GABRIELE RAUSSE

Monticello - Charlottesville, VA

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Interviewer: Amy C. Evans, Southern Foodways Alliance
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[Begin Gabriele Rausse Interview]

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Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans on Thursday, June 19, 2008 and I am in Virginia at Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson, with Gabriele Rausse. And so would you please say your name and what you do here?

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Gabriele Rausse: My name is Gabriele Rausse, and I'm Assistant Director of Garden and Grounds. And I do a little bit of everything but mainly propagation of the plants. I'm responsible for that part. These are old plants, which actually are kept at Monticello; they're not the ones that we produce for resale. And, of course, I'm responsible for the vineyard because that is my background, but I do everything they ask me to do. **[*Laughs*]**

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AE: Now I understand what brought you to Virginia was the Zonin family and Barboursville Vineyards, is that right?

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GR: Yes, I was brought over on April 1976 to start a vineyard in a farm, which was not purchased yet, actually, which the farm was purchased on April 13. It happens to be Jefferson's birthday, so I remember that after we departed, the money in the bank, we got back—from the purchase—we got back a $2 bill. And my boss [Gianni Zonin] was happy. He said, "Well, it's a good start. **[*Laughs*]** So yeah, I was brought over by the Zonin family to start Barboursville Vineyard.

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AE: And I—I read also that you have a degree in Agricultural Science from Italy. Can you talk a little bit about your background and what you were doing before you came to Virginia?

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GR: Sure. Well I think my father wanted me to be a lawyer, but when I went to the University of Milano to—to put down my name for what I wanted to do, there were 300 people in front of the lawyer office, and there was none in front of the Agricultural Sciences office, so I decide to go into Agricultural Sciences. And I was raised with a lot of respect for farming, for producing your own food and all these things, even if my father was not a farmer. He was an accountant. Actually, we had two small farms, and everything we ate was coming from the two farms, so I fell in love with what was happening there. And when I finished my university, my first job was actually in a winery, which is Tenuta Santa Margherita, which still exists, actually—the very popular wine in the United States. In the Italian restaurants you always find the Pinot Grigio from Tenuta Santa Margherita. And then I went to the military service. When I came back, I worked in Australia for a while, and I really love Australia, I wanted to go back. And the plan was really to do something in Australia, but it happens that immigration were closed for a couple of years, so while I was waiting, first, I went to France, and I worked south of Paris, actually, in a nursery. And eventually, I had the offer to come to the United States, and I thought it was a good idea to improve my English. So I accepted a trip to the States with the plan of taking off for Australia, as soon as I was getting my visa. And it took, actually, a year and a half to get the visa; I got it in December of ’77. By the time I was sort of in love with what I was doing in Virginia—and, of course, there was no plan to be successful, so that was even more attractive to me

because with the success, there are responsibilities and lots of work. And so I thought it was a nice adventure and I kept going and it ended up to be a success, whether I like it or not.

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So, of course, I—I stayed in Barboursville six years as a Manager and Vice President of the company. I stayed a bit longer as Vice President of the company, but I eventually decided to go in a different direction for many reasons that maybe I shouldn't go into now. Maybe I'll write them in a book, and then you will find them after I die. **[*Laughs*]** But I—I decided to move forward, and I came to another farm, which is not far from here. Actually, I started another vineyard, another nursery, another winery, and I was there until 1995, when the pressure of the wine industry, the politics of the wine industry started to be too much for me, and those are things that I don't like. And so to come to Monticello was really a—to take a break for all what was happening. And, well, it wasn't so much a break because also at Monticello there were a few vines that I actually grafted in 1984 for them and—and so I started to dance again with my grapes and my wine. I started my own winery, because at Monticello I wasn't busy enough, so I had to do something else. And I started to do a lot of consulting, and so now I find myself working twenty-four hours a day sometimes but—but I'm happy with what I do.

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AE: Well, if I can go back to when you were in school in Italy and—and learning Agricultural Science, is it something that—since the wine industry in the States is so young, and it's obviously so old in Italy, what kind of just knowledge and appreciation does—does your average Italian and young person in Italy grow up with for wine and winemaking?

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GR: Well, I have to tell you something which is sort of important for the Italian agriculture. Grapes is the only agricultural product which is not supported by the government because it can make it on its own. So it doesn't matter what you try to be in the agricultural or agricultural field; you will end up to learn about grapes because that is a must. I don't think there is a person who has a backyard in Italy that doesn't have a few grapevines. First of all, they do very well there, but it's part of our culture, and a glass of wine was always served on the table all my life. I mean I don't—I don't remember when I had the first drop of wine. I'm sure it was mixed with water, but I was certainly very young and I've—actually, I raised my children the same way, and none of them seems to exceed on the use of wine. None of them seems to be attracted by other alcoholic product. It's part of our meal. And I have to say that I generally stay away from wine before the dinner starts, but I will start to drink it after I had something to eat, and that makes a big—a big difference to appreciate it and also not to get too excited, happy about it—whatever you want to say **[*Laughs*]**.

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So now, going back to what—to what, you know, happened in the Agricultural School in Italy is, as I said—it is our most important crop. We are the biggest producer of grapes in the world and, of course, we've been always racing with—competing, excuse me, with France on that. But I mean, once France lost the colonies—North Africa—we have been always the biggest producer of—of grapes. As far as the quality of the wine, well, I think the French were ahead of us, but we have been catching up, you know, pretty quickly, I think—pretty well. So Italy has so many different varieties of grapes planted; there are actually over 1,300 approved by the government as grapes that you can grow and make wine out of it. The only grapes that it is out of law to use and to produce are the—what are called French hybrids, which you can grow, but you have to drink the wine yourself, so you cannot sell the wine made with hybrids.

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Believe it or not, when I came to Virginia, the only grapes which were planted in Virginia were hybrid grapes—with maybe in the corner of the four vineyards which were around a few semi-abandoned *vinifera* **[*vitis vinifera,* grape vines native to Europe and the Mediterranean]** struggling, trying to say, "We are here like all the other vines, but we are not respected enough." So, of course, now it's changed; there is much more **[*Phone Rings*]** *vinifera* vines planted. I think there are probably 250 acres of hybrids and 2,800 of *vinifera*. This is the proportion, actually.

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AE: And so did your—your family in Italy did—was there winemaking going on when you were coming up in your—in your home?

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GR: Well, I told you my father was an accountant. He was actually managing a woolen mill, but we had two small farms, each of them was thirty acres, and in both farms we were producing grapes. Only in one we were making the wine there, which was, you know, used by the people who were working there and we were getting, you know, some for our own use. In the other farm, it's that the grapes were brought to a cooperative, and the cooperative was making the wine, and they were returning to us wine made by the cooperative and some money. But, as I said, you know, all grapes and wine were—are part of our culture, so it's the first thing you plant, if you have a piece of land.

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AE: When you worked at Santa Margherita what kinds of things did you learn working there?

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GR: I learned how to sweep the floor, how to **[*Laughs*]** take away the pruning from the vines and from the other, you know, fruit trees that they have. It was a very big farm. It was 4,000 acres, so I've seen more there than anywhere else I've seen the rest of my life **[*Laughs*]** because the 4,000 acres were producing everything. It was land, actually, which was taken away from the sea because it was a lagoon right—and so they were building dams and creating highland and in the highland there were all these different, you know, agricultural products. It was a beautiful place.

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AE: And now the Zonin family is there. They're one of the largest winemakers in Italy, is that right?

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GR: Yes, that is correct. They have about, I think, almost 10,000 acres in grapes. In different parts of Italy, actually. Even if the beginning was in—near Vicenza [Italy], where I'm—where I'm from and where the industry started, but they decided eventually to expand and have a vineyard in eight other regions in Italy. So they—they are very well established, and I have to say that they were very brave to have ventured themselves in coming to—to Virginia. I don't think—I don't think—well, first of all, nobody was speaking any English of the Zonin family, so I was also the interpreter for their—for their, **[*Laughs*]** you know, desire of communicating with the accountant, the bank, and **[*Phone Rings*]** lawyer—whoever—whoever we were supposed to talk to, so it was a very nice adventure, I have to say.

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AE: And how did they find you? How did they know to come to you to bring you to Virginia?

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GR: Well, we lived three miles away one from the other, and they always knew my family, and my father was actually in the Rotary Club with Gianni Zonin, who is the person who brought me here, so I think it was a little bit—you say they conspired to bring me here, is that correct? Yeah. Yeah, I think my father could not control me, and so he decided with Gianni Zonin to put me to work and do something, which makes sense. **[*Laughs*]** So that's, I think, how I end up—end up here. I think they were glad that I didn't go to Australia. It was a bit too far.

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AE: So can you remember what you thought of Virginia when you first arrived here and the *terroir* **[*the special characteristics recognized in a grape, as a result of geographical and environmental influence*]** and the thought of—of starting a vineyard here?

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GR: Yeah. Well, there is one thing, first of all, that, before we came, we looked at the climatic condition of Virginia and, you know, the average rainfall is the same of my town: forty-three inches. The average climate is the same as my town. The extremes were slightly different. The general look is what you find in *colli di Berici*, which are all the hills around Vicenza. So when I came, it looked like a very familiar place. And the thing, which, of course, was the most unexpected, were the high temperature, you know, some time in the summer and the cold temperature some time in winter, which end up to be not so deadly for the vines probably

because they didn't last a long time, but it was certainly scary to see the thermometer to go below zero or to go over 100 degrees for a night. So that was—that was different.

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For the rest, you know, I have to say that I was very well accepted by the community. They laughed a lot at me and—because what I was doing and they said, "Well, if it could have been done, somebody else would have it done." And I remember when I went to visit the Commissioner of Agriculture in June of '76 with my boss, and of course Gianni Zonin was speaking very slowly so I could translate and, of course, it was translated with my mouth but also with my hands a little bit. So the Commissioner of Agriculture, at the end of my fifteen-minutes talk, he opened the drawer, and he decided to answer with his hand, and he pulled out a box of cigar, and he said, "The future of Virginia is tobacco and not wine," which made us to understood that it was time for us to leave his office. **[*Laughs*]** And I went back to him in 1978. Actually, he called me and asked me to go there and plan to spend a day in Richmond. And I went to his office, and there were two dozen scientists from Virginia Tech and from USDA and each of them explaining why what I was doing didn't make any sense and could not be successful. So the plant pathologist gave me a list of all the diseases that affect the vines, and the virologist gave me a list of all the viruses which affect the vines, and when they finished their six-hour talk, I told the commissioner, "I'm sorry that I had—that you had to disturb so many people to tell me to go home, but I'm in the Land of Freedom, and I don't disturb anybody, so I should be allowed, I think, to continue with my experiment." And I remember that the professor of plant pathology for Virginia Tech, he stood up and he said, "As long as you throw away your money or the money of the people you work, for that is perfectly all right with us. The moment you get a Virginia farmer excited about something that doesn't make any sense, we have the moral duty to stop you."

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And so I said, "Okay. I—I understand. And when they come to ask me what I'm doing, I'll just tell them I don't know what I'm doing," and that was the finish—I mean the end of our six-hour conversation, if you want. And I have to say that it took a while for the people to start to believe that *vinifera* grapes could be grown, but because we were not successful in the first year when we planted the first vines in Barboursville, we lost the—about fifty percent, we decided to start our own nursery. And that's really what changed because—the whole situation—because we started to produce grafted vines, which had no problem to go through the winter, and we realized that—that was certainly one of the problems that Virginia had.

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The problem was—was also in California, if you want, but in California, the weather is so good that the poorly grafted vine will be able to survive. In Virginia, a poorly grafted vine will—vine will die. And so I think that if we made a difference on the industry, which didn't want to take off, we certainly proved that we could produce a grafted grapevines. We could take the winter of Virginia.

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AE: So there were a couple of wineries here at that time, were there not?

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GR: Okay. When I arrived in '76, I think the only license which was issued was Farfelu Vineyard. I think Piedmont Vineyard got it in 1978. Meredith got it, maybe in '78 and maybe '77. And then there was Mountain Cove, which I think got it more or less '77—'78. So I think we were fifth license issue in Virginia. There was also a winery in Petersburg, which was making, I call it synthetic wine, because it was made with sugar, water, and acid. And I don't

remember the name, but they were producing this, you know, wine which didn't have anything to do with grapes? So we were certainly the first which planted *vinifera* in certain quantity because all the other were hybrids, you know—a few vines.

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I remember that when Piedmont in 1978 produced their first *vinifera* wine, they were seven bottles of Chardonnay. And I went for dinner at Mrs. Furness, who was the owner of Piedmont Vineyard, and it was a big dinner with over eighty people, and we sat down and the wine was French. And I asked how come that you serve French wine, and she said, "Well, you know, we started to produce this year, and our production this year was seven bottles, so I couldn't serve seven bottles to eighty people." And then I was sitting at the right, and she asked me, she said, 'When do you think you will produce your first wine?" And I said, "Well, we already produced the first wine—I mean I produced 1,000 bottles this year—but we didn't have a license, so my boss said I can drink it myself." **[*Laughs*]** And she said—she jumped off the chair and said, "I don't believe it." She said, "I planted my Chardonnay in '72, and I got seven bottles in '78. How can you have 1,000 bottles, if you planted in '76?" So I kept my mouth shut but I—I realized that there was a lot of guessing in how to plant the vines, how to handle them, and what to do with them. I don't think there was really anybody who had done the job before. There were people, you know, from the university, which were consulting, but they were always people who had studied and write a book, rather than done the job. And that, you know, makes a big—a big difference.

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So when we released our first vintage, which was the '79 vintage, we produced 15,000 bottles, and people really started to say that we were getting the wine from Italy and putting it in the bottle. But if they knew that the regulations there are, you cannot bring a drop of wine from

Italy without the ATF [Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms] and ABC [Alcoholic Beverage Control] knowing and without—and without them charging for the tax on the drop of wine that you bring in. **[*Laughs*]** But anyway, that was the story in the beginning, and then people started to come. Actually, I remember when the Commissioner of Agriculture of Virginia came, and it was 1981, I think. Well, he said, "I can't believe that you have a beautiful vineyard, and I've heard so many stories about this place that I thought there—there was nothing here. And, instead, I see—I see a lot of vines and a lot of grapes." So there was certainly a—how can I say—a certain disappointment, if you want, that we were successful with our grapes because the people who started with hybrids wanted *that* to be the vine of Virginia. And I remember, actually, there was an interview given to Professor Galet, who was the Professor of Viticulture at the—the Montpelier University in France, and he was brought over, and they gave him the hybrid wine to taste, and he said he never tasted wine made with hybrid as good as the wine that he tasted in Virginia. And, of course, I think, in the back of his mind he said, "As long as they make stuff like that, we will keep selling French wine." **[*Laughs*]** He was certainly not trying to help Virginia; he was trying to help France. He didn't say that the wine was wonderful. He said that it was the best wine he ever had made with hybrid grapes, right. So it was a pretty direct statement that—on—on what he—on what he said. And you know, now, you know, because also the wine technology, the—the—the enology, etcetera are progressing and we know much more than we knew thirty years ago. You can make, you know, decent wine also with—with hybrid grapes, but, you know, at that time, **[*Sighs*]** it was more the tradition, rather than what the school was teaching. And I remember that I discovered that also when I went to UC Davis in June of '76, when my boss came back and we met with Professor [Harold] Olmo, who was the Director of the School of Viticulture in—in UC Davis, and he was in his last year. And he said, "I'm going to

retire this year, but you will live long enough to see every state in the United States to produce grapes for wine." And look, he died last year, and so he lived long enough to—to see every state in the United States to produce wine.

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But the reason why I brought him up is because, visiting someone in California at the time, I found out that there was no connection or very little connection between the university and the producer. Of course most of the producers we visited were of Italian descent; they had a lot of faith in what their granddaddy taught them, and they thought that they didn't need the university. UC Davis was already, at that time, the best university in the world for winemaking, but nobody was paying attention to them. And actually, I have to say that—that I do respect a lot Robert Mondovi for being a little bit of person who did evolution, if you want, because he said, "We have a wonderful climate, how come that Europe, which has a lousy climate comparing to us, produced better wine than us."

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And so he started to look at the possibility of improving the wine industry in California, because, I assure you, there wasn't much there when I went. I—I think Napa Valley was just a—in the beginning, so it's—it's—it's very, you know—completely—I went to Napa Valley six months on February of this year, and I couldn't believe how things changed in California—visited UC Davis again. I went to two community colleges, and I realized that, you know, that is a total new world over there now. And it comes from the fact that Americans are now so interested in using wine as a beverage. You know, when I made my 1,000th bottle of wine in '78, and my boss told me to drink them, of course I gave some of this wine as a present for Christmas and actually, my wife made a special label, you know, for the people the wine was given to. And we were going to a party in a certain house, and we saw our bottle of wine there on the—on the

counter or on the fireplace—oh, what do you call it—mantle, right? And then a week later, we were somewhere else and we found that—that bottle had already moved to another house because the person didn't drink it. He gave it to a friend, and the friend was giving it to a friend and to another friend. And so I realized that nobody had ever opened a bottle of that wine. Everybody was giving it to somebody else. They were—I don't know if they were afraid of it or if they just didn't care—that was the main thing. So I did, one day, say, "Well, look. Well I came to produce wine. I came to a place where nobody drinks it." So I felt that I was done with the production I needed to do that year because nobody was opening a bottle.

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I do remember a bottle went to an Italian lady who was living here, and she was the only one **[*Laughs*]** who called me and said, 'Hey, pretty good." But she was Italian, so she didn't count. Oh, it was—it was pretty—it is interesting how the things, you know, change. And I remember going to, you know, a house for dinner, and they were opening a bottle of wine, which was untouchable, you know. It was anything but drinkable wine, and nobody said a word; everybody said, "Well, you know, this is pretty nice. It's for me?" They say, "Oh yeah, yeah, very nice, thank you." **[*Laughs*]** So things changed—changed a lot and in a certain way, I like, you know, the way the American approached themselves to wine because while in Europe people are sort of committed to the wine they like, they don't need to try anything else because they know what is good and therefore they drink. And here they keep adventuring themselves in trying, you know, new kinds, new varieties, new brands, and they love to know more, and they love to really go deep in finding out what is going on. I'm sure that today, the average American knows about the wine it drinks much more than the average Italian now because they are more interested in learning and finding out.

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AE: I know a lot of people consider you the father of viticulture in Virginia, and I'm starting to learn why, but do you think that it—it took an Italian to come here and—and establish the industry here in Virginia?

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GR: Well, it's difficult to answer the question because the French people, which I run into, you know, these thirty years they always ask me the same question: "How did you find this place? How did it go through your mind to come to this place?" Well first of all, it was not my idea. It was Zonin's idea. But I realized that nobody would ever adventure himself in something like that because everybody is so proud of his, you know, little spot, little *terroir*, little area. I mean even, you know, among the French, you know, the Bordeaux—the one from Bordeaux thinks that the best wine is from Bordeaux, and the ones from Burgundy think that the best wine is from Burgundy. And the people from Piedmont think that the best Italian wine is from Piedmont, and the ones from Tuscany think that they come from Tuscany. So I think that probably any Italian with my background would have done the same thing. I didn't have anything, you know, **[*Phone Rings*]** special comparing to other people, and we might not know much about how to raise a buffalo, but we know how to grow grapes because that is a—our life. So I would say that any other Italian with my background could have been the father of the Virginia wine **[*Laughs*]** industry. It just happened that it was me, right. **[*Laughs*]**

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AE: Now are there things and practices in the vineyard and—and with the vines and—and working with them that are still, today, different than what native Virginians who have wineries that they're doing that are different techniques and styles?

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GR: Well, there is one thing that, for sure, was different from what they were doing in the United States, in general. No doubt that the Virginian that planted the grapes went to California to look at what they were doing, and in California you don't need to protect the graft during, you know, the winter. In Italy we heat up the vines every winter—at least in the north of Italy—and by doing that, we protect an area, which, especially when the vine is young, it's very delicate. But we also give ourself the guarantee that if a cold weather comes, enough of the grapevine which produces the *vinifera* fruit, that is protected to be able to put out a new shoot and put you back in business in a matter of a couple of years, rather than having to replant everything. This is something which was unknown here when I—when I came. Of course in Italy, the place where I come from, in 1927 we lost each vine, if they were not covered. A lot of people, you know, they start to do it, and then they get lazy and say, "Oh, it works anyway." And it is true that most of the time it works, but in 1927 there was a very early spring, and then the winter came back, and so the vine which had already—the sapling, they just exploded. They literally exploded. My father told me that in 1927 they thought there were machine guns in the field from the noise of the vines exploding because the sap froze inside the vine.

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You know, the vine has a very unique vascular system in the sense that the vessels are very large in diameter. There is a lot of water inside—inside the vine and they like drought, they like to pick up a lot of water deep in the—in the ground. And I—I think since 1927, I've always

seen the vines covered in my part of Italy. In Virginia now, you know, everybody does it in the first two or three years, and then they let it go. I don't know. I always think to what my father told me so—. **[*Laughs*]** I think I cover them up. I cover them up every winter.

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AE: And so you left Barboursville after it had gotten established and you moved to Kluge [Estate Winery and Vineyard], is that where you worked after that?

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GR: No. After I moved to a farm, which is a mile from here and the name was Simeon Farm, and it was owned by Stanley Woodward, who had this farm for many years, and he told me I never was able to produce anything—this place—and they wondered if we could try with grapes, and so I was very happy to start a new adventure. Of course Barboursville didn't want to let me go, so I was finishing to work at Simeon, and every evening at five o'clock, I was going back to Barboursville and working until midnight there. And so that kept going for three or four years, until I couldn't do it anymore. But I'm still, you know, as a Board of Director as Barboursville, so I still see the Zonins when they come over and all this.

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I—no, I started this new—this new vineyard, which in the beginning was sort of very slow in taking off because the owner was a pretty old person. He didn't want to open to the public, and I remember when finally I convinced him in 1989 to open to the public, the sale went up 100 percent immediately. And then I—I scared the accountant because he said he was not prepared for any such sudden change on the economics of the—of the—of the farm, right. And eventually, the owner died in '92. The son came in and decided to get rid of me as shareholder,

first of all, filing Chapter 13 [Bankruptcy], and then he changed the name of the place to Jefferson Vineyard. And I knew that that was not Jefferson Vineyard, so I decided it was better for me to come to work at Monticello, which is where Jefferson was. Of course there is a history behind that farm; Simeon Farm is the land Colle, which is the place where in 1773 Fillipo Mazzei came. And Fillipo Mazzei was an Italian from Tuscany who came over on the request of Benjamin Franklin and John Adams and George Washington to start a Mediterranean horticulture in Virginia. So he's the person who brought over olive trees, citrus, and vines to sort of test the—the possibility of growing all these plants in Virginia. And he was not successful for many reasons. Probably the main reason is that in [seventeen] '76 the [American] Revolution started—well [seventeen] '74 was one of the worst winters there was, so the vines died, all the citrus died, all the olives died, so he brought them over again, and then in [seventeen] '76 the [American] Revolution started. Most of the *vignarons* [vineyard workers] he brought over went to fight. He was sent by Jefferson to Italy to raise some money to finance the Revolution. He was taken by the British and put in jail, so a lot of things happened, which didn't add to the betterment of this experiment with the viticulture and—and Mediterranean horticulture, if you want. But he certainly, you know, planted some vines. He planted some for himself in the place that is called Jefferson Vineyard, and he planted some for Jefferson also at Monticello. But Jefferson planted vines at least seven times. He doesn't talk much about what happened to them. He just said that he planted, and it was the good the fact that he kept replanting *vinifera*. I do admire him for that because he understood, especially after his trip to France, that *vinifera* was the way to go. So the vineyard that we have now actually reflects the vineyard planted in 1807, where there was a collection of twenty-four varieties of grapes, and twenty-two of them were *vinifera*. One was the Scuppernong, and the other one was a natural hybrid, which was found in

the garden of William Penn in Philadelphia and is called Alexander. So I—I think it kept going with *vinifera* until 1824, where he planted, for the first time, grapes which were American, and one of them was the Norton which was an American variety. But you come from where—Mississippi? So isn't that a lot of Norton planted there? I think so. I think that is the variety of Missouri and Mississippi—the grape variety of Missouri and Mississippi. But I mean, in 1824 he sort of gave up in planting *vinifera* and, of course, what was killing the *vinifera* was, you know, the Phylloxera or the fungi disease, but mainly because the vines were coming from Europe, and it was very difficult to ship plants from Europe. They were probably arriving here already well damaged you know. I have no doubt that Jefferson didn't see many of the vines to sprout, and if they were sprouting, they were certainly damaged enough that it could have been a problem for them to recover and to become a good grapevine.

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AE: Well what do you think about Virginia's 400—Jamestown's 400th anniversary was last year, and I understand there was a law for vines to be planted at Jamestown and people to grow grapes. And then the passion of someone like Thomas Jefferson and the frustration of someone like Thomas Jefferson who—who tried so hard and—and never really was able to make wine. And then, you know, here in the Twenty-first Century, Virginia now has—all these centuries later—this—this thriving wine industry?

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GR: Well, it's certainly true that, you know, when Virginia with a capital letter, by that I mean all across the United States they started to plant their crop and all these things. The first thing that they wanted was to be independent from—to be independent from the British, right, and that

was something that they wanted so badly that they were inviting people to have, you know—to be successful in growing whatever they were growing, you know, and wine was something which was definitely coming from Europe. I remember reading somewhere that when Lafayette came over to help the—Revolutionary Army he was not very happy of having to drink only oxidated [oxidized] wine. And I think Jefferson himself was very happy when he went to France as an Ambassador—Ambassador and he started to find out how beautiful wines there were—that were there. I mean I do respect the oxidated [oxidized] wine for what, you know, they are, but they certainly don't belong to the dinner table. They belong to the after-dinner or before—before dinner.

00:41:34

So the—their desire to be independent is what made, you know, the people decide that everybody should try to grow vines and, I don't now if this happened also with other crops. It probably did—they wanted people to—to try and to be successful. Of course, the knowledge of controlling all these diseases there are was zero, and so people were not able to be successful. I don't know if I answered.

00:42:08

AE: When you came here, were you at all exposed to the tradition of home winemaking in Virginia and Scuppernong wine and Muscadine wine and things like that?

00:42:16

GR: **[*Laughs*]** No. But I find out. I'll tell you what. I find out terrible things. I remember this trip to North Carolina in—to a winery which was producing wine made out of Scuppernong, and they show me the facility and gave me some wine to taste, and then, as they were showing me

around, they showed me this enormous press, and they told me this press came from Switzerland in 1893. And I looked at the press. It was a continuous press, and now I don't want to go in details—how to explain how a continuous press works. It is actually a press which is—we don't use anymore. But I look and I saw that there were still grapes inside, and I said, "How come, you know, we are in March or April and there are still grapes inside the press from the year before?" And they said, "Well we try to take advantage of having a cork already made." And if you understand how the continuous press works, you will understand that in the beginning, you had to create this amount of grapes, which are the one who allowed the rest of the grapes to be pressed, right? So they were leaving the grapes from the year before in there, not—so that they didn't have to remake what is called the cork. And you can imagine the amount of bacteria that there were in those grapes sitting there during the whole year, so it was a total disaster from—I mean there was no understanding on how wine should taste. Like there was the understanding that from the sugar, we make alcohol. That was the only thing which was there. I mean the wine actually was all—was all unacceptable to me. But it was a very primitive industry and, you know, and I'm sure that the home winemaking was not more, how can I say, evoluted [evolved] than they were making this sort of wine. One of the things that was most difficult to explain to people is that the winery has to be perfectly clean and I—I always admire when new French winemakers appear in the—in Virginia and they are hired from a winery, and it doesn't matter how clean the winery is; the first thing they do, they clean everything again. And I have to say, they are wonderful because that is the first thing that they do, you know, and unless, you know, a little bit of microbiology, you don't worry about it. I have my son helping me in the winery and I—I see it doesn't—it doesn't worry about—about microbiology. So—I don't know where we are. **[*Laughs*]**

00:45:11

AE: I wonder if, when you were a young man in Italy, if you learned in school about Thomas Jefferson and—and other Italians that made it over this way a couple hundred years ago.

00:45:22

GR: No. I mean when I came here, I knew who Thomas Jefferson was, but in school I never learned much about what was—what was the old American history. We learned more from the movies than from what we learned in school. I mean there was enough history in Europe that we didn't need to go anywhere else. So they were very, you know—very basic things that we learned, but I certainly—I certainly fell in love with Thomas Jefferson when I started to work at Monticello and found out what kind of person he was, and that's probably why I'm still here, you know. I—every time I learn a bit more, I am more and more enchanted about this man.

00:46:11

AE: Can you elaborate on that a little bit and what it is about him that you find so intriguing?

00:46:16

GR: Well, I find that he was very modern on easing the protection of a lot of things. Of course, because we are talking about wine, you know, the fact that he said that people should stay away from hard liquor and look at wine as the beverage—the alcoholic beverage to enjoy—is something that, if you think what happened after Jefferson, they certainly didn't listen to him. I mean look at Prohibition. I mean and look what is also happening—happening now, you know. We have, not to criticize, you know, the Alcoholic Beverage Control [ABC], which have been always very nice to me, but it is certainly a—how do you call it—entity, I don't know the proper

word—which is obsolete, you know. The rules are the same. The rules that—that were created, you know, because the—after the—the Prohibition, and while I respect the fact that they don't want, you know, young children to drink alcoholic beverages or that they want to get taxes on the wine, all the rest is a very elaborated bureaucratic, you know, machine, which doesn't make any more sense in 2008. So it's something we should be looking too. And while I say that the—the drinking of liquor—should discourage it, the drinking of wine during the meal should be encouraged.

00:47:59

You know, I said something to somebody one day, which scandalized the person because he said, "Oh, you—we'll have the mother for a drunk driver **[*the organization Mothers Against Drunk Driving*]** all after you—you say something like that." And I will say it will make sense for me to educate, you know, young people what—on what wine is to give them wine to taste, to give them also a glass of wine, if you want, when their parents are with them and can bring them home and put them to bed, so they feel what happened, but to teach them what they are dealing with, rather than from one day to the other, turn the key and say, "Yes, you couldn't drink any alcohol, and today you can drink as much as you want," right. To me that doesn't make any sense. I mean education of young people is, in my opinion, the solution to a lot of problems with—with what happened for—exceeding with—with alcohol, you know. So Jefferson definitely, you know, realized—that he realized also that a glass of wine was good for health. He said that. He said, you know, my doctor—even my doctor suggests for me to drink a glass of wine with my meal, but when I'm with friends sometimes I indulge with two or three glasses of wine. **[*Phone Rings*]** See, he's not exaggerating. He's just saying that, you know, two or three glasses of wine with a—with a meal is not—not out of place. But you know, a lot of other things

he was, you know, way ahead of his time because he could—he could see good and bad things that it took, you know, 200 years for other people to discover and to put—and to put together.

00:49:53

AE: Now with Jefferson not being able to convince his fellow countrymen that wine should be the beverage of choice and to support growing wine in the new colony and in Virginia, and then for 200 years to pass almost or 170 years passed before Virginia was able to start growing and making and selling wine here, and you coming in 1976 to grow wine. And it now only has been thirty years that you've seen such a growth in the industry and in people's appreciation for wine and did you—did you expect that? Did you see that on the horizon that that would change so much in your decades here?

00:50:36

GR: Not—not at all. The reason why I have no faith is because I realized that, in general, food was not a—a very important thing in the—in the American culture. Food was something that you needed to survive but one thing or the other—cook one way or the other way—didn't matter. For us, food was always—I mean in the Italian culture, food has been always very important, probably because we live in a country which was, you know, blessed by God from the point of—from the agricultural point of view, you know, because there is plenty of water and plenty of sun, and you can grow, you know, almost anything you want, you know, from the mountains to the seaside. It is a very unique place, so there is a culture of food, you know—the table, the dinner table, the place where all the family gets together and it is a master. At home there was a very precise time of the day when, you know, lunch was served and when, you know, dinner was served, and everybody had to be there; there was no excuses for not being there, unless you—

unless you were sick, you know. When I came to America, and eventually I got married with an American girl, I realized that for her, that didn't make any sense. You eat when you're hungry, and when you're not hungry, you do not eat. And sitting at the table didn't mean anything for—. So because this—sort of disrespect for good food—maybe not disrespect but lack of, would you say, sensitivity to good food. I said, "They can—they will never love wine because they don't understand food. How can they understand wine?" And instead, you know, things did change—did change a lot. They changed because a lot of people travel and, you know, when—when people come back from Italy, they said, "My God, any place I went, expensive or cheap, the food was always good." And I said, "Yeah, I think you're right." I said, "You know, I can't believe that, you know, in here, in Charlottesville itself, there are places which produce very unattractive food, and they survive." They are able to have customers every day who go there. And, you know, it—I've seen more—more **[*Laughs*]** than once a situation that, in Italy, it would have never been accepted, but in here it was—it was okay, you know. The food is not great, and I won't make any name of the restaurant or place but it was—you know, I couldn't find bread when I came to—to Charlottesville. The only bread that I could eat was a frozen bread called La Vie de France, and it was available at Foods of All Nations, which was the best store in Charlottesville. But I was going occasionally to dinner in—in private houses and sometimes I was surprised of what I could find. And I would say, "Where—where do you find your bread?" "Well, we flew to New York this morning. We bought the bread. We bought everything we needed for the dinner. We came home, we cooked it, and here's the dinner." So people had to go to New York to—to find some food, to find something fresh, something decent, something acceptable.

00:54:13

I still dream about the first time that I walked into a grocery store and that, you know, the produce section was microscopic, and the rest were always, you know, pre-prepared food and there was nothing—nothing really attractive. I mean I remember **[*Laughs*]** that my boss was asking me to cook when—when I was in Barboursville because he said, "You know, you're not a great cook, but you're certainly better than the other person that I've been—I have seen cooking in this place." **[*Laughs*]** So he was—he was funny. I remember more than one scene when, you know, I was, you know, preparing the very simple things—the things that you see your mother cooking at home—but he was saying, "This is better than they do at the restaurant." **[*Laughs*]** You know, and I don't want to go in details on the place I went and what I ate. It was terrible.

00:55:10

AE: Well, in the—that interim near the end of your—your time at Barboursville, who—who was buying Barboursville wine?

00:55:23

GR: You know, I tell you this story. When, finally, we produced the 15,000 bottles of wine, I remember a very scary thing. The distributor that we chose to sell our wine ordered ten cases, and I said, "Fine." They would be ready. After two months, he had not picked them up yet, and so my boss, for me, said, "Well bring them to him. Wake him up and go there and ask him what he's doing." So finally, I convinced him to come to get the ten cases, and I realized how scared he was of picking up these ten cases. He was wondering, "What do I do with them? What do I do with them?" You know, we are—we are starting now to convince people that California produced wine. How you can convince them that Virginia produces wine? So the guy was not interested at all. I think it took him maybe two months to sell the ten cases. And I remember my

boss calling me and saying, “Listen,” you know, “we need—we need to find a solution to this thing because it doesn’t make any sense.” Well eventually, in 1980 is when, you know, the law was passed that we could sell directly. So this was done by the five wineries that existed in 1980 which was Meredith, the Farfelu, Mountain Cove, Piedmont and us. And we applied for changing the law so that we could sell the wine directly to the retailer. And I remember going to the—to Richmond the morning that the law was proposed. There was nobody there. The distributor was less than worried about Virginia wine, and so they let us do whatever we wanted. The law was passed, and it was great because we started to be able to go from store to store and convince the people to try to sell Virginia wine. So that was a great thing.

00:57:30

Of course you know that two years ago [in 2006] the law changed again, and now we have to go through a distributor. And I can tell you an unbelievable story on what I’m going through selling the wine to the distributor now. I—I tell you—I tell you one because it’s very funny. I released two months ago my new Pinot Grigio [from Gabriele Rausse Winery], and I—I brought it to the distributor, and the Pinot Grigio was delivered to the food organization, the store where I was buying the frozen bread thirty years ago. And the guy looked at it and he said, “I don’t want it.” He said, “The wine is oxidated, and I’m not going to buy oxidated wine.” So the distributor called me and he said, you know, “I want to return all the wine that you—all the Pinot Grigio that you brought to me because it’s oxidated.” And of course I understood right away what happened, and I said, “Well, okay. Do you want—do you want money back or do you want another wine?” And he said, “Well,” you know, “you can bring me another wine.” “Well,” I said, “I need to be very honest with you and ask you a question.” I said, “I know that you refused the Pinot Grigio because it has a very 5little copper color right? So my question to you, which color would you like the wine that I’m going to bring you instead of the Pinot Grigio? You might have

heard of Blanc de Noirs that is a white wine made with grapes or the color from white to red; we can do the color you want. You just tell us which color you want." And she said, "I don't understand what you're talking about." "Well," I said, "if you Google the word *Pinot Grigio,* you will find on the screen a cluster of grapes which is exactly the same color of my wine. If the rest of the Pinot Grigio in the world is a fraud, that is not my problem. It could be made with other grapes, or it could be harvested too early, and then it doesn't have the copper color like it should, obviously, at the right time; or if you leave the skin in for a few hours, you would always have the copper color." So now Pinot Grigio is my best-selling wine. **[*Laughs*]**

00:59:38

But, you see, the distributor has no idea what he's selling. I'll tell you another story. I went to a winemaker dinner two months ago. This is another distributor for the south of Virginia,. And I go there at 6:30. The dinner was supposed to start at 7:00, and the representative of the distributor is there, and he said, "We have a problem." And he said, you know, "The wine is not here." I said, "Well you set up this dinner, you know, two months ago. Come to the winery, we come and we will be late, but we will do—whatever right." So eventually, the wine arrived. They asked me to entertain the people for half an hour until the wine chilled and then finally, the wine is served. And next to me is sitting the representative of this distributor, and when they served the first wine, he looked at me and he said, "This Chardonnay is not bad." And then they served the Viognier, and they said, "Hey," they said, "this Viognier is good." And then they served the Cabernet Franc, and they said , "Wow, I never had the Cabernet Franc so good." And then they served the Cabernet Sauvignon and they said, "This is wonderful!" And so I looked at him, and I said, "Did you ever taste my wine?" He said, "No." "And you are my distributor; you are the one who promotes my wine in Richmond and you never tasted it?" I said, "Thank you very much." "But," he said, "we had 2,000 wines. We cannot taste them all." I said,

"It doesn't matter to me." I understand very well that if I want to sell my wine, I have to do it myself, and the distributor is only somebody on my way, created by the, you know, ABC [Alcoholic Beverage Control] law and—and it doesn't—it doesn't make it easy, you know, to—to make the Virginia wine to take off.

But anyway, most of the wineries are open. Mine [Gabriele Rausse Winery] is not open, so when they are open, they have the opportunity to talk about their wine and all these things. I don't have the opportunity because I work here, and I have a lot of other things to do. But maybe one day, I'll open too.

01:01:38

AE: Well tell me a little bit more about your winery, just for the record, to—to clarify that you have—you maintain your own acreage and your own winery, and your name is on your own label and bottles of wine. How long have you maintained that?

01:01:48

GR: Well I—I started my winery in [nineteen] '97. Naturally—and the plan was eventually to leave Monticello and take off with my winery but I—I—difficult to do that. First of all, because I like Monticello too much. Second, because I don't have the money to, you know, take off with the winery with the way I should. Third, because I do a lot of consulting, and so I'm always everywhere but in my place. But I enjoy my life very much, so I don't see why I should change something that I—that I enjoy. And yeah, I mean I don't grow or—most of the grapes that I use because I get them either from people I consult for, you know from neighbors, and I—I make—I make a lot of different varieties that I don't grow myself. But I love to do it and, you know, don't ask me if I make money or losing money because I don't know. I think I'm losing money,

especially after the law change. **[*Laughs*]** But I—even if my father was an accountant, I was never interested in that part of the—of the—of the business. **[*Laughs*]** And I do a lot of things which I'm not—that a businessman would not do, but that's the difference at all.

01:03:19

AE: Can you tell me a little bit more about the consulting and how many wineries in the area you—you work with?

01:03:23

GR: Well, I've been working with a lot of wineries in the sense that probably at least fourteen wineries now which use my consulting. Some of them are on their own now, in the sense that they—they learned what they are supposed to do, and they don't need me anymore. But I planted more—or had planted more than forty vineyards, so now I have actually five that I'm currently consulting with, and it's more than what I need, but—but I do it anyway. **[*Laughs*]**

01:04:04

AE: And they—they use you from beginning to end sometimes, or is it just when you're planting?

01:04:09

GR: Oh, yeah, it depends. You know some has been keeping me—I have one which I have been consulting for them for eighteen years, and they still keep me there. That is a nice story behind that. That one is Stone Mountain Vineyard. Because I remember when the owner, which now passed away, came and purchased from me a few vines and planted them and told me he was doing an experimental vineyard because he wanted eventually to make a bigger vineyard. And he

eventually started to prepare the land, to build the road, because he was on a mountain and so he had to, you know, find a way to reach the places that were chosen to make the vineyard and—and so it took him probably, you know, four or five years to get everything going. And this is the moment the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] decided to take him to court because, they said, you know, "You—you," you know, how you say, "claim a lot of expenses about this vineyard, but we don't see any wine yet, so what are you trying to tell us?" Now remember that he came to me and asked me if I was willing to go to be a witness in court, and I said, "Yes, if you think I can be useful. And I went there and I—I remember there was a lady who was the judge, and there was a jury, and after I had a few weeks before interrogation at Federal Court here in Charlottesville to see if I knew what I was talking about, the, you know, the trial started and the judge told me, she said, "We know that you started Barboursville, that you are working at, you know, SimeonVineyard, at the time, that you consult for other vineyards, and you're respected in the area for what you do. And we have a very simple question to start with, which is how long does it take to start a vineyard?" And I said, "Well it depends, you know, where you start it. It depends on what is involved with, you know, the land that you choose to start your vineyard and, you know, there are many different parameters you can influence how long it takes to start the vineyard." And so the lady said, "Well give us an example." **[*Laughs*]** And I said, "Well," you know, "if I think how long it takes to start a vineyard in Tuscany, maybe that is an example which would make you to understand a lot." I said, "Usually, the grandfather removes all the large rocks from the field and the son removes all the—there's more rocks and the grandson plans the first vines, so three generations to start the vineyard." **[*Laughs*]** So she—I mean she started laughing, and she couldn't stop. The jury was laughing, and they couldn't stop, and for an hour it was, I assure you, a comedy because every time I was opening my mouth the judge was

laughing and the jury was laughing. **[*Laughs*]** And I think I convinced them pretty much that it's an adventure, especially in a part of the world where there is not a tradition, and it's an adventure which can last, you know, a lifetime. And eventually he got out of his, you know, problem with the IRS. And we started—but he wanted me to be his consultant, and so we started his vineyard. We started the winery and after, you know, eighteen years, I'm still there, you know, going, you know, twice a month to check the wine, to check the vineyard, to see, you know, if there are problems. And I think, more than once, I really left them speechless for little things that, you know, how to solve and the person, if he doesn't know—doesn't know, right.

01:08:00

AE: Uh-hmm.

01:08:02

GR: So—.

01:08:04

AE: So you're an Italian in Virginia producing European varietals. Would you say—would you say that you make Southern wine?

01:08:13

GR: **[*Laughs*]** No. I make a wine which reflects a lot of my character. Actually, now the wine industry is pulling everybody toward very heavy wine, very tannic wine, wine with a lot of structure, with a lot of flavor, and I do respect them—I mean I do respect this tradition, if you want, but it's not the kind of wine that I want to—to make. My wine is very gentle, very soft. It's not going to last for thirty years, but it goes well with food. And, instead, today, most of the

people are producing wine to win the competition, and to win the competition you need the wine with all these characteristics. I—I cannot drink them, I'm sorry. I can taste them. I enjoy to taste them because I always enjoy to taste a good wine, but having a wine for dinner for me is a totally different story. So I have a good follow-up, and I make a wine which is very Italian and very old-style, if you want, because also in Italy, you see how everybody is going for the gold medals and not for making a wine which is a good companion with food. I mean I'm—I shouldn't use the word horrified, but I am very surprised when I pick up a bottle of an Italian wine that I knew very well when I was there, and today it's totally different because they followed a new strain, you know, keep going around, right. And then people will start to go away from that and eventually go back there, and it's—but I stay with my gentle and soft wines because I love them.

01:10:06

AE: Can you talk about how the *terroir* here affects the grapes that you grow and the wines that you make?

01:10:11

GR: Well, you know, we have a pretty interesting old volcanic soil, and the best soil to produce grapes for wine is actually the young volcanic soil, that will be the first choice. The second choice is the old volcanic soil. We have a lot of red clay, and a lot of vineyards are planted in the red clay. But we have a lot of other less heavy soil, which a lot of people are experimenting with, and this seems to produce the better wine, actually. The loamy soil seems to be able to—to give you a better product, so the Nason and Tatum soil seems to be the one most wanted at this point. Of course they are not as deep as the—as the Davidson or—or the rapidum which are, you know, twelve, fifteen feet deep clay soil, and so sometimes it might be a good idea to have some

irrigation on the soil. I never used irrigation because I believe that the vine should find a way to get all the water it needs, but some shallow soil might need it. And it's—it's interesting how different rootstocks behave in a very different way, depending on the soil. So the soil itself is not—is not enough. The climate, of course, can change a situation. There are a lot of microclimates in Virginia, the soil, as I said, but also the rootstock makes a big difference, you know at Kluge, a couple of years ago when we harvested the—the grapes, every bin which was coming in, had the vineyard, the distance between the vines, to the variety, and the rootstock, and it was unbelievable. I mean the day that we were harvesting our Cabernet Sauvignon, there were four or five different chemistries on those—on those grapes because of the different soil and because of the different rootstocks and the different exposures. So it was interesting, at the end, to put them all together, but they were different wines which were put together. And you know, you see that also when there is bad weather, you know. You have a little area where the temperature is, you know, five, six degrees lower than in the other area where the, you know, there is fog, and there is no fog in your place. There is more—it's—it's very—it's very different from place—you know four or five years ago in Virginia, there have been several acres totally destroyed by the hail, which is not very common, but they were just a small area, you know. Sometimes I've seen, you know, a vineyard of twenty acres with two acres destroyed by the hail and the rest be okay, right.

01:13:17

So I—I'm not at a point of which I can give you the precise answer to your question because the more I'm involved with different vineyards and different situations, I realize that there are many more micro-climates in here than I would have ever thought, you know.

01:13:35

AE: Would you say that you're at all able to taste Virginia in your Pinot Grigio, for example?

01:13:43

GR: That's stretching it. **[*Laughs*]** You know, I compare the ability of tasting wine to the ability of listening to a piece of music and go to the piano and find the notes without—without knowing anything about music. There are people who can do that, and they have an ear, which is superior, and the same thing is for the—for the palate. I—I think I can distinguish a California wine from a Virginia wine, but they've been fooling me before, right. And so I prefer to say that I—I'm not sure if I can. And I have to have time to believe, you know, that—that people can recognize a certain vintage and a certain Château in France and all these things, you know. I'm saying there are exceptional people—and I remember a lady coming to Simeon Farm, you know, to taste the wine, and I had fourteen wines, at the time, and she walked into the tasting room. And I asked her, "Do you have any preference, or do you want, you know, to choose what to taste, or do you want to taste them all?" And she said, you know, "I never had a drop wine until two months ago, and I've been, you know, really fascinated by tasting it, but I think we should taste them all because I don't know anything about wine." And so we tasted them all, and I had the impression that she was really enjoying what she was tasting and at the end of my—of my presentation of the wine, I said, "Can you tell me which one is the best wine here?" And she picked it up right away. So that was a person who has an exceptional palate, but it's not—it's not for everybody.

01:15:35

You know I—I see over and over, you know, people that talk about wine, and they have no idea what they are talking about because they don't have a—you know, a palate which is really refined enough to be able to do that. On the other hand, I see people who don't know anything about wine, but they pick up a glass of wine and they say, "This is good," and they say,

"This is not very good," and "This one is bad." And—and—and so it's—it's—the comparison that I made with music, I think, makes a lot of—of sense because it is that way.

01:16:14

AE: When we've—and I've kept you here for quite some time, but I wonder if—if you don't mind, if we could talk for a minute more about your time here at Monticello? And I'm curious if you came to them or if they sought you out to work here on the grounds?

01:16:27

GR: You want the story? **[*Laughs*]** Well the story is this one, naturally, that when I decided I wanted to leave Jefferson Vineyard—for many reasons, one of them was that they called it Jefferson Vineyard—I applied for a job here, and of course what they would offer me was one-third of what I was paid at the vineyard, but I—I realized that I had to get out of the wine industry because the pressure was too much for me. So I applied for the job, and I came, you know, many, many times to ask what was the situation, and every time I was told, "Oh," you know, "there are more people who applied. We—everybody has the right to apply; everybody has the right to have an interview; everybody has the right to whatever." And so it was November of 1994, and I decided that I wanted to leave at the end of the year. And I mean I was supposed to give ninety-days notice, but I wanted to, you know, to close the end of the year and give the ninety-days notice. So I found an Italian company, which wanted me to work for them, and they made me a very good offer, from my point of view. And I got them to prepare a contract, which they signed, and then when they signed the contract, I said, "Give me one more chance to go to Monticello, and I will ask them—ask them if they want me or not, and they have to decide because if they say that they don't know, I come with you."

01:18:11

So I came here with a contract signed, and I said, "I have to give the answer to this Italian company within a week, so you have a week to decide if you want me or not. And they hired me the following morning so—." I don't know. You can put it the way you want, **[*Laughs*]** but I think I definitely wanted to come here, and that proved to them that I was interested enough. They were worrying that I was staying a very short time, and they asked me to guarantee them that I was going to stay at least a couple of years, and I said, "Yes, I can guarantee that." And based on that, they hired me, and they told me not to make any wine here, but I made it also for Monticello over and over illegally first and then legally. **[*Laughs*]** I don't know if you want to go there but **[*Laughs*]**—.

01:19:04

AE: Well was anyone paying attention to Jefferson's vines and—and vineyard before you got here?

01:19:08

GR: Actually, my brother-in-law planted the vines here because he was working here when, in 1984, I grafted the vines, so no, the vines were taken care of for like, you know, the rest of the orchard and but they were taken care of for the people to see them, rather than to make wine, right. So it was a different story when I came here.

01:19:36

AE: So was it hard for you, then, to see producing vines that people weren't doing anything with, and you had to make some wine? **[*Laughs*]**

01:19:43

GR: No, very—I'm very—I adapt myself to the situation. If I work, I'm a happy person so I—I didn't—it was not—it was not a problem. When I saw the grapes, I said, "Well, what do we do?" And they said, "Well, do you want to make wine?" And I said, "Yes." So I made wine the first year and did it the first, the second, the third, and then the ABC [Alcoholic Beverage Control] find out that I was making wine without a license here, and so they told me that I had to either get a license or bring the grapes to a place which had a license, which ended up, you know, that I brought—brought them to my place. And so the grapes are processed there [at Gabriele Rausse Winery], and then I bring the wine here, and it's sold at the gift shop, you know. In a couple days, usually. It's not much so—.

01:20:35

AE: And so when you—before you started making the wine at your personal winery, how were you doing that here?

01:20:40

GR: At Monticello? No, no. I purchased a little press. I purchased a little crusher, and I was doing it in the barn down here right in a very unsophisticated way. It was very, very basic. I mean there was—there was nothing. **[*Laughs*]** But, you know, if you have good grapes, it's not difficult to make good wine. If you have bad grapes because of the season, because of disease, then you need a way to make the wine, then you need a sophisticated winery, and then you need a lot of equipment. But if the grapes are good, you don't need much to make the wine.

01:21:20

AE: So how many bottles did you make at that first harvest?

01:21:24

GR: The first legal harvest or non-legal harvest?

01:21:30

AE: The first non-legal harvest?

01:21:32

GR: The first non-legal, I don't remember. I remember only the legal because they were 1,053 [bottles], and every label was at a number, right. The non-legal, I don't remember because we were—I was making it—we were using it, you know, for our own function or whatever, so I never kept track of how much wine I made. But you know, it was more or less—it was like a barrel plus per year in the beginning. And then I remember then the first legal one was [nineteen] '99; there was 1,053 bottles. Two thousand, there were 750; 2001 there were 1,000 again; 2002 there were almost—over 2,000, I think. So it depends, you know, from—from the situation, from the—from the year and—last year there were zero. **[*Laughs*]**

01:22:31

AE: What has that meant to the people here at Monticello who—the highers-up, if you will, that—that wine is being produced here after all these years?

01:22:39

GR: Well I remember when the first legal wine went to—on sale, it was announced with a little, you know, story on the local newspaper. And I remember that the gift shop where it was supposed to be sold said, "Well, bring ten cases." So I brought ten cases, and the store opened at

nine o'clock, and at ten o'clock the ten cases were sold. So I said, “What do you want to do tomorrow?” They said, “Well, bring ten more cases.” So the following day I brought ten more cases, and at ten o'clock the ten more cases were sold again. And so that afternoon the president [of Monticello] called me, and he said, you know, “This thing of the wine is driving me crazy.” He said, “People call me because it was announced in the newspaper to come there, and there is no wine. And then they tell them to come tomorrow and then the following day, there is no wine again. So bring all my—all the wine to my office.” And I said, “I cannot—I cannot do that because, you know, legally, I can bring the wine only to a place where there is a license, and your office doesn’t have a license.” And **[*Laughs*]** he said, “Well don’t worry about it.” “No,” I said, “I worry about it. I bring it to the store, and you bring it to your office yourself.” So we got on the third day and I bring all the rest of the wine, and he called me again and said, “Now what is the story that people want you to sign the bottle of the wine?” He said, “I don’t understand what is so special about this Monticello wine.”

01:24:06

I said, “What is special is only one thing.” I said, “It’s that the location is Monticello, and every wine is made in a very precise location in the world, and this time it happens to be in Monticello, so that’s why people are so excited.” I said, “I doubt the people will drink a lot of this wine, but everybody will keep it, you know, as a souvenir of the first wine, you know, made in Monticello since Jefferson time.” And they’ll remember that, you know, a week later, which was sold at thirty-five dollars was on eBay for $800 a bottle, right. So what that meant? It meant that it didn’t matter how good or how bad it was. It meant that because it was, you know, the wine made at Monticello, people wanted to have it. And you know, it’s interesting that it maybe a couple of years later I run into this person at the festival [Monticello Wine and Food Festival], and he came to me and said, you know, “I bought on eBay, you know, your—the wine made in

Monticello, and then I put it against, you know, Château Brion, Château Lafite and all these things, and your wine didn't really come out—it came out sort of in the middle." And I said, "What are you comparing?" I said, "Do you know what it's—what I make?" I said, "What I make is a Sangiovese, the style it was made 200 years ago, which was blending Trebbiano, Muscat Blanc, Malvasia—a wide variety. So it has nothing to do with the modern winemaking. It has to do only with the tradition that—that in Tuscany, well they don't even know why they were doing that. They know now but, at the time, they had no idea. They knew that blending those varieties, the wine was better. It was better only because when the Sangiovese was ripe, the other variety were not right, and so adding the right variety, they were low in the PH, so the chemistry of the wine was corrected.

01:25:54

I made the wine which is historically correct. I've never made a wine—I didn't want to make a wine to compete with Château Brion. If I wanted to compete with Château Brion, I'd come to get the grapes in Bordeaux, and then I make like Château Brion, right? So it was very interesting that ignorance, if you want, which was involved with all what happens. I remember in 2002, a lady stopped me on the road and said, you know, "That wine that you made in Monticello is so light. It's so light." "Well," I said, "you should be happy that it's so light because that means that I have a lot of wide variety producing and I blend it in half to correct even better the chemistry, which will have been wrong in the Sangiovese. But—

01:26:37

AE: So is that a—a welcome challenge for you to—to reach back in history and kind of try and recreate something that would have been here 200 years ago?

01:26:46

GR: Yeah, I—I love—I love to do it. I love to do it because, you know, Tuscany always had the reputation of producing the best wine in Italy, *with* the Piedmont, right. And do you know the reason why Piedmont and Tuscany were producing the best wine? Piedmont, because they are using mainly one variety called Nebbiolo, which naturally has a very low PH, so when you have a low PH the bacteria cannot affect the wine. In Tuscany, on the other hand, they will blend the Sangiovese with a wide variety, and the results were the same, the low PH. And that was the key thing before chemistry was, you know, where it is now to make good wine. So I love to—I love to do the same, you know, to go through the step that my ancestors went through in an attempt of making a wine which was lasting and making a wine which was tasting good.

01:27:42

AE: What do you think Thomas Jefferson would have to say about your wine here at Monticello?

01:27:46

GR: I'm sure he would love it. **[*Laughs*]** No, I'm sure he would love it because his, you know, approach—when he does his trip through France and, you know, through Italy, you see very well that—that he understands what he's tasting, you know. His first stop is in Auxerre, which is just before Burgundy, and he said, "The wine is no good there." Well it makes sense to me that the wine could have been no good there because he didn't have it with a lot of rain, not a blessed area to grow grapes, and so he just, you know, says another way that the wine is no good. And then he was—he stopped to go through Burgundy and, you know, he's surprised how beautiful the wine is. And then he gets out of Burgundy, and he goes to the Côtes du Rhône, and the first

place where he stopped is the Château—called Château-Grillet and he's enchanted with the wine, Château-Grillet. He doesn't say what it is, but he said, "The wine is beautiful here." Well it is Viognier. Château-Grillet or today produced Viognier, which is a beautiful variety, which now in Virginia is doing very well. And without saying much, he really raved about that wine, and then he goes, you know, South. He goes to Côtes du Rhône he goes to the south of France, and then we he got to Bordeaux and he tasted Château Brion he said," I have to send a case of wine to my son-in-law."

01:29:11

And so he got—he arranged for a case of the Château Brion to go to—to his son-in-law, and then he would go up to the Loire Valley, and he liked the wine in the Loire Valley. But when he goes back to Paris, he ordered only Burgundy. And Burgundy, especially at the time, was a very gentle wine. Pinot Noir is a very gentle variety. Of course now they make it that it tastes like—whatever it tastes. But, if you wanted, they would still make it the old way, and it's a very gentle wine, so a wine which goes with food. The Chardonnay the same thing: the wine which goes with food. And so you think that he chose the proper wine, rather than, you know, going toward the heavier of Bordeaux, which are, you know, good also, but you don't—you know, Jefferson was not a vegetarian, but he always said that he loved vegetables, and he was using the meat only as a condiment for the vegetables. And so you see that the wine, which goes better with that kind of food, that they either like the wine, the Burgundy, rather than the heavier wine of the Bordeaux, which goes with, you know, the meats. So, you know, we can talk forever. I like it very much. Everything he said was always perfect, was always the correct thing.

[*Laughs*]

01:30:28

AE: Well what—what would you say is the future of the Virginia wine industry, if you had to say?

01:30:32

GR: Well, you know, when people hire me or just talk to me about starting a vineyard and starting a winery, they always worry about what is happening in the world, right? Because we have, you know, Argentina, which is producing beautiful wine at a very low price. We have Chile. China planted 80,000 acres this year of grapes. They probably planted 80,000 also last year, and that would be, you know, our competition on the shelf. On the shelf, we have to compete with these people, but if you open the winery, if you start to bring people in, there is such a irreplaceable pastime in visiting a winery that the Virginia winery—the Virginia wine industry would thrive, as long as they make it easy, you know, for the tourists to go to the winery, and they help in that—in that direction.

01:31:36

You—you tell me what could replace for a family to go to visit, you know, two or three wineries on—on a Sunday, you know. The father likes to do this; the mother likes to do something else; the children want to do something else. Well usually, in the winery, there is enough going on that the children are not disappointed, and if the father likes the heavy red, he can have that heavy red; and if the mother likes the light white, she can have the light white. And after the glass of wine, you know, the father and mother are happy. The children are happy to see their father and mother happy, so it's irreplaceable, right? I—I can see it over and over. I mean when I was at Simeon Vineyard, my house was next to the winery, so we had chicken and we had geese, and I remember going to the [Monticello Wine and Food] Festival and letting the children telling their parents, "That is the guy who has the animal in the winery." **[*Laughs*]** And

it was something very special for them, but it was something that was attractive enough which got their, you know, attention, and they were dragging their parents to the winery, which had the chicken and the geese because they enjoyed that part of life. So no. No, I can see that if there was no—if there was not a possibility to—to offer the wine to the public directly, as you can do at the winery, there would be no hope for the Virginia winery because, you know, the costs are more than in China or in South America. And, of course, you know, the climate is not as perfect as it might be in Chile, and so it's hard to compete. But I think we can—we can create a new Napa Valley in Virginia with no problem.

01:33:21

AE: Do you recognize the role that you've played in the industry here over the course of the past thirty years?

01:33:27

GR: No, I don't. **[*Laughs*]** I'm just happy that everything happened. I told you that I hate politics, and now there are so many politics involved with the thing that—that I stay as far away as I can from all that. I—that really bothers me a lot. So I don't want to think and try to recognize what—not what I did, but what happened. Also, I think, to me, because—because—because what's going on is not what I like, you know, to happen.

01:34:02

AE: Well are there any final thoughts—positive words to—to end on or things that you want to—to leave with?

01:34:11

GR: Well, you know, I have to say that I would encourage, you know, anybody to have their own little vineyard, even if—even if they don't want to go commercial because it's a lot of fun to see what you can do with grapes. It's a lot of fun to teach to your children how to make wine. It doesn't mean that they have to learn to get drunk. Vice-versa, they are to learn to respect what it is. But it's a very—a very fascinating thing. It's fascinating to see how every year, it doesn't matter how much you try to produce the same product, it will always be different. It will reflect the climate that you had, the excessive rain, the lack of rain, you know, the high temperature, the low temperature; there is always something, which in the wine, can be found out about what happened that in year in the climate. Of course, when you have the sophisticated wineries in the store, you can always make good wine. But when you do it for your own consumption, it's very beautiful to see the, you know, variation that they'll have, so it's a very entertaining thing.

01:35:22

AE: Have you ever taken your own wines back to Italy?

01:35:26

GR: **[*Sighs*]** Yes. And I had different reactions. For the reason that I told you before, because everybody is stuck with what he likes, and he says, "Well your wine is not bad, but I prefer the Tenuta Santa Margherita Pinot Grigio because I've been drinking it all my life, and I like that and I'll stay with that," right. So I would say that I find more—more how can I say—not rejection but disappointment in Italy than—than in Virginia because they are, you know, stocked with, you know, their own thing. My father was the first who was drinking wine only from this region. When he passed away, he had over 2,000 bottles of wine in his cellar, and they were all gifts that he never touched because they were not from his own region. And for him, that was the

wine, and the rest didn't mean anything to him. So, you know, I like much better Virginia, where I can convince the people of the product I make—even if I've sent, you know, cases in Italy and the people who appreciate—who knows about wine, they were very surprised of what we can produce here. So the connoisseur did respect it. The one who just drinks wine for fun, they appreciated it as much.

01:37:03

AE: All right. Well I think that could be a note to end on, unless you have something else you'd like to—to finish on. But I appreciate you sitting here with me for so long. I've enjoyed it a lot. Thank you.

01:37:10

GR: Thank you very much.

01:37:13

[End Gabriele Rausse Interview]

