand, is a little easier in the field. Don't have to spray as much? Very bug and mold resistant. Cayuga, the same thing, but when you bring it into the winery, that's when the skills of the wine maker come into effect. Cayuga, on the first hand, right? Very viscous, lots of acid, which I love, high acid in all my wines, you know, cutting back the proteins right off the bat with it, maybe a little more bentonite up front. Get it done. Get those proteins settled down.



Norton, on the other hand, when it comes in, the pH could either be really low and the total TA could be super high. So, making sure that we're getting that balance there are some of the things I learned from Chrysalis was adding tannin powder to it, softening it up. We only do maybe two or three punch downs a day, compared to our Merlot, where we're doing six or seven punch down because we don't want to beat up that Norton. Trying different techniques at Chrysalis I learned here with our small batches, was the temperature during fermentation for Norton. A normal winery puts their grapes in T bins. Even though it's 60 degrees in the winery inside that must right, is going to get hotter, because obviously the yeast is doing three things. It's converting the sugar into alcohol, which is what we want. It's creating CO<sub>2</sub>, which is when you're busting up that cap, letting that up. And the third thing, it's creating heat. So even though it's 60 degrees ambient air in here, inside that fermentation, you could be getting upwards almost to 89,90, 95 degrees sometimes. Which is just like a chicken, right? You can bake a chicken at 200 degrees maybe over four hours, right? Get a nice, moist, little more flavors. Or you can cook it at 600 degrees in 30 minutes and have a dry piece of chicken. But I started learning, and again, having smaller batches and what my wife and I always like to say, we don't have bosses, it's just her and I, you know what I mean, if I want to do something, I'm going to do it Fred. I'm going to take chances, especially when you're making initially small batches, you know, 30 gallons, small batches, you're going to try things. And what I noticed was the wines that I Jake and I would pick the grapes the same time I would control the fermentation. I was able to, right? We use little warthogs originally for home wine brewers or even beer brewers. And we put those chillers with a temperature probe in the must. So, when the must get up to a certain temperature, the chiller would kick on then the coolant would kick in. It's a food grade

coolant which when then it keeps fermentation at a proper temperature. And what we noticed was that Jake would have a fermentation going in his T bins. He'd be done in five days. My fermentation would be seven or 14 days long and what I noticed was that mine were a little softer, because I really do believe it never got hot. We never allowed it to get hot before it burns some of those flavor profiles. And then initially, what we kind of saw, too cold off the front, the yeast wasn't happy so we wanted to get it up to about 70 degrees, sometimes our Merlot, we want to get it to like 72 to get it going, then we chill it down.

### **Fred Reno**

So, this 22 Norton we're having right now, which is really beautiful, and the structure of this wine is great. But I understood in general, '22 was a very difficult year for a lot of producers in Virginia. This wine isn't showing it. Are your wines 100% Norton?

### **Dustin Minor**

No this is 85% Norton, 5% Merlot from Charlottesville, 5% Tannat, and 5% Petit Verdot. So again, Norton, when you bring it in, right? It's lacking some tannin structure. So, we add tannin powder. We literally planted Tannat and we leased our property for Petit Verdot, just for Norton. Everything I make here in this winery is for the aspects of showcasing Norton, even the whites. I make the whites fantastic so I can make more money, so I can put my money into the Norton. It's crazy marketing. Fred, I know I'm crazy. So, Chrysalis is usually a little bit of Tannat and Petit Verdot. I like a little vinifera. I am not a Merlot fan, I will not just open up a single varietal Merlot. Usually, I like a little more structure, a little more tannin, a little more body in the wine. But what I do love about Merlot is that it really doesn't add or take away

anything in a wine. It's a good balancing wine. The Merlot we got from Charlottesville, from Wisdom Oaks winery, I know the owner, Jason. We've been friends for a couple years. We've been working on these projects, and he specifically understands that I want my Merlot a little higher pH. So, 3.7, which is crazy, right, obviously. But I'm not using it for a single variety. I'm using it because I want to take away the acid from Norton. So, we raise it up to get a little higher up on the pH, and then when we pick it and we Saignée some of it, because, again, any Virginia Merlot, right, doesn't really get too much of the green pepper, or doesn't get that dark. So, we Saignée and we put that in a rose and the rest is just full bodied. And we beat the junk out of it. We probably seven times a day we're doing punch downs on it, just to beat it up and then we press it off, and then it sits in French neutral oak, because we don't want to add anymore. We just want the Merlot. And really, what we do is just to soften it up so that 5% I really do believe. And when we try the 2023, you're going to see we actually bumped up to 7% Merlot. Because again, I think even with this wine, which was Silver in the Governor's Cup this year, for 2022 I had still a little too much bitterness and acid on the mid palette that I wanted to kind of soften up. I love regular style Norton, and I can drink 100% Norton. I can drink all different kinds of Norton. But we like to say we're the Norton for non-Norton fans.

### **Fred Reno**

A lot of Norton producers don't talk about it as openly as you have, but they put other varietals in to try to get the kind of balance they want in their wine. I have found that everybody does something a bit differently which I've come to discover. I'm curious about how you develop a consumer base here. What are your customers saying? I mean, you're

off the beaten path so to speak. You're not on a wine trail here or anything.

**Dustin Minor**

We do have one winery down the road, Effingham Manor, which is Chris Pearmund's.

**Fred Reno**

How close is it?

**Dustin Minor**

Three Miles. Again, I think once we opened up, they saw more traffic, because, again, people want to come to areas where it's more than one wine initially. Fred, remember, my winery was in the basement. We didn't have a tasting room. Everything was sold through VWC, everything. If you ever heard of Michael Brown, Michael Brown winery. And yeah, so, you know, I listened to a podcast that he was on, read his book, got to meet him, and then his marketing strategy was, you get your wine out to as many people that want to try it to the masses. First at a cheaper rate, get them liking your wine, raise the price, and then, all sudden, get started with membership. And then the membership loves your wine, and at that point, you're going to have enough wine just to sell to the members, and that's really what we're kind of doing here.

**Fred Reno** Well, yeah. I mean, what is your production? You can't be making more than a couple 100 cases or what.

**Dustin Minor**

We make 1000 cases. Yeah, we do 1000 cases just for Nokesville. But we also have side contracts where we make it for a brewery that's has their own little winery to sell in its restaurant. This is something that I came up with, So you and your fiancé are getting married. You want to have a special wine for your wedding. Will help you make that wine? Oh, I see so like home wine maker stuff, but I'm here with you to make

it. So, we help with that kind of production. But 1000 cases is where we're at and we're happy at the this point, that's all we want to do.

**Fred Reno**

That seems like to me, on the surface, that's a fair amount of wine for an operation this small by one guy.

**Dustin Minor**

Yeah, it's me. We do everything Fred, everything is done by me on property from the moment the grapes come in either, again, if we're not growing it on our property, our lease property, we work directly with the grower. The only grapes I get outside of Virginia are from California. We get extra Sangiovese, and then we get Cab Sauv. We have tried to get Virginia Cab Sauv this year, but the hurricane destroyed it, so we had to go back to California. But everything else is from Virginia, so again, not grown by us or at the lease properties. The way we have it worked out is they have their vineyard crew managers, and they have me, you know, I go over there. I kind of oversee, like, Hey, this is the kind of vision that we want our wine to taste like. And that's why I always tell people we don't just get grapes, we have a vision for that bottle, and we work all the way back to the field. And now I remember his name from Disney it was Aldo. Oh, that's a good Italian name, yeah. So, Aldo was the one that he actually told me, you cannot just get fruit and then make wine. You must have a vision for the wine. And I was like, okay, so that was the wine that we had a vision for. And we work all the way back.

**Fred Reno**

Well, I've got a question about your branding. The packaging, what's the history behind the shield?

**Dustin Minor**

So really when I first started actually making wine from our vineyard, I had some friends over, good friends, and at first, we were like, you know, this was 2020, right? So, I was like, I'm thinking about doing this. And then obviously, the more the wine flows, that's a great idea. And I'm like, I don't know what I'm doing. And I'm like, we need to come up with a logo. And one of my best friend's wives actually drew it. She came up, we talked that night, and the next day, she sent me this, and I was like, I love it. And we put it on the packaging.

### **Fred Reno**

Well, I would tell you, as a branding guy, the two most. The important thing on any brand packaging is what's the winery? The name should stand out. Then if you have some type of logo or icon that the customer can remember, that's important, because then they see it, they get it right away. Yeah, too many wineries clutter everything, and nobody knows, what's the winery? I don't even know what the winery is.

### **Dustin Minor**

We like to look a lot. You look at those higher end wines. Michael Brown is fantastic. You look at his, it's the name of the winery, the label. And then what we want to probably put on next is a little more about each wine. When we started off, we were so small and at that point, we had one label company in North Carolina, which was a horrible experience. But now we have a local company that helps us design and make it. They're actually here in Prince William, husband and wife operation, just like ours. I met them through Wisdom Oaks in Charlottesville. They use them. I go, I know where exactly Montclair is. It's in Prince William. So yeah, now that I feel more comfortable that way, we can kind of explore other options for getting our story out. Again, people aren't always buying our wine here in the winery, you know, most of our wines still sold through distributor or wine shops and

restaurants. Perhaps we can move them to having that experience, where they can maybe scan a QR code that brings it back to the winery to tell our story and add a little more about us or each wine.

### **Fred Reno**

Yeah, well, the idea of a QR code you can scan gives you unlimited ability to tell a story. So that's probably the smarter way to go in the long run, because the simpler you keep your packaging, I think the better.

### **Dustin Minor**

I think we'll probably just have one QR code on the back to just keep it simple. And with the QR code maybe something about the wine here, like, oh, you know, pairs well with this. And what we've noticed more, too, is that everyone who loves or those who really get into wine, they love to hear about the TAs, the Ph, that stuff. And I've noticed a lot of our customers come in. They're asking those questions, and I'm like, oh, that's probably something I could put on a bottle. And I've noticed that more wineries are doing that kind of stuff.

### **Fred Reno**

So, you're new to the Norton business, let's say, but what have you seen from your customers when they come in and they have a glass of Norton, let's just say it's for the first time. What kind of reaction do you get?

### **Dustin Minor**

When we first opened up, we had small batches. And when we opened up the actual tasting room, 2022 was our first big wine that we had here in the tasting room. And some people came just to try

because they heard about us. Others were pretty much, I would say, the majority of them came in and would say you could skip that one I want to go back to the PV and Tannat. So, what we ended up doing here was we just stopped telling people about Norton. We would pour our wines, and then in the middle of it, I would just have an unlabeled bottle of Norton, and I would pour it. And then I go, Hey, what do you guys think about this? Oh, we love it. It's so elegant, it's structured well, has fantastic acid and tannin on the back. And I go, Well, this is Norton. They would say there's no way, I hate Norton. I don't have that Jammy notes on it. I go, this is Norton. This is 85% Norto, you know what I mean. I would go through the whole spiel. And I go, see you are a Norton fan. You just had so much bad perception of what a Norton is, and that not all Nortons are the same. Again. You cannot treat a Norton like you treat a Merlot. You can't beat it up. And this is what I mean. I tell people, This is what we specialize in. This is our life.

## **Fred Reno**

Well, what you've explained to me here Dustin is exactly what I experienced myself. At the Homestead resort, where I've been the consulting project manager for three years on this program called the Virginia Wine Experience. The first time we had a Norton producer that we serve their wine at the end of the dinner was DuCard. And I watched at the end of the dinner, it was the wine that everybody at this dinner wanted more of. I went, Oh, that's it. And I turned to Scott Elliff, the owner. I said, Scott, I get it now, when the consumers are served Norton with no preconceived bias, and is served in the right atmosphere. And also, people Quaff, wine these days, you do not quaff, Norton. You sip it. You ponder. That's what I love about it. I call it an intellectual wine. I've said that same thing. And this was at the end of the dinner so they're not quaffing, they're sipping. And I looked at



him, and said, “So I get it. It's not the consumer, it's the trade and the press, who have created this whole atmosphere where people either love it or hate it. This polarizing bias. But when the consumer goes into it without a bias, and it's served in the right atmosphere, they're like, Oh, this is really good.

### **Dustin Minor**

So, I mean, from that aspect, when we started, people started talking about us. They have a Norton there, you wouldn't believe it. So, we started getting customers from all over. And this is the point where we actually opened up the big facility with our tasting bar area, and we are getting people from DC, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, North Carolina, to come and just try our wines and they would say you are the Norton people. I don't know how I became the Norton guy, but it was crazy.

### **Fred Reno**

This '23 you've opened immediately it appears darker in color, yep, no question about it. And a more dense, concentrated fruit, clearly, but still a really good structural balance between all the elements.

### **Dustin Minor**

The 2022 we didn't saignée the Merlot at that point I was just getting, used to Merlot. This is the first year that we saignée the Merlot. Okay, we added a little more. So, this is a still 85% Norton, 7% Merlot. And then the rest is a split between PV and Tannat. And what that actually ended up doing was, the Tannat brought all those fantastic tannins at the end the PV on the mid palette, but the Merlot, adding that even just 2% more Merlot really took away from the acid and bitterness on the mid palette. And it just makes a nice, elegant, smooth wine, which is,

again, this is a wine I had three years in the making, and I think this is the first time that I nailed it like, I felt like I nailed it. You know what? I mean, this is exactly what I was aiming for in a wine, and Fred, this was just bottled a month ago.

### **Fred Reno**

It's a pretty wine. And again, with 5,10, years bottle age this wine will be remarkable. That's the transformation of Norton. So, we're in such an embryonic stage of this. When I was interviewing Todd Kliman for my podcast, the author of *The Wild Vine*, he made some statements at the end of the interview that I thought were fascinating. He basically said, what if we didn't have Prohibition? Because Norton, in the mid to late 1800s was the dominant grape on the East Coast and was getting all this praise and winning medals and awards. And then Prohibition, we lost all that institutional knowledge. We lost all the vineyards as they were ripped up. Who knows where we would have been today with Norton. We're just starting to redo it. Yes, we're just coming out and really beginning to understand what this is.

### **Dustin Minor**

It's so funny, and obviously, only being 40 years old today but when I was in high school, prohibition was a very, very quick thing. I was very surprised World War One and Prohibition were quick lessons, and they were over in your US history class, you know, they talked a little bit, obviously more about World War Two. And it's funny, growing up in the north, the Revolutionary War was a big one. Civil War, really quick. Moved on. And I never literally learned about prohibition right until I started getting into Norton. And I was like, what really caused this? And then you get down this rabbit hole of, you know why California

was still allowed to make religious wine and we couldn't, you know what I mean, like, why couldn't Norton be the Catholic wine?

**Fred Reno**

Interesting. You touch on it, because most people don't realize it. But during Prohibition, grape acreage in California doubled. Now, of course, it changed, unfortunately, the course and the character of the grapes they were growing then because they needed hardier grapes that could be shipped in boxcars like Alicante Bouschet and other similar grapes. But it doubled in acreage because all the vineyards were ripped out here in the East.

**Dustin Minor**

Yes, the ABC agents actually busted barrels. I mean, hey would come in and had pickaxes and busted the barrels.

**Fred Reno**

When you think about how crazy that is, it's just remarkable. You know, one of the side effects and collateral damage that most people don't realize about Prohibition, that's what gave us the IRS, You tell folks that and they say what are you talking about? I tell them that the government lost a little over 40% of its tax revenue before 1919, when all these states, mostly in the south, went dry and they lost their excise taxes, and so they needed to get a source of revenue. That's how we got the IRS, and we still have it today,

**Dustin Minor**

Just more death and taxes, Fred, death and taxes.

**Fred Reno**

More collateral damage. So, people don't realize when you try to legislate morality, I mean, good luck.

### **Dustin Minor**

Fred, you know, you hit the nail on the head. I have a lot of Napa Valley wine maker friends, and we discuss harvesting, you know, especially, us being on the same hemisphere, you know, I am not a Chilean wine maker, right? Obviously, our harvest still starts and ends relatively close. Right now, they're just finishing up all their harvest stuff and we always like to have a conversation. Either I fly out there, or they fly over here, and we have multiple wines talking about what we learned. And the thing they always like to say is that you Virginia wine makers have to use your education. Most years in California, the fruit comes in, fantastic, right? 70 degrees when it comes in, presses off, natural fermentations everything, right? I go, if I did natural fermentations on everything, I would have a bunch of stinky, spoiled wine. And it's not going to happen. Obviously, 2023 was our year, and that was the one year that I felt like a Napa Valley Winemaker. Everything came in, perfect, everything. I mean, I had time to pick, oh, let's let it hang for one more week, you know, no worries. Compared to, 2020, 2022 when I actually had to use my education, which I love.

### **Fred Reno**

Well, as Jim Law said to me early on, "we just don't have the benefit of that sun kissed fruit here in Virginia. He says this tongue in cheek.

### **Dustin Minor**

You know, it's funny, because last year 2023 was a perfect year for Virginia. 2023 was not a very good year for California. So, I actually had them calling me, going, Hey, what do you do in these kinds of

situations? I go, Well, this is what I do. And they would actually do it. I can't wait to have a couple bottles of their wine from 2023 where they actually had to do some wine making. For the most of them, they said it was actually really fun, which it is, really fun, because wine makers very rarely want to just be lazy. You know what. I know no one gets into any type of profession, whether you're a mathematician or firefighter, like to not do your profession that you want to do. And we're very fortunate that here, not every year is the worst harvest, and not every year is the best harvest. It's usually on an average, it's a perfect average where some varietals, I got to do some wine making, other varietals I don't. Again, we grow specific varietals just to showcase Norton.

### **Fred Reno**

One of the things that really came to me early on doing this podcast, was we still talk about Norton in Virginia as a varietal. We don't talk about it with a terroir story. Every great wine in the world somewhere has a terroir story associated with it. Now I think partially that's because Dennis Horton was the first to bring Norton back here, and when he was advising people, he said, well, you can put it in the worst part of your vineyard because it's bulletproof and it's going to survive, But you don't put your noble grape in the worst part of your vineyard. And we're starting to see an evolution here now where we're going to see that Norton tastes different because it's grown there, than that Norton, it tastes different because it's grown there. And I was kidding Jenni, at Chrysalis about all the time, and say, Jenni, you kind of stumbled into this after 25 plus years of growing Norton, largest vineyard in the world, reputedly. You have four or five different Nortons because you and your wine making staff over the years have discovered what type of Norton you can produce best from that part of

your vineyard. And as a result, you confuse people, because you have all these different Nortons, but they're all reflective of a different growing in part of your vineyard. We're going to need to start to get more and more people focused and when I say terroir, I always like to explain what I mean? I see it as a three-legged stool. The first, of course, is climate. All agricultural products are determined by climate. There's no way around that. Secondly, it's not just soil with site selection, its elevation, its aspect, it's all the things that go into that. And then what you touched on, what made me think about this is the third is the hand of man. What you do with that resource once you get it in the cellar? And that's why they call it the art of winemaking.

### **Dustin Minor**

Yes. I always tell people, especially when they come here, I can't sing, I can't draw. But I can make a beautiful glass of wine. And I think through the history of how I started drinking wine, understanding wine, and really defining my palette, and then I was very fortunate to have a lot of well off friends that could afford very good bottles, that I was able to hang out with and have a good bottle of, Wow, that's something that tastes like a \$500 bottle of wine, right? So how do I with my organic chemistry background, chemically make this what's going on in this enzyme process of this grape to really make it to where it's like that and that's just the way my mind works. It's why I was a very good Fire Marshal, because you take a house that's burned and you're able to go back to pinpoint his is what started the fire. Same with wine making. What is making this bottle so good. And how can I make my varietals or the blend to make it where I wonder what other wines can I grow with this to make that wine? And that's why, again, we had Merlot. We did a little more Merlot. The Merlot that we're growing is very specific for this, Norton, that's it. That's all we're doing with it.

**Fred Reno**

That's very cool. Well, hey, Dustin, I want to thank you for your time. This was enlightening, and yet another good episode I can add to my series about talking all about Virginia. Norton.

**Dustin Minor**

Okay, I loved it. Thank you, Fred.