

CHRIS PEARMUND
Pearmund Cellars – Broad Run, VA

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Interviewer: Amy C. Evans, Southern Foodways Alliance
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[Begin Chris Pearmund Interview]

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Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans on Tuesday, June 17, 2008, in Broad Run, Virginia, at Pearmund Cellars, and I'm with Mr. Chris Pearmund. And Chris, if you would please state your name and what you do for a living for the record?

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Chris Pearmund: I'm Chris Pearmund, and I call myself a wine grower. I think that kind of encompasses the concept of growing grapes, making wine, and all the other attributes in running small businesses in the wine industry.

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AE: And may I also ask you to share your birth date for the record, if you don't mind?

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CP: August 2, 1961.

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AE: Now are you a native of Virginia?

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CP: No, I was born in London, England, actually. I'm a dual-national of British and American.

I—I find myself politically aligned as an American more than a Brit, though.

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AE: And what year did your—you or your family come to Virginia?

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CP: I came here as a kid about four or five—about five years old, I guess, and spent most of my childhood in the United States. As a young adult, I spent three years in England off and on—between six months and a year at a time. Actually, I came back from England three or four days ago. I go back quite often. I have four brothers and a father and grandmother still working and living in England and see them often and keep the—that part of my life open.

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AE: So may I ask what your college career was like and what you studied and where that was?

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CP: Disjointed. I did spend time in the US Air Force doing Microwave Radio. I went to a few colleges, never graduated—community colleges and—and in Virginia, Randolph Macon. I studied Psychology, Business and Marine Biology. I—in my first love of life I also did a lot of work in restaurants. I had worked in the restaurant industry from the age of thirteen or fourteen taking restaurant classes in California. I lived in California for a number of years, going through elementary to junior high school and much of high school. And the restaurant industry was good, and my training was appreciated. I got into Marine Biology for a number of years, as well, before coming to the wine industry.

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AE: And how did you take that turn into the wine industry?

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CP: Well, I call myself a restaurant refugee. The appreciation I have and—and love of food and wine, cooking in—in school, and, professionally, as a teenager I really loved—and worked in London, in California, and in Northern Virginia in restaurants, mostly in the kitchen—really liked it. As I became a chef and then became manager of restaurants, I always lent towards finer restaurants that had good food but also had good wine. And I really loved a lot about wine through the 1980s, working in restaurants and decided to own my own restaurant in—and be a chef in Washington, DC. A lot of international foods. I studied a lot about wine and thought that the best thing for me to do to make myself more marketable, more independent, was to become a winemaker. So in the late '80s, I really focused a lot on winemaking and wine knowledge and became a winemaker in 1990 for a local Virginia winery, thinking that if I worked here for two years, I would be able then to go back to DC and have a hat as a professional winemaker and a chef and a restaurant manager. That was something that no one else had at the time, and I could—I would use that as—as a good steppingstone.

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After becoming a winemaker in 1990, I really loved it. First, you had evenings off, which were pretty cool, but the whole concept of agriculture and, like, cooking where you work from raw ingredients, working forward. You do have a lot of control in the vineyard and in the cellar as you do in the kitchen, from sourcing your products to—to cooking them. And in a kitchen you buy a chicken on Tuesday, cook it on Wednesday, and do it again on Thursday, and by the weekend you have it right. And that can get boring and can get repetitious. In the wine industry, you're harvesting grapes once per year; you're making wine once per year. So to change the philosophy, change the direction, or a deal takes several years to do and there's a lot of intricacies in winemaking and grape growing as there is in cooking, but they just work at a much

slower and much more intellectual scale. So your margin for error is greatly diminished. Your ability to focus and not make mistakes and plan is increased. Restaurants rarely think one month further out than today. Wineries need to think two or three years out from today, so the ability to keep my unstable mind active was—I—I think it really suits the wine industry.

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AE: So was there like a winemakers apprenticeship kind of program that you entered or—or how did you—that—that learning curve, how did you get in on—on the ground level and—and make those strides so soon?

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CP: I went to—the late '80s, I went to all the different wineries in Virginia—in 1985 and '86 and '87—and visited every winery and made my notes and—and one of the local wineries I liked a lot. I thought they made the best wine [Naked Mountain]. And I offered to work there, and they said, “Sure, you can work here on the weekends.” And—six-bucks-an-hour kind of job in the tasting room, and I worked with them for a while and asked a lot of questions and shared my knowledge, and I guess I did well. And—and I said, “I really want to work here full time. I don't need any decision making power, but I do want the ability to do everything. So you tell me what button to push when, and you tell me what hose to drag where, and I'll do it for a—a badge of—of having done it and understanding it better.” I said, “I'll give you a two-year commitment. I don't care how much money I make.” I had sold a previous business [a chain of sporting goods stores] and didn't have any major financial concerns. And they said, “Fine.” And I worked there for six months, and they actually then gave me a very good job and with good responsibility and good pay. And I was going to maintain my two-year ability.

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In 1990—in 1991, we started a business as a mobile bottling line so—bottling equipment is very specialized, very expensive and in the larger wine areas of the world, Australia and California, there are tractor-trailers that have expensive custom-made bottling equipment that will bottle wineries' wines. We started the first one on the East Coast in 1991, and I ran that from '91 to '96. In 1993, I purchased the vineyard that we're sitting in here. In 1994, I was working for forty wineries in ten States. In 1995, I was voted President of the Virginia Vineyards Association, and it just kind of got out of control from there.

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It was because, I think, I had a lot of passion and drive for the industry but more importantly, it was just the timing. It was a new industry with few wineries making some good wine, a lot of wineries really not knowing the product, the world, the industry, and I came from the foodie side, and I had good retail experience in the wine industry, too. That was just good timing.

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Wineries were not communicating well with each other and, running a mobile bottling line, I worked with the owners and the winemakers, and they shared with me all their secrets. And when I went to the next winery down the road, I would reiterate problems I heard from somewhere else and became their friend. So I had the confidence and confidentiality of forty winemakers and forty winemakers' problems and forty winemakers' successes and—and kept their stories filed in my head and shared other people's knowledge. And I was a conduit; I didn't use names. I was just the conduit and, in time, developed quite a catalog of information, and that allowed me to get into—because I was a nice guy sharing information no one else did—into the state politics of the wine industry. And from there, I started helping people open wineries

because I had worked at a lot of different wineries and knew that, you know—how—how to design one through functionality. So to build a simple small winery, there are some functional designs that are important, and I guess I had worked for more wineries than most other people and—and in a functional way, so my ideas seemed to have value and weight and started helping people open wineries. And, to date, I've helped open eleven wineries, and number twelve we're breaking ground on soon.

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AE: Goodness. And I—well, and I've read recently, too, that you are an advocate for Virginia wine, of course, but also you really promote this collaboration between wineries and that Virginia as a wine-growing area and wine-producing area cannot thrive and—and gain recognition that it deserves without this cooperation.

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CP: Absolutely. Of all the wine sold in Virginia, four-percent is Virginia wine. That's basically one out of every twenty-five bottles purchased in Virginia is a Virginia wine product, so we feel, I feel—we feel, as an industry this four-percent is an individual entity, and we're kind of competing against the rest of the wine world, the vast majority from California, a lot of imported wines and other places as well.

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So if we can communicate well to share our knowledge to reduce problems, to learn from other people's mistakes, to cooperatively share equipment where possible, to cooperatively use our purchasing power as a single entity, whether we're sharing barrels or corks or equipment, the label gentleman, as you saw today, I've gotten him a dozen accounts, and now he is a Virginia

wine guy, making sure that Virginia wineries are treated well. Our cork suppliers, we use the same cork supplier that has a large selection, so we don't always use the same cork, but by using the same supplier, we get the same price as Kendall Jackson. We get the best price out there. With our barrels, we cooperatively purchase barrels from a consortium of barrel producers to where we get better prices and better freight and ship direct from France, so our barrel prices are less expensive than California wineries paying, who buy a lot more barrels because of how we're organized.

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So I think there's a lot of ways to share—to reduce economic—reduce prices, share knowledge, to share staff when possible and necessary. A winemaker breaks a leg or goes on vacation, you need somebody to drag a hose around, or you need someone to work in a tasting room, always happy to—to share that information. But also, more importantly, it helps us to not say bad things about each other. When you are in an industry that's competitive with each other, which is true of most industries, whether it's construction or high-tech or restaurant or whatever you're in, a lot of people take pride and maybe kind of poo-poo other people's doings. When you are kind of tied in a business way, you're going to bite your tongue and not say anything nasty about the next winery down the road. So I think part of this working together is a really good way to help reduce any negativity in our industry. And—and I think that's invaluable.

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AE: Now is this a statewide cooperation, or is there only a certain number of—of wineries that have this ideology?

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CP: I—I think it—I think most people in Virginia too—do. Virginia is still known as a Southern state and Southern hospitality so I—I hope to think that—that there’s a lot of congeniality. I think it’s very regional. We are in northern Virginia. There’s one county to our north, Loudon County, which has some different synergy. They do work together incredibly well. They are very, very well organized with the county websites and county brochures and—and do speak well of each other. We’re in Fauquier County or the—the next tier, if you will, of counties aligning in western—in—in northern Virginia, I’m heavily aligned with, and we have our kind of way of doing things. As you move south through the state in Albemarle County and Nelson County and different areas, I think you have county regions.

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In Virginia, presently, there’s about 150 wineries. And twenty years ago, Virginia wine—fifteen years ago, Virginia wine was Virginia wine. And it was all under one umbrella. About six or seven years ago—or less than that, maybe five years ago—we had a breakaway of regional wine trails. Think of it this way. California’s California wine was that thirty years ago. Now it’s not California wine; it’s Napa Valley, it’s Sonoma, it’s Monterey, it’s Central Coast, it’s Amador County, so you have the regions that have picked up a lot of the market strength and individuality. So Virginia is kind of taking the same hit.

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We have regional identity under the larger umbrella of Virginia wines, and they all have kind of evolved a little bit differently. Excuse me. In Charlottesville for example, the two main people or three main people down there—Chris Hill, who has been growing grapes for forever; Michael Schapps is a winemaker and—and Brad McCarthy and a few other people down there have been involved with many wineries and have kind of shared their ideals of growing grapes, making wine, marketing wine, and what varieties to grow. In northern Virginia, I’ve been one of

the leaders up here to help kind of design that so there's a—if you were to distill—maybe that's the wrong word—blend some of the wineries we've been involved with in northern Virginia, versus the wineries in central Virginia, you'll see a difference in winemaking style. And I—I think that's really cool to have a regional identity—and even within that regional identity of Virginia, to have some sub-regional identities.

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On a larger scale, if you compared Virginia to California and France geographically, it's 3,000 miles either way. But I think wine-style-wise, we're in the center, as well. We're not the big California over-oaked, over-extracted, high alcohol fruit balms, which California is sometimes known for, nor are we the French wines that sometimes French is known for—the higher acid, thinner, lower alcohol, non-oaked or lightly oaked wines. I think Virginia, stylistically, is very much in the middle between the two broad-brushed strokes of what California and France represent, so we're politically aligned there, or I think socially, in many ways. I think wine-growing and grape—wine—and our wine product is—is aligned there, too, in the center between these two states. Which is kind of fun. It took Virginia a long time to come up with a concept of how to have Virginia wines as a regionally identified product. If you took all of the Cabernet Francs in California to one pot and all the Virginia Cabernet Francs into one pot and all the French into one and tasted them, you would see a lot of synergistic regional identities there, and I think that's really important. And I—I think growing that forward to how Virginia grows grapes, how Virginia makes wines, is important to maintain and develop further this regional identity for respect.

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There are some great California wines at five and eight bucks a bottle. There's some great California wines at fifty, eighty, 100 bucks a bottle. As in France, some great inexpensive and

great very expensive wines; Virginia has not been able to compete in that marketplace. But when you compare Virginia's wines at twenty-five—at fifteen to twenty-five dollars per bottle of the same varietal, to other grape growers of the area—of the—of the world, I think we compete head-to-head. And that's, right now, where our market is and where our respect has been gained in the international marketplace.

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AE: Well I think, too, if memory serves that I read somewhere that you said that, in your opinion, that Cabernet Franc grows in Virginia better than in California.

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CP: It really does. In California, you think of, you know, it never rains in California, or at least the Southern bit. It gets very hot in the daytime often; the nights are cool and beautiful. A lot of sun intensity and Cabernet Franc basically gets ripe too quickly. I think. It goes through its phenolic ripening stages in—in a too-quick of a pace and doesn't really get phenolically mature. Virginia and the Loire Valley in France, where you have more cloud cover, it doesn't quite—it doesn't get as hot in the daytime. It might get ninety degrees; it doesn't get 100, 105. Evenings are a bit warmer. And—and with less intensity of sunlight, the Cabernet Franc grape, taking longer to ripen, goes through its phenolic ripening stages slower and gains more complexity. So I—I think you end up with a much more interesting grape. And wine is not always about power. And Cabernet Franc is not a powerful grape, but I think in its diversification of flavor profiles, what you want to do with it, you can make an awesome wine. It—it's, I think, an underrated grape. California has never put it as a mainstay in their varietal program. You have Chardonnay, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc are kind of mainstays in California.

And it's nice to have Virginia using varieties that are non-mainstays of the Pacific states. Viognier, I think, is the same place. We make awesome Viogniers in the states. Vidal. The number one grown grape by varietal in Virginia: Chardonnay, with about thirty percent of the acreage planted to Chardonnay, and they're good Chardonnays. There's good Chardonnays around the world. It's actually not a difficult grape to make wine from. It's not the easiest one to grow, though. But I think these regional identified grapes are really helpful for Virginia. The new ones on the—on the horizon right now are Tannat, Petit Verdot, Petit Manseng, and a few others are kind of leading the way as esoteric varieties that really make a wonderful wine and something that I'm—I'm really enjoying working with right now.

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AE: I want to ask you about that because you were talking about, you know, varieties and—and I wonder if in marketing and—and trying to generate respect and—and recognition for Virginia wines if these not-so-recognized varieties that aren't, you know, the West Coast, you know, standbys, if—if that's been a challenge to educate the public and consumer in what you're making here? Not only is it just a Virginia wine that you want them to be recognized for, but that you're producing these varieties that maybe some people haven't been as educated about.

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CP: Great question. It's—let me answer it a couple different ways. One, Robert Mondavi recently died, a wonderful—great man in our industry—really brought Sauvignon Blanc to the forefront in the '70s from—from California. It was not a well-respected grape, and it certainly has gained a lot of respect the last couple of decades. Many consumers are looking for more knowledge in what they eat, what they drink, where they spend their pastime, and where they

find their intricacies of—of quality. If you're into art, into cars, into food, you—you want that knowledge, and wine knowledge in this country has expanded dramatically the last thirty years. And I could write a dissertation on that.

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The knowledge and desire, the thirst, if you will, [*Laughs*] of having people want to know more about grape varieties and want to know more than just a cheeseburger or pizza and— and how to cook a different pork loin fifteen different ways, I—I think ties into the wine as a consumerism hobby, if you will. So people are hungry for different ideas; people are hungry for sharing their knowledge.

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There are in Italy, for example, over 1,000 different grape varieties in fifty-three districts that are allowed to be grown. In the world there are twenty-seven different grape families, seventeen of which are native to North America, and none really make decent wine. Okay, the Norton makes a good wine and maybe a few others, but the viniferous species of Europe have thousands of different cultivars or clones or sub-species within *vinifera* [*vitis vinifera*, **grape vines native to Europe and the Mediterranean**] that are making wines around the world.

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What Virginia was trying to do was find comparable climates that historically have made good wines in other parts of the world and comparable climates and—and plant them here and see what does ripe. One of the vineyards I work with is twenty-six acres with twenty-one different grape varieties. You plant grape varieties, and you pull them out, and you plant some more and pull them out, and then you have your bread and butter that works. The farm here at Pearmund Cellars started in 1976 and on two acres of land, nine different grape varieties, on two acres—one acre went east and west, and one acre went north and south. We had four different

trellis systems, three different rootstocks, and every twenty or thirty feet in this vineyard had a different thing going on. That experiment lasted for eight years. After eight years, planted fifteen acres of Chardonnay running north and south on vertical shoot position [trellis system] and on nine-foot by six-foot row spacing, and that was because of this eight-year experiment of what grew best.

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Different grapes like different microclimates, soil types, row orientations, designs to really maximize their quality potential. This is nothing new. This has been going on in the pre-Napoleonic times in Burgundy and Bordeaux, and it's been going on in California for a number of years, and Australia is—is very strong, as well. Virginia is no different, and as we focus on these things, we can really define quality of Virginia wine and be more consistent in that quality vintage to vintage and be more consistent in that quality as a value to quality relationship and—and to keep it as an agricultural entity. Farming—we're still farmers out here. Farming is tough. It's hard work. You're at the vagaries of the weather, and you might think it's romantic to sit around in a white polo shirt and drink Chardonnay and say, “Is it time to harvest yet?” but that's about as far from reality as possible about growing grapes. It's not romantic. It's hard-damned work, and—and I love every minute of it.

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AE: Well let's talk about the work in the '70s that a lot of these pioneering wineries started and—excuse me—and you know, a lot of that was a direct result of the Farm Wineries Act in the '70s that allowed—allowed people to—to grow and—and make wine. And Meriwether Vineyards, for example, that was here before you purchased it and created Pearmund and those

eight-year experiments and—and your experience at this—the first winery where you worked, which by the name—what was it—by the way what was the name of that winery?

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CP: Which one, I'm sorry?

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AE: The first one you worked?

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CP: Naked—Naked Mountain.

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AE: But I wonder what your experience and your knowledge from Meriwether, where you, you know, came before and they started in '76—what kind of that learning curve was and what—what was the mindset then and what did people think they were doing? Did they think—they think they were jumping off a cliff or they were visionaries or what—what did they think the future of Virginia wine was twenty years ago?

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CP: Well back then, I guess, to be funny, European wines were quality. California was not well respected and had just started gaining respect for the first time. I think people were drinking French wines and thinking they could do this in Virginia. The Farm Wineries Act basically allowed—legally—wine to be produced for the first time since 1920, when Prohibition started and laws allowed—it was—it was a whole set of laws that allowed this to happen.

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The people doing it were normally larger farm owners, landowners, had cows and had corn or had tobacco or whatever they had and would put some acreage into growing grapes and dedicate part of a barn to making wine as a professional hobby, if you will, to see if it would work. And it took years—six or seven years to get to the first six wineries that made at best tolerable wine.

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From those infant days, we've gone out of our infancy into adolescence. I think there's been about three or four generations of—of wine produced in Virginia. The first generation being a lot of hybrid groups, a few *vinifera*, trying to understand how to grow the grape, and trying to understand how to make the wine. If the grapes were picked too early, they were just not—not very decent. As the right grape variety on the right spot was chosen, as good wine—better winemaking practices were incorporated, as investment into equipment was made, as professionally trained and experienced winemakers came to Virginia, we came into the next generation of wine that was making some good quality wines. As the next generation passed, that, I think, were the people I think like Dennis Horton [of Horton Vineyards], who really stretched the envelope, as to what great varieties could be grown with a lot of grapes from a—a—from France and Spain and—and Portugal—of varietals that are not known to the American public, but are known to the wine world as producing great wines, and then has evolved, more specifically, to how can you make the best wine from that grape with technology?

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Technology has touched all of our lives in so many ways and thirty years ago, technology was not used very much in wine production. Wine has been an art for 6,000 or 8,000 years until a time of Louis Pasteur, and then it became somewhat of a science. Even fifty years ago, wine was

much more of an art than a science. Now the artfulness of wine is still important. I believe all great wines are made from the art and the science confirms the art of winemaking. Science confirms this by monitoring nitrogen—by monitoring microelements, nutrients in the vineyard, and during fermentation monitoring all the different aspects—nutritional needs of yeast during fermentation, about good hygiene in the winery. A lot of products and philosophies and—and sampling techniques are available now that weren't even around ten years ago. There is no reason to make a wine that is not a very good wine to be on a table. There—there's no need for it. Technology—we've—we've passed that in technology. If you're making bad wine right now, it's because you're lazy and cheap. Dare I say that? One of the two, at least. So—so I think our competitiveness now is on this new generation of wineries open for Virginia is to create a great memory of place, to create a good product of value quality relationship whether it's a ten or twenty or fifty dollar bottle of wine, there's a good quality value relationship at all those price-points, too, in creating this memory of place. Wine is the product that you purchase to maintain and recapture and relive that memory.

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We're not selling glasses and bottles of wine anymore. We're selling ambiance, we're selling a place in time, we're selling an environment. The different wineries that are opening up have great views, great customer service, great facilities for a wedding or a tasting or a wine dinner, educationally, and it's about quality. We're not serving, you know, McDonald's cheeseburgers. No offense to McDonald's, but we cannot survive on inexpensive wines. We have to—we can only survive on—on better quality, more expensive wines, and more expensive environments. To create a winery near Washington, DC, Northern Virginia is also expensive land. You can be spending \$30,000; \$40,000; \$50,000 an acre for agricultural land and another

\$20,000 to \$25,000 to plant a decent vineyard and \$1,000,000 bucks or \$2,000,000 bucks to build a winery. You know, pretty soon you start talking real money.

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And, therefore, it has to be run as a real business, as well. If you're able to incorporate various aspects of history of the area, of—of good food, wine combinations, cooking classes, wine appreciation at different levels, wedding facilities, whatever it be, to allow the business of the winery to—to continue for time to come is really what we're about. I don't think many people in the wine industry are here for the great money that we make. We don't make a lot of money doing this; we do it for love and passion. But it—hopefully, if we're lucky and smart enough, it's going to be here for a long, long time. And the business of running a winery is about the winery being here a long time from now. And, over the course of time, sure, you make some money because land appreciates in value, and that's really where your goal is at the end of time in creating a—a longevity of respect. The best wines of Europe have their reputation and price because of consistency of quality of product. And I think Virginia is finally starting to hit stride there. Does that answer your question?

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AE: Uh-hmm, yeah, very much so. But then after speaking about technology and—and marketing and all that let's talk about *terroir* [***the special characteristics recognized in a grape, as a result of geographical and environmental influence***] and what the land and the climate here has to do with the wine that comes from here and how you taste that in a Virginia wine.

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CP: Um, hard question to answer. On Fauquier County, where we are, there are sixty different soil types, three predominant ones that are sub-soils. We are on epidote chloride or Catocin greenstone. It's not that much dissimilar to limestone, in that it's a Precambrian sedimentary rock that sits above granite and was squished over eons of time by seas and things that arose up. This was waterfront property 200 million years ago and, actually, volcanoes in the area that are about forty million years old. What you need to have for a good grape to grow and produce a quality fruit is a few simple things. One is good soil drainage for water. One is in having good soil drainage. You also have loose soil so roots can penetrate down at depth. You have attack roots feeding down for water, and you have the feeder roots feeding away for nutrients. And if you're able to have a vine that's cut back and pruned and maintained well with a good deep root structure, you'll have a more consistent product of longevity of the vine. But then you start getting a lot of minerality of flavor into the grape.

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Virginia is known for having a lot of hard red clay soils and, certainly, we have more acreage of that than anything else. But once you get to the foothills of Virginia and on this hill, you have the erosion of ions of time to where you do have some good decomposed granite substrains and water tables that are far enough away from the vines to not cause a problem. And the frost issues are not alleviated but certainly minimized by having a vineyard on the side of a hill. It's always been said that a vineyard is a fairly snobby thing because they like to have a good sunrise view and would also like to have a good sunset view as well. They—they like their open space on the side of a hill.

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To taste those components of *terroir* is good viticultural management practices. Let me answer it with an anecdote. When I was in Bordeaux studying wine a dozen years ago, in

Margaux, national village of Arcins, in a restaurant called Léon d'Or, wonderful wine dinner, and at the end they said, “What would you like for dessert?” A kind of open venue. And I said, “I’ll—I’ll take the recommendation of the waiter.” And he had a big smile on his face, and he comes back with a cup of apples, a very expensive cup of apples, I might say, that are all cut up, and they were the most flavorful apples by threefold I’ve ever had. And really, at first I was kind of embarrassed; a stupid American here spending way too much money on some cut up apples, and realizing all the *terroir*, minerality, flavors—not just the fruit, but the good acidity and the crispness. It was just the perfect apple. I could go on about describing it.

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And I said, “This apple is phenomenal. Where did it come from?” And he said, “Sir, I grew those apples.” “I said, really? My waiter grew the apple. That’s really cool. How did you get the flavor so intense, so diversified, all these different not just fruit textures but all these different entities of flavor and texture in the apple?” He said, “Sir, you’re a winemaker, yes?” I said, “Yeah.” “You’re a grape grower, yes?” “Yes.” He said the—his four apple trees are treated the same as we treat vines in the vineyard. The apple tree could produce 200 apples, but he only asks about forty apples of his trees. And he pulls leaves around individual apple—apples to have no blemishes and to make sure that the sun hits all spots of that apple to maintain equal ripeness. He picks them at the peak of ripeness. He babies and spoils those trees. He watches nutrition. They don’t have any large trees around them to get hidden by the shade. He prunes them intelligently every year and went on in a parallel of doing what we do to every grapevine. And when you have that level of—of—of intervention in—in a wild plant, then you start having consistency of product. And it was an amazing apple.

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In a vineyard, to do the same thing, here, we're sitting amongst 11,000 vines. We want to have each vine produce its best quality, but if you don't treat each vine the same, you won't hit that quality. But if you do treat each vine the same, or you do have different soil types, different water levels, different health of vines, you're also going to have diversification. So when you work in a vineyard, the big goal is to get the fruit ripe at high quality at the same time during harvest. So one vine is going to be treated differently than the vine next to it or fifty vines away with a goal of having all the fruit being ripened to the same level. So we go through the vineyard about eleven times per year. As you see, the guys are working out here today to pull leaves to cut the tips of the vines—canes off to thin out the canopy, to drop fruit, to have some vines produce more fruit, some vines produce less fruit, but all with a goal of even ripeness, so every time you pass through the vineyard, the ten percent of the weakest fruit gets pulled out. And in three weeks from now, ten percent of the weakest fruit is culled out, so you're always bringing down the bottom ten percent. And, over the course of time—this is kind of simplistically, but it gives a point—over the course of time of—of a few months, you end up with very healthy fruit, all evenly ripened at the same time, and that's I think where you build a flavor of—of place and time.

00:35:31

Terroir, to me, is—is a flavor component of man's intervention and nature's involvement and soil composition of the fruit up to the time of harvest. So if you prune your vines aggressively and leaf pull aggressively, that manmade intervention will change what *terroir* tastes like. *Terroir*, to me, is not just the soil type and the micro-climate; it's all of man's intervention to the point of harvesting that grape. And we all strive for a balance of highest quality and the ability to pay for the labor and land that we're using.

00:36:10

AE: Can you talk about—you were mentioning how the vines that are surrounding us here now are all dedicated, the land is all dedicated to Chardonnay grapes. And that—that was tried and true and that's established and they're there, and that's what this land is for. Is there something now that—that learning curve has ended and there's more knowledge about what grows here and what grows here well and where it should grow, is there anything on the horizon that might be a—a specific Virginia wine, like a signature Virginia wine that comes out of all of this established knowledge now that there's some new innovation on the horizon?

00:36:48

CP: Sure, yeah, somewhat. We are labeling our Chardonnay for the first time this year—we bottled last week as old vine. They're thirty-two-year-old vines, and I think that justifies old vines. Certainly, by Virginia, standards it's old and by most of the rest of the world it—it becomes old vine. What we're doing now is monitoring very closely micronutrient levels in the soil and in the vine. We took petiole [*the stem that attaches the leaf to the vine*] analysis and—and monitoring the tissue to maintain high calcium levels, high calcium levels like in your bones protect you from injury. They will also stave off disease in the vineyard, so I believe in—in high—high—particular nutrient levels being very high in the vineyard. We augment that in soil and canopy sprays.

00:37:32

We have now eleven different clones of Chardonnay. When this vineyard was planted, there were three different clones used. One of them has been taken out. Now we're replacing 500 vines per year in the same spot and—and these inter-planting with different clones are partially to see what grows best here, but partially for diversification of labors. Let me answer it long

ways, since I'm [*Laughs*] taking a lot of time talking here. In Burgundy, France, you have a red wine grape or a white wine grape—Chardonnay or Pinot Noir—and you have a Chardonnay grape that's going to be harvested and is normally a single—Burgundy is known for single vineyard. So you have a single vineyard harvested on a single day, making wine from a single grape. It's going to normally go into be made by a single winemaker that's going to use a single yeast, whether it's native yeast or inoculated yeast. You're going to use, normally, a single-barrel cooper or often just a single-barrel cooper, and Burgundy is all about singular place and time, a singular footprint, a very sharp point on the spear, if you will.

00:38:38

Bordeaux is the opposite. Bordeaux is about multiple vineyards, multiple harvest dates, multiple grape varieties, multiple coopers, multiple yeasts, different yeasts for different varietals, blending these wines over the course of time—often several times—to come up with, foundationally, something as diverse as possible. So you're making these different blocks of a foundation of a building that, in time, accumulates to a single product, so Burgundy and Bordeaux are very, very different animals. I like the Bordeaux philosophy much more. So even with our single vineyard series of wines that we use, we want to use different clones, if different clones are available, different yeasts, different things to make fundamentally complex as possible. Chardonnay, for example, we will put Chardonnay juice into the barrel and add yeast to the barrel, where the Chardonnay turns from juice into wine, as many, many people do.

00:39:31

Last year we had thirty barrels of Chardonnay. Our favorite yeast, half those barrels got our favorite yeast, but half the barrels—fifteen of them—had different yeasts. We had two barrels using one yeast, different two barrels using a yeast—a different two barrels using a yeast; we used eight different yeasts last year. Part of it was to see and experiment which ones we liked

the best and there are differences but at the end, we fold them altogether into a single tank, filter, and bottle, so we're trying to build different levels of flavor in the vineyard through clone selection in the winery through different yeast selection and a couple of the barrels will start malolactic fermentation on—to keep a crisper green apple or edge to it. So we're trying to build complexity at different levels with the Bordeaux philosophy. So I think there's—as long as there's desire and—and—as long as there's desire, you can go through and create as much as you want.

00:40:27

People have been cooking food as long as fire has been around and a dead animal has been—a dead animal has been next to it. But people have not stopped learning how to cook food, how to prepare, how to make different flavors work with each other. We had a gorgonzola cheese with ripe pineapple and [*Finger Snaps*] basil and [*Sighs*—I forgot what else; I'm blowing it right now—gorgonzola, fresh pineapple with mozzarella cheese, olive oil, a little gorgonzola on top, fresh basil as a fresh tropical Caprese Italian-type of appetizer. It was phenomenal. No one has ever put Italian and Hawaiian food together like that before. But you know what, it worked; it worked really good. So a little creativity with a little experience of what works—you can do anything in the vineyard. There's so many more opportunities that are happening every year by taking tradition and folding them into new applications.

00:41:30

AE: Well tell me then about your Vin de Sol, which seems to be an example of that.

00:41:35

CP: Ah, perfect example! Vin de Sol, wine of the sun, hybrid between Spanish and French language, intentionally. Back in the old days in Jerez in Spain, where the Sherries were made, the wines were given—the wines were given—. [*Calls out to an employee*] DJ?

00:41:55

Back in the days in Spain in Jerez, a few—several hundred years ago, the wines were often kept in barrels out in the sun. The wines, over time, would evaporate or not be left full; a floor of yeast would develop on the top; it would actually eat the alcohol and leave this nice nutty character. There are several different types of Sherries made different ways with different histories and stories of histories of where they came from. But this country is not big into Sherries. And Sherries now are made—many of them are made with fairly modern technologies. There are a few Old World producers I've seen that will take their wine and put it in a small glass containers on the roof, in the sun, for a couple of years to help the floor develop to help nature have its way. And basically, what you're doing is ruining the wine so good it tastes nice, kind of like duck *confit* or something else. So we are destroying this wine until the point where it tastes really, really good again, and every year is different. We experiment with filtration or not, with different SO₂ levels, different PH, whether we're going to go through ML or not, different grape varieties. I've done this with four different grape varieties so we have fifty or sixty glass containers on the roof with different markings on them that are often different years, different experiments, five or six experiments per year going on, trying to make something that is very Old World. And we're trying to reinvent and learn what was done several hundred years ago that isn't done anymore and—and create, I think, a really cool Sherry. It's high alcohol; it's natural. It naturally ferments to about seventeen and a half percent alcohol and it takes—it's a two-stage fermentation to get it to there. We have—we have a lot of fun with this wine. It's part of the creativity—part of the fun.

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AE: Can you describe the taste of the Vin de Sol?

00:43:54

CP: It's a very nutty wine. It has a sweet almondy flavor. Well, first of all, on the nose and the color—the color is very amber. In time, it becomes a darker amber. The nose is much different than the taste, and the taste evolves and kind of clicks. It has a long finish, probably a seventy—forty-five-second finish, so when it changes, you have this ripe apricot sweet almondy type of nose to it. On the taste, it has a drier, more pecan and hazelnut kind of nut texture. It still has this dried apricot fruit to it, almost a compote, and it evolves an almost molasses-type flavor sometimes. It just kind of clicks around in your mouth, picking up different things and some people love it; some people hate it; some people take a long time to figure out exactly what it is that they're tasting in their mouth because they've never had anything like that before. And you can do something as simple as pour it on top of vanilla ice cream and just really enjoy it, which is—I think is awesome.

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We've made crème brûlées to where we incorporated it as part of a crème brûlée or put it in with the whipped cream and put that on top of your—your fruit. It's—it can be aperitif. It's actually good with salted almonds and—and olives and green olives as a tapas appetizer type of thing. Treat it like a good Amontillado Sherry or an Oloroso; it's not as rich as an Oloroso but it's—I don't know. There's so many different wine styles out there in the world. We're trying to, you know—I'm a kid in the candy store. I want to make a Port, I want to make a Sherry, I want to make a Champagne. This is fun. Let's do it all. How quickly can we do this? It's like, you

know, a young chef in a restaurant wants to try everything, and there's only so much room on the menu you can do but we're—we—we're trying to click through as much as we can.

00:45:42

AE: Are you thinking about doing a Sparkling Viognier?

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CP: No because—it—it has been written. It has been said. I—we thought about it. We—we haven't done it. We've been making sparkling wines. The current vintage of our sparkling wine is 1997; it's ten years old. Sparkling wine is, basically, an early-picked grape—we use our estate Chardonnay here, fermented to wine at about ten percent wine alcohol. And then, after six months with a little bit of barrel oak aging, put it to bottle, add yeast, add sugar, and let it ferment again in the bottle traditionally—Champagne, method-wise—and then you lay the wine down for two or three years and then you disgorge it and bottle—and—and drink it as a normal sparkling wine. But we don't disgorge it after two or three years; we wait ten years. So this wine bottle, after primary fermentation, has been laying down for ten years, and then you disgorge it and can drink it. So the term is RD or Recently Disgorged—Bollinger kind of style wines that are really biscotti, bread doughy, yeasty kind of decomposed flavors of the yeast that's in the bottle. It still has some nice bright green apple kind of notes to it. It's a more complex wine, I think. The difficulty is (a) you lose some through the course of the ten years you're holding this wine; (b) it's holding something for ten years. I don't think many restaurants could survive if they bought a steak and cooked it and waited ten years before they sold it. It's just not—not an easy thing to do, so it is a specialty wine for us.

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But I think that's part of the passion of pushing the envelopes of (a) being recognized as quality. Quality doesn't come by the pick-up-truck-full. Quality comes, you know, one at a time and one critic at a time, and these are the products, I think, that's really—. And—and many people in Virginia are making some individual products like this, trying to really push our quality on and love to show what we're capable of doing. Not to say we can do this every day or drink these wines every day, but—. I don't know. It's having fun doing it.

00:47:50

AE: Well tell me, if you would, the—the grapes that you grow and the wines that you make, if that's not asking too much.

00:47:56

CP: No, that's fine. Pearmund Cellars is—is based on the Bordeaux varietal of reds. The five classics, which are Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Petit Verdot, and Malbec. Our whites are the traditional European whites of Chardonnay, Riesling, Viognier, or, I guess, Nouveau Modern Viognier, and we do a late-harvest wine, as well, which has traditionally been Vidal or—Viognier for us.

00:48:28

Our wines here are kind of a hybrid between Old World and New World. Like California, we kind of push higher PH levels, higher alcohol levels, but like France, we're trying to show as much *terroir* as possible and trying to really respect the Bordeaux and Bordelaise winemaking techniques and—and flavor components with an aged wine. So when you get a five-year-old wine, you're really looking for a lot of those, you know, not just fruit-driven but a lot of the

barnyard characteristics and a lot of what a good—a good Bordeaux is about is—is our goal there.

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Other wineries we're affiliated with—really, we're trying to develop a—a benchmark style to go for. With the Winery at La Grange, developing more European flavor profiles, not pushing alcohol limits, more Old World varietals, a lot of Liberian-type of varietals, the Spanish and Portuguese things. Barrel Oak Winery has a lot of leanness in its whites, kind of like Loire Valley wines and California—not pushing big alcohol, intentionally going to lower alcohol wines, so we can stylistically kind of tweak around. I guess an analogy would be if you were to help with several different restaurants—and every restaurant is not a McDonald's and not cookie-cutter; they're all individualistic—that were going to develop menus and profiles and flavor components that are consistent but in class but individualistic to the winery.

00:49:55

The wine—we work with right now—or last year, seventeen different vineyards. I think I'm at only fifteen this year—to where each vineyard produces one or two different grapes for us. Many of these vineyards are business partners. Many of those vineyards are ones that we've helped plant that our staff are involved with in—in maintaining and cultivating, pruning, hedging and everything else. So we have a—eighty—eighty percent of our fruit is direct management control. Different grapes are grown on different pieces of property for the same reason you would have a salmon and a trout and a crab and a tuna all grown on different environments in the water. They don't all swim together well at the same place. It's very difficult to grow a diversification of varietals on the same parcel of property. God, it doesn't even work that good in California. They try all the time.

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So we have a north-facing, high elevation vineyard of decomposed granite that makes awesome Reisling for us. We're really, really proud of the vineyard. We have Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard that is graveled that faces to the South, a much warmer vineyard, lower elevation; we bite our fingernails around frost time, but it hasn't been hit hard. Cabernet Sauvignon is late to grow, so we've been escaping frost, but it's also at a slightly southern-facing soil, and it takes a lot of the heat from the afternoons and translates it into the heat needed to get good Cabernet Sauvignon ripe. All of our vineyards run north and south. One vineyard has half the vineyard running east and west, and I'm still kicking myself to this day, ten years later after planting that vineyard, that I argued to go north and south and the owner wanted to go east and west and—and we still have issues in that vineyard. I will only pick fruit from north and south rows, unless I really have to do it differently for how Virginia grows.

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Dr. Tony Wolf, who has been instrumental in growing grapes in Virginia for twenty years through University Extension Service and has been teaching other people quality and doing a lot of research, has really been fundamental in helping a lot of growers understand not only quality, but sustainability. If you grew the best grapes in the world, and it cost you a lot of money out-of-pocket every year to do it, you're not going to—you can't continue it forever. A lot of people can't. So we do need to be economically sustainable. In Virginia, it probably—a lot of people think of a goal of \$5,000 per acre, per year as a value of the crop, and it costs about \$4,000 per acre per year to really grow a crop. Those numbers can be thrown a lot of places, depending if you throw in depreciation of tractors—and this is without land cost, these numbers—but depending on how you want to run a vineyard, if you run a vineyard and you break even, I'm completely fine with that. If you run a vineyard and—and it costs you a couple hundred bucks an acre to—to—to harvest your fruit—big deal. But if you're going to be growing a vineyard, and

you're losing thousands of dollars per acre per year for a long time, then it starts to really become difficult. So the vineyards kind of do it—have to—kind of have to hold their own.

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In the country, there are five and a half vineyards for every winery—a vineyard that grows fruit and a winery that makes wine. And in California, all the largest vineyards are actually private companies that are just that: they grow grapes. McDonald's does not own any potato plants. So a lot of people grow fruit, and a lot of people make wine. In Virginia, we're required to have a—a commercial vineyard on the location of the winery to be a farm winery. Also we're required to grow at least half of our own fruit on owned or leased land, and Virginia encompasses that really well to have involvement that we are a farm entity. We're not a buyer of someone else's wine or someone else's fruit and making wine in an industrial warehouse. We're—we're still really maintaining an agriculture edge as a state, and I think that's something that Virginia really has strong going for it. It really keeps us close to the ground. So in Virginia, the ratio of independent growers to wineries is three to one. It's actually very tight compared to anywhere else.

00:54:13

AE: Well let's talk about how that factors into tourism because I know that Virginia and the—the Wine Trail—the Virginia Wine Trail is gaining in popularity and how that has helped the industry.

00:54:25

CP: Yeah, Virginia's tourism industry right now is estimated at \$17.7 billion with a B for Virginia—a very important industry for Virginia. The agriculture and forestry industry—sector

of the Virginia economy is the largest sector of the Virginia economy—above technology and everything else, which is interesting. And the wine industry is the largest growing part of the agricultural industry, even though we're very, very small. It's only a \$150 million industry.

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Agriculture for Virginia wineries is strong in that (a) the industry is positive cash flow for the State. Thirty cents of every dollar—thirty cents of every bottle of wine produced in Virginia goes to the State General Fund coffers, so we do generate some nice tax revenue, and there's other taxes, too, that—that the wineries pay, of course.

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When people come and visit Virginia wineries and agrotourism or ecotourism—and some have now referred to it as egotourism, sorry—that we are very low-impact. We don't use a lot of county or state services. We're keeping open space. We're keeping farmland going. And people come out and spend their money also at local restaurants, local bed and breakfasts, hotels. They're keeping local money local, and they're bringing in other money to help show off what Virginia can be about. So I think it increases land value, and people come out to a nice rural setting and there's some nice houses around here, and a vineyard is something nice to do that the diversification of agriculture with the equine community and some—a few cows here and there really do provide, I think, a Sonoma-County-type of environment that is slow to development, that protects open space, and that will increase the beauty value. And when people who live in suburbia can drive for half an hour or hour and come out and spend some good money, those tourism dollars are very, very important to keep—keep this going. You know, we wouldn't be here without it.

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I'm trying to think of how else I can answer that. I know I'm missing some major points but—. Virginia is dramatically encompassing wineries and the ecotourism—economy-friendly tourism aspects of it. It's—it's a big part of Virginia right now.

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AE: Well and let's talk about Pearmund Cellars itself, physically, now. You took me on a tour through the—the barrel room and—and all. And we were talking about how you—you built this in 2003, is that correct?

00:57:07

CP: In 2002.

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AE: Two thousand two. And how, since you—you've been in the industry for a very long time, but since you've established Pearmund Cellars just fairly recently, that you were able to do a lot of new and innovative things in—in building your winery here, so can you talk about that?

00:57:23

CP: Yeah. I—I think as, fundamentally, a farmer, we're always very aware that we're custodians of the land and—and want to do no harm. So our vineyard is—is using about eighty percent organic matter. We're very, very low-impact. We're high about bio-diversity building; we're bio-diversity in the vineyard. And the winery was kind of an outstretch of that. We designed it and built it in 2002, planted the winery in the middle of a vineyard. We're surrounded basically on all sides by vines. We took the lowest spot of the vineyard, the least quality producing fruit out to put the vineyard there; did not take out the nice vineyard on the top of the

hill for the beautiful views for the people. The vines get the good views; the people get to look up at the nice vines on the hill. And in doing this, tried to make a minimalistic footprint of—of destruction of mankind, which we are known to do, and now it's become socially acceptable that we've actually had some issues as—as a species. So we planted this vineyard. We have geo-thermal technology for heating and air-conditioning; we drilled holes into the ground that go down 450-feet and have a—a closed system of water for geo-thermal capacity for all our heating and air-conditioning needs. The winery is built with double insulation on all of its walls and insulated floors. All the windows are non-operable; they're all vacuum-sealed, very high-tech windows, at the time, to be thermally strong. The design of the building with the large porch wrapped all the way around it allows late afternoon winter heat to hit the outside walls, but in the summertime, there's no heat that hits exterior walls. The roof and side walls are double-walled where there is no point where the heat of the outside is touching an interior wall, being double-walled, so we don't have any of the elements of winter or summer affecting the comfort zone inside. So whatever we can do to help minimize the usage of electricity and natural resources in building the place, I—I think is really important.

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We were given some nice kudos and awards for this design, and this was done before the—the modern era of—of doing these, which I'm glad everyone else is doing them, and I'm not trying to be egotistical saying we were first, but it was nice to know that we were ahead of this curve when people didn't understand what these products were about—everything down to the paint we chose.

00:59:58

AE: And tell me, too, about your barrels or custom-made barrels.

01:00:02

CP: Um, the—the design of them?

01:00:04

AE: Uh-hmm.

01:00:04

CP: I think the wine industry is about 8,000 years old, and it has evolved sometimes fast and sometimes slow. Technology has obviously changed a lot of things lately. We've been, I think, on the cutting edge as much as we can with different products and designs to make our wine better, less expensive, and easier by using fewer labor hours and—and more efficiency. We use new products every year that are normally not on the market through the—the major development companies who make yeasts and nutrition aids in the world. I—I get involved with them, and every year we do our different experiments. But before things hit a catalog for high-tech wineries, our barrel system, which is I think very unique to the world—we were the first ones in the—in the country to use it. It's an OXO line; it's beautiful; it's high-tech; and it saves about seventy percent of the labor in a barrel room by keeping the barrels separate from each other but still stacked securely.

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Our barrel design—barrels are traditionally—are shaped differently, as wine bottles are shaped differently, depending on what part of the world you get your wine barrels from. We designed—we designed a wine barrel for—that was—and now being basically accepted as the 265-litre style, length of Bordeaux, girth of Burgundy barrels to increase the volume of a barrel fifteen percent, without increasing its footprint in a winery. So when we hit our winery capacity,

by design we're actually hitting it fifteen percent plus by design from these barrels that were made for us our first year being open. It took the barrel maker about four months to come up with a—with the ability to make the barrels because they had to re-tool their facility different. Barrels come in many shapes and forms, but it's nice to see, I think, that—that the wine industry is really accepting this—the common now 265-litre barrel and—and no one knew what it was very few years ago.

01:02:15

There's a lot of new technologies that are being created in efficiency and quality at the same time and so proud to have many of those actually take place here.

01:02:28

AE: Do you think that part of where Virginia is right now in the wine industry and—and people like you bringing such innovation to the craft of winemaking but also being a Virginia winemaker on the national and international scene, do you think that that has helped Virginia in a way? That it has come—is a latecomer on the scene?

01:02:48

CP: Oh, very much so. Technology and spray material and laws, you know, allowed Virginia wines to—to develop and now—now flourish. And I travel a great deal and go into South Africa or New Zealand or California, France, and Spain—people know about Virginia wine. It's really cool. I went to Portugal and—and met with David Fonseca Guimaraens and introduced myself. He said, “Great, did you bring any Tinta Cao or Touriga Nacional for me? I know Dennis Horton is growing some, you know. I—I really want to try his wines.” Or you know going to other wineries where—where people know. They're reading about Virginia, and it's really cool, and it

does help. Our industry, no matter where you go, is very encompassing. If you're in the wine industry and go to just about any other winery, they're going to spoil you and want to spend time with you, pick your brain, you pick their brain. It's—it's a very family camaraderie thing. It's very few industries share this love and passion for the product that supersedes any perception of competition. If any winery owner comes here, and we've had many visit, or I go to any other winery, and I've visited many, and you have any particular question on—from a yeast you use or how you do this or how you do that or what's your philosophy, how did you learn to do this, how can I take something back that you've done, and I'm going to cut to the chase and not duplicate mistakes and I need you to help me—they're fine, you know. People—people are very happy to share, and I think people are very happy to share, in general, in the industry and as consumers, to have a wider breadth of selection of regional products.

01:04:23

You know, Virginia wines are, I think, really coming of age. They're being well-respected. We still have a ways to go, but in our market of twenty, fifteen to twenty-five dollar bottles of wine or a few thirty dollar bottles of wine, we're as good as anybody else.

01:04:39

The—and it's not through complacency. I mean all these little things that we're doing make it work. The rest of the major wine world of France and California and South Africa and Argentina are certainly keeping up with their edge too, furthering developments of irrigation to fermentation to so many different things in our industry. And the world has become so much smaller that through the research of large pocketed areas, we get the research knowledge very, very quickly—almost as—probably as quickly as their next door winery gets it. So with the way people travel, the way people communicate with technology and information, we're getting information as quickly as anybody else. We're not backwoods reading yesterday's newspaper. I

mean, we're reading it today with everybody else, so I—I think that's really an exciting part to help us keep on—on—on—hmm, I think it's pretty cool that way.

01:05:44

AE: Uh-hmm. Well I wonder, too, on the same lines if, you know, you were talking earlier when you first started working at that—that first winery and were just learning the—about the industry and you said that you were—that the timing was right, that it was kind of a perfect storm of being in the right place, the right time, right people, right—right everything. And I—that's what I'm hearing you say about Virginia. And if we take the long view back to Virginia history and there being vines in Jamestown in, you know, 1607 and 400 years, really, in the long view of Virginia's history with wine and Thomas Jefferson and wine and this very rich history but, again, Virginia being a late-comer on the—the international scene and how that—how you kind of reconcile that as a winemaker or how you use that history to bolster marketing or your building the image of Virginia and wine. Does that—does that figure into what you do also?

01:06:39

CP: A little bit. And you're right, Virginia has now a 400-year history or coming up on a 400-year history of winemaking, even though most of it wasn't very good. Jamestown failed as winemaking; Jefferson failed as a winemaker. And the late 1800s, there were many wineries in Virginia, and some of them did produce actually very good wines and got recognition at international world fairs, and the Norton Grape did very well in Virginia and some other wineries have done well 100 years ago. But for the most part, all this is modern news of Virginia's success, I think, and our best success has certainly been the most recent. But one thing, if you want to play a little fun what-if game, Thomas Jefferson brought over twenty-three species of

grapes from Europe. And they all died basically because of a root louse called Phylloxera. Phylloxera eats the—the underground and its pupae stage will eat a lot of the root hairs and—and basically kill a vine, so he was never able to produce wine from grapes he grew. Thomas Jefferson, well, to get rid of Phylloxera he grafted. He grafted Native American root stock that is resistant to the—the—this louse and he grafted it onto the European tops, and therefore the vines we have to date pretty much around the world are all grafted.

01:07:56

Thomas Jefferson did graft a great number of things. He grafted an apple tree with different species of apples on the same tree. He grafted herbs. He grafted many, many different things. His graft unions were almost all above ground. He wasn't grafting roots to tops as needed here, but he did a lot of grafting.

01:08:18

If you were to think about for a second, what if Thomas Jefferson grafted a grapevine? What if he grafted and found out that the problem we had was with the—the—this Phylloxera in the soil? If he were to graft a grapevine seventy-five years before the French discovered that's how you manage Phylloxera, there's a humorous side. But basically, it says that wine, as an elitist beverage of Europe, would have been downplayed because we would now have wine available in our country in the 1800s as—as an affordable local product. So with good wine also comes better food. We probably would have been maybe cooking a little bit better through the 1800s.

01:09:00

With wine available and not the whiskeys—and you drink whiskey when you don't eat food; you drink wine with food—so whiskey without food makes you a little bit nuts, a little bit drunk, a little bit violent, and the Wild West might not have been quite so wild.

01:09:16

Certainly, one could argue that Prohibition would not have happened. Our Prohibition came from the abuse of distillates and the anger of the Industrial Revolution and everything it encompassed, but it's strictly square on distillates. If we would have had local available wine, I don't think Prohibition would have happened. And the only good thing that came out of Prohibition that I can see is NASCAR—not that I'm a big NASCAR fan but I—I could argue then today that we would not have NASCAR today, if Thomas Jefferson had grafted a grapevine. How's that for a stretch? **[Laughs]**

01:09:47

AE: I like it. I like it. And if I could ask you, too, about your opinion of the Norton Grape, the indigenous grape of Virginia, and why you've chosen not to grow it here for—for Pearmund.

01:10:00

CP: We haven't grown it here because a few people grow it and grow it well, and we buy our Norton from Jenny McCloud, [Jennifer McCloud, owner of Chrysalis Vineyards in Middleburg, Virginia], who is the world's largest producer of Norton. And she is a big flag-waver of that grape, and we do make it for the Winery at La Grange. I have worked with it for several years. I like the Norton Grape. For my particular palate, it's not my thing that I'm going to go drink a glass of, but it's an individualistic choice. I also don't like peanut butter, so who is going to listen to what I like?

01:10:32

The—the grape is—the grape, because it's indigenous, which I really like a lot, but it's also a difficult winemaking grape. You have, with an average wine grape, you have a high amount of tartaric acid and a small amount of malic acid. In Norton, it's the opposite. You have

high malic and low tartaric. That creates some issues on the palate, and it creates some issues on winemaking. You also have a grape that is high in acid overall but also high in PH. So it's not a very stable wine. The palate structure is hollow and center palate, and it takes blending and it takes work to try to get it to taste more like a traditional red wine. And then you have the fundamental argument, well if I make wine where I blend fifteen or twenty percent Merlot or Cabernet Franc or Cabernet Sauvignon into Norton, I—I tweak the acid ratio, barrel-age it—I do a lot of things with this grape to really make it more towards a—lean it towards a Bordeaux varietal and—and fill in the center palate. And so the argument is made, well, you're manipulating the grape past of what it's supposed to represent, so it's not Norton anymore. It's just a—a different animal. I—I do that for my personal palate. It's what I like out of it. So a—a true Norton isn't for everybody's taste.

01:11:58

I think it's great for Virginia. I think it's really cool. We're making some Virginia native oak barrels. I've got Virginia native trees from a national battlefield, and we're going to be making barrels from a Civil War battlefield oak trees, and we're going to fill these barrels with native Virginia Norton Grapes and have a truly native wine, and I'm really excited about this project, too.

01:12:19

AE: Hmm. So what would you say is the—the future of Virginia wine?

01:12:27

CP: We've maintained about four-percent market share in the last ten years—even though the number of wineries have doubled, acreage has nearly doubled. But also, the consumption rate of

Virginians has doubled. My long-term goal is to maintain this four-percent and grow it to five or six percent. I don't think we're ever going to be eight or ten percent. Our agriculture doesn't allow it. Our weather conditions—it's expensive to grow. We don't have the ability of large-scale production of vineyards—not like the rest of the world can produce. But I think to maintain in the higher tier of wines of modern dollar—fifteen to twenty-five, thirty dollar bottle of wine, not the cheap and cheerfuls and not the most expensive—to gain respect and to have more wineries pay more attention to what they're doing, to have them spend their extra ten cents, twenty cents, thirty cents a bottle of production, to really pay attention to the quality standards and to not have Virginia wineries put out an inferior quality product. The top twenty percent of Virginia wineries are putting out a phenomenal wine and there's many out there, and I'm so proud to be a part of it. To have the bottom fifty percent of Virginia wineries that are hobbyists, not focused, making mistakes has really been—is continuing to do a disservice to our potential as an industry. And bringing up the floor is probably the most important thing for our industry. The leaders are going to lead. It's—it's everybody else right now that's not helping our industry reach its potential. I'm trying to say that as politically correctly as possible because a lot—a lot of these people are my friends. **[Laughs]**

01:14:25

AE: **[Laughs]**

01:14:25

CP: And I help, and I'm trying. **[Laughs]**

01:14:28

AE: Well do you have—a different kind of tangent—do you have any ideas or opinions about Southern wine or Virginia wine and Southern food?

01:14:37

CP: Huh, good one. Oh, Southern food I tend to drink more beer and mint juleps with. I—I am affiliated with a winery in North Carolina and the Southern food thing—it's different with the wines. I think, yeah, I—I got to think about that one before I answer about the Southern food and wine going on and what wine pairings and—a broad-brushed style. The problem, as you go to Southern states, is you have warmer evenings. If it's not at the right location, you can have warm evenings and hot days, and that's not the best thing for grapes. Grapes like to have a cool evening. South of Chattanooga, Tennessee, and the mountains of—of Georgia—great place to be growing grapes—it's—it's hot and sunny. They're away from frost. There's cool evenings. Yadkin Valley in North Carolina; Texas has some very good grape-growers. There's some good spots to be growing grapes and I—I think the neat thing about Southern cooking is, as these producers are going to be making better wine, I think—I'm hoping that the local wine and local food work together.

01:15:56

You think of Italy. You know, they have been making wine and making food—good food, good wine—for a long time and they have evolved together. Southern food has evolved for a few hundred years, but it's been without Southern wine. I—and if I say anything else, I'm probably going to insult somebody. **[Laughs]**

01:16:21

AE: Well Fred Thompson wrote an article fairly recently that—where he—he came up with some wine pairings for [pork] cracklins, and so I wonder if you think it's just maybe a novelty to try and make those associations, or do you think it's something that could be a great kind of marketing idea for Virginia wine and Southern wine.

01:16:37

CP: Oh, I think that's a great thing. And Elvis was known for his sweet white wines like Sauternes and a fried banana and peanut butter sandwich, you know, maybe with honey on top, if you really want to be completely pairing with the Sauternes. You know, what—what wine goes with fried chicken and—and coleslaw and good pork barbecue? I'll—I'll drink Lone Star Beer, personally.

01:17:05

The [*Sighs*]*—*there's got to be some—(a) it's—well let me—let me go this way. Let me—let me, maybe, take the right tact here. In our country, the United States, it's about freedom—freedom of choice, freedom of people. If you like wine, then drink it; if you like barbecue, then eat it; and if you want peanut butter and fried banana sandwiches with your Sauternes, then who is going to say anything different? And if you want to put rum in your Coca Cola®, or you want to drink a nice quality rum by itself or you want to put White Zinfandel in turkey sandwiches together because that's what you like, then good for you. In the wine world there are probably twenty percent of bad choices with wine and food. Riesling and chocolate does not work good together. And there's twenty percent of really good classic combinations. A good crisp, clean white wine or—or a sparkling wine with good oysters from down in the Gulf Coast—phenomenal.

01:18:05

When you have a nice Pinot Noir and a good roasted pork, yeah, yum. So and—and there's probably a lot in the middle that is individual preferences, you know. I like my burgers medium-rare; you like them medium-well. And I don't like baked potatoes and—and I'm very particular about my coleslaw. So what, you know. Drink what you like, eat what you like, and if you can justify why it works and other people like it and you've created something new, good for you. I—I have yet to see a deep-fried pork sandwich, but I'm sure someone out there has already made one. **[Laughs]** I don't know what wine to put with it, though.

01:18:47

AE: Well and I'm sure it's lunchtime, and I've kept you here for a long time, and now that's making me hungry. But, Chris, is there anything—a final thought you'd like to add or—or something that we didn't touch on that you want to make sure to offer to the record here?

01:19:00

CP: No, I've—I appreciate the conversation and interest, and we're out here having fun and fighting hard, and I think you can do both at the same time. You know, a lot of people say I work too many hours in a day. My argument is, there's not enough hours in a day to do what I love. It's the compliance and paperwork that kill me, and that's where the work is. And also, I've been very fortunate to have good staff. We've got really good people here working with us and people have come and people have gone as employees and friends and—and all, but this industry in Virginia, this industry in general—the wine industry is about friendship. It's about good food, good wine. It's about passion and appreciation of nuances and always with respect, I think, and that's—that's fundamental. But I appreciate you coming out and come visit us sometime.

01:19:54

AE: Cheers to that. Thank you, Chris.

01:19:55

[End Chris Pearmund Interview]