

Circle Update

December 2014



A happy, prosperous 2015 to all Update readers Highlight of this issue: CWW in Virginia Plus: Christmas party and more Circle happenings

Circle Update is the newsletter of the Circle of Wine Writers

It is published five times a year: March, May, July, October and December

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Circle Update is available to external subscribers for £60 a year. The Circle's membership list is available in various media from £95. A special joint package of the membership list with frequent emailed updates through the year and a year's subscription to **Circle Update** is available from £135. These options can be viewed at www.circleofwinewriters.org. For more information, please contact Andrea Warren (see below). Membership enquiries should also be directed to her.

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This edition's featured photographers are Mick Rock and Steven Morris, for their work on the CWW Virginia trip. Front cover: Boxwood Winery by night, by Mick Rock; back cover: autumn colour at Afton Mountain Vineyards, by Steven Morris. See pages 12-36.

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CWW in Virginia 2014

*Steven
Morris's
montage
from
the trip.
Read
on for
reports
and
many
more
photos*





2nd-9th November 2014: the Circle returns to Virginia

Falling again on our feet...

Vivienne Franks introduces the reports

The CWW's first trip to Virginia, in 2010, was very successful, long-lasting friendships were made, an excellent CWW Christmas party was hosted by the Virginians and another CWW trip to Virginia was planned. In the first week of November 2014 that plan was realised.

We were an interesting group of two UK photographers, three UK educators/writers, one UK-based Russian writer, three American writers and one Canadian writer. If you follow Instagram, Twitter and Facebook you will have seen some fabulous photographs from Steven Morris and Mick Rock highlighting the magnificent autumnal colours in the vineyards and stunning backdrops of the Virginian countryside. The rest of us used social media to capture and share our experiences of the wines, food and culture of Virginia.

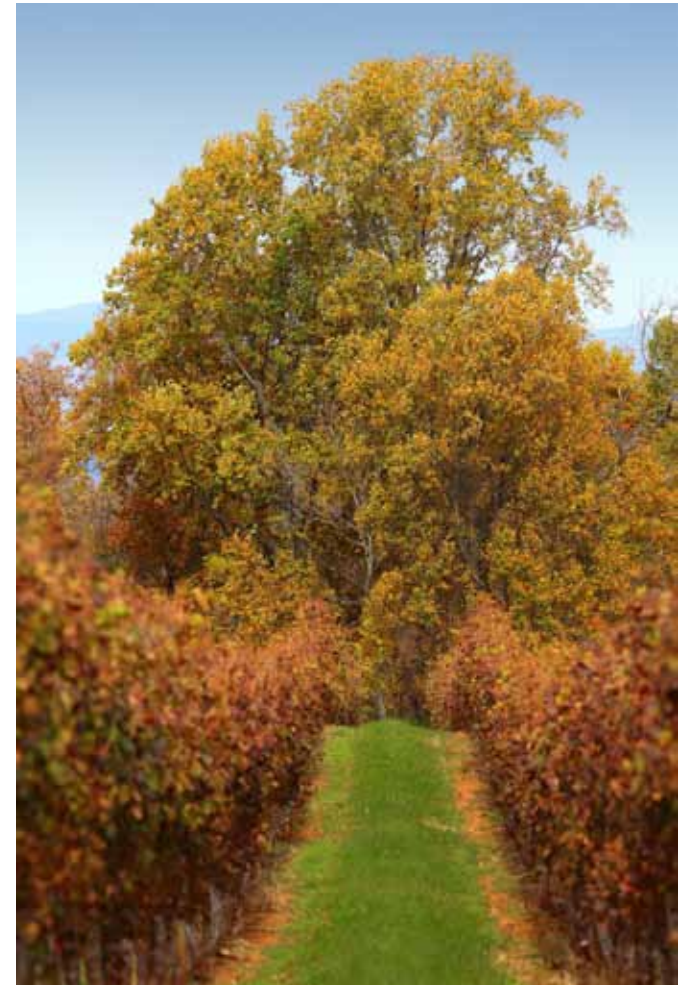
Detailed reports on our trip follow and I would like to thank all my colleagues for making the second trip to Virginia such educational fun, and for sharing their thoughts and tweets on the visits. Particular thanks to Steven for being quiz master on the longer coach runs and educating us on weird and wacky facts.

Also our thanks to CWW member Richard Leahy, resident Virginian and local wine writer, for joining us on the trip, sharing his local knowledge whilst updating himself for the revised edition of his book *Beyond Jefferson's Vines, The Evolution of Quality Wine in Virginia*.

Our evident enthusiasm and wine knowledge has spurred Amy Ciarametaro to sign up for the WSET Diploma: good luck, Amy! Following the trip Susan Wagner has got engaged: congratulations Susan and Jeffrey!

Special thanks to Annette Boyd, Amy Ciarametaro and Susan Wagner from the VA Wine Marketing Office, Christi Braginton from the VA Tourism Corporation, Jennifer Buske-Sigal from Visit Loudoun, Brigitte Belanger-Warner from the Albemarle Charlottesville Convention and Visitors Bureau, Maureen Kelley from Nelson County Economic Development and Tourism and all the producers for sharing their wines and their knowledge and very generous hospitality.

The fabulous colours of Virginia in the fall, captured by Mick Rock at Afton Mountain Vineyards (top) and Steven Morris at Barboursville (right).



**Sunday 2nd
November: after
the frustrations
of arriving in
Washington,
Vivienne Franks
finds calm at
Boxwood Estate
Winery**

A tired and bedraggled group arrived at the winery, some of us directly from Washington's Dulles airport after crossing the Pond and enduring the two-hour welcoming greeting from US immigration, the rest of us having waited patiently at the airport for us all to make contact. Even in darkness the aura of calm surrounds the Boxwood winery.

Originally, Boxwood Estate was a well-established horse farm in Middleburg. Land was purchased, 20 acres of vineyard was planted and the state-of-the-art winery was built in 2005 by John Kent Cooke, son of the late Jack Kent Cooke, owner of the Washington Redskins football team. The winery is managed by John's daughter, Rachel Martin. Rachel learnt about wine in Napa and Bordeaux and consults with Lucie Morton for viticulture and Stéphane Derenoncourt for the vinification of the wines produced at Boxwood.

Grape varieties include Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Petit Verdot and Malbec.

Sadly, Rachel was unable to join us on the evening, but the tasting room team, Kelly and Mark, did a great job for our first Virginian wine tasting.

We did not taste the rosé that sells out quickly. We did however taste the red wines:

2011 Boxwood Trellis, 60% Merlot and 40% press wine blend (Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot) (\$18), a fresh crisp red fruity wine yet earthy, mineral characters on the palate.



2011 Topiary, 68% Cabernet Franc, 32% Merlot (\$25), a much darker ruby colour, more intense black fruit flavours, with a spicy herby finish.

2012 Boxwood, 56% Merlot, 33% Cabernet Sauvignon, 11% Petit Verdot (\$29), intense black berry fruits on the nose, rich spicy notes in the mouth.

2008 Boxwood, 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 45% Merlot and 5% Petit Verdot (\$18), the most mature and intense of the wines tasted, complex evolved nose with ripe tannins, and a long spicy finish.

2009 Topiary, 50% Merlot, 48% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petit Verdot (\$18), garnet colour, delicate strawberry aromas with an earthy intensity, this wine has a long spicy finish. What a delicious wine with which to end our first taste of Virginia.

**Monday 3rd November: Angela Reddin
discovers a green approach at North Gate
Vineyard**

Mark and Vicki Fedor built their cellar door and winery in 2011, although they have been making wine since 2007; their first label was made literally in their garage. It is very much a farm-gate operation; Vicki is in-house and operations manager/winemaker until Mark can devote himself fully to their goal. As with most places we visited, they cannot make enough wine. It is all sold quickly and, it seems, easily.

Mark and Vicki have achieved gold status under the LEED system and are very proud of this. LEED (Leadership Energy and Environmental Design - a set of rating systems



Top left, Boxwood is a calming place, photo by Steven Morris. Above, Boxwood Estate at dawn, photo by Mick Rock.

referring to the design, operation and maintenance of green buildings) is a local US government points system in which each aspect of a building plan can gain LEED points, leading to a specific status, ie gold. In the winery and tasting rooms, everything is made from recycled products – even the plumbing pipes. They installed a solar roof, with a government incentive of 30% of costs, and think they will achieve investment payback within seven years.

Virginia is a hard place to make wine. The humidity means there needs to be a rigorous spray programme and a lot of work in the vineyard. Nothing can be done about the hot nights. Humidity and heat means acid is lost very fast. “We will add acid when needed before, during and after ferment. Ph levels this vintage [2014] were great, 3.4 - 3.6, so no acid has been added so far. We had a lovely summer with cool nights this year which is unusual for us,” says Mark.

There is ripe grape loss due to deer and birds. They counteract birds with noise – distressed bird calls and predatory bird calls are played regularly over the vineyards. For the deer, they erect temporary fencing when the grapes are ripe and remove after picking so as not to spoil their views.

The farm area is 26 acres, with eight acres planted. Some vineyards are leased. At around 60 miles from downtown DC, North Gate Vineyard is very much in range as a weekend destination for people, so the wine club and cellar door traffic accounts for most of the sales, although there are some wines in retail stores.

Tasting notes

Current vintage Viognier, 2013: 100% Viognier. The wine spends six months in neutral oak, no malolactic and zero residual sugar. Asian pear, orange blossom scents, has subtlety. Lovely freshness with some body and a lick of tannin, the acidity keeps the tension and texture lively. Long finish.

Viognier here has a slightly thick skin, so needs leaf shading and plucking, opening the canopy to take advantage as much as possible against the relentless humidity. The



Viognier is whole cluster pressed 50%, the rest crushed and destemmed, so some skin contact happens during the pressing. They chill down to enable the processing of cool fruit. Clone 1 Alben is the most planted Virginian clone. It has looser bunches, therefore getting more airflow around the grapes and is distinctive by being forward and flowery.

Chardonnay from the 12-year-old vineyard. 100% crushed with stems. Cold stainless steel ferment with full malolactic. The wine stays for six months in barrel, 12% of which is new, light toast. Apple citrus and stone fruits, some lemon crème. Very smooth and silky in the mouth, with a nice bite.

For their Cabernet Franc 2012 Mark and Vicki use local oak from Minnesota, but they are now trialling Virginian oak. 17 months in oak, 60% French, 40% American. Lightish



North Gate vines, and a warm welcome, photos by Steven Morris.

colour, lovely nose, sweet red briar fruits, some cranberry, with a nice capsicum touch. A crunchy red in the mouth, lively and tense, low key tannins, ready to drink now.

Merlot 2012: fruit sourced from three separate vineyards, picked and vinified as individual lots then blended together. Cold soak first, then 2-3 weeks on skins with punchdowns as required. Then into French oak for 17 months maturation. Squashy plum, graphite, subtle spice, compote. Quite lush in the mouth, big burst of fruit, quite moreish tannins and a nice bright finish.

Meritage 2012: 'Meritage' is so well known in the USA now that it becomes the recognised brand name as opposed to 'Bordeaux blend'. Mark and Vicki will start to incorporate the little bit from their leased Cabernet Franc vineyard which has a bit of Malbec in too (a single barrel-worth).

Petit Verdot 2012: deep colour, smoky earthy nose, all French oak and sometimes with up to 10% Cabernet Sauvignon.

Chambourcin: spends six months or less in neutral oak. Beautiful bright vivid colour from this tenturier hybrid variety. Meant to be drunk lively and young, Beaujolais style. Soft red fruits on the nose, very lush and ripe (tastes like it has some residual sugar). A juicy mouthful with real drinkability.

Mourvèdre: this spent two years in barrel as they 'forgot' about it. They took the fruit from a neighbour who didn't know what variety it was or what to do with it. Only after it was vinified did ampelographers confirm the vineyard was Mourvèdre. No one else grows it in Virginia. Slightly tinny/metallic nose. A little light but nice enough, just not very distinctive:

Mark and Vicki also produce an apple wine, using wine yeasts for fermentation and adding some tannin for body.

Monday 3rd November continued: Angela Reddin at Breaux Vineyards, where Nebbiolo is one of 18 varieties planted

Jen's father Paul Breaux founded the winery and estate in 1997. He bought the land, which already had vines planted,



Mark and Vicki Fedor pour North Gate wines, and, right, more autumn colour in the vineyard., photos by Steven Morris.

in 1994, to escape city life. The original block is still in production, now 28-30 years old. The logo is a crawfish – or Cajun shrimp – as the family were originally from further south.

We arrived and were met by Jennifer Breaux Blosser, who gave us a visual and panoramic explanation of the vineyards and Little Scotland Valley itself, which is in the Loudoun Heights district. Standing outside to gain a feel for the estate, we could see the horse paddocks and the south-east facing hill behind the winery which has Nebbiolo planted on its crown. Unfortunately the wind chill factor soon drove us inside. This wind here is pretty much a constant, enabling Breaux to grow varieties that could be prone to some serious rot problems if it were not for its ameliorating effect.

Breaux owns a total of 404 acres, with 104 being planted

to vines, of 18 different varieties. This makes it one of the largest estates in Virginia. One of the more unusual offerings is iced wines — Nebbiolo being one. Cryoextraction of the juice can concentrate the Brix level from 24 to 48°.

We were taken to the dedicated tasting room, styled very like an English pub, cosy and comfortable.

Just recently joined winemaker Heather Munden has had a number of careers. She used to be a chef, cheese maker and beekeeper and made her own pig products, charcuterie/ sausages. She will start a piggery here also. She has been winemaker at Breaux for seven months, from her last job in Napa where among other winemaking commitments, she was winemaker and owner at Fama Wines, making Chardonnay from fruit sourced from the Hudson vineyards.

Heather advocates meticulous dropping of rotten fruit and leaf removal in the fruit zone. She did not like to dwell



Breaux general manager Chris Blosser and Jen Beaux Blosser, and winemaker Heather Munden, photos by Steven Morris.

on what was made here previously, kept her mind clear and did not bother too much with what and how wines were made in the past. A very confident and intelligent woman, she wants to make her mark looking not back but forward, with her own particular stamp on the style.

The 2014 harvest was the 24th Heather has completed. She gave an interesting comparison with Napa, where she would be picking grapes at 30 Brix. This vintage she was happy with 23.5 Brix for the reds.

Tasting notes

Sauvignon Blanc: Heather staggers the picking here and uses different methods of vinification. She has just bought some stainless steel drums, to process the majority of the fruit, but also uses some older French barrels, which she guides through malolactic (30%). Very straightforward, good aromas, clean, without being overpowering.

2013 Viognier: sur lie ageing for five months, 75% stainless steel, 20% goes into new acacia wood and 5% into new French oak barrels. Flowers and stone fruits with

exotic hints. Pear, peach and apricot flavours give plenty of fruitiness, the weight in the mouth is impressive, almost but not quite oily. Good length and fine balance.

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon: barrel fermented in 60% French, 40% American barrels. The wine was kept in oak for 30 months. 2010 was a 'hot' year, declaring 15% alcohol. The wine is rich with plenty of dense black fruit components, solid tannins; the alcohol just shows through on the finish.

2007 Meritage: 42% Cabernet Sauvignon (used all five varietals). This vintage is released slowly through the cellar door and wine club. A big wine, lots of oomph, bold and deep flavours and a long finish.

Cabernet Franc 2010: 50% French oak and 50% American, coming in at a whopping 16.4% alcohol. "The low pH re the high alcohol possibly came from uneven ripening on the vine," we were told. A big bruiser of a wine, like a dry port, that had amazing presence. I didn't like it but was impressed by it.

Heather said they tinker with the reds in the cellar and bottle on taste "when they have the blending components

in harmony". They offer older vintages through the cellar door, wanting to give some bottle maturation, and release on demand.

Soleil 2006 Vidal: cryoextraction concentrated the juice to 48° Brix. Some oak used in the maturations. 2014 will be the second vintage – the fruit for which was in a trailer on the property – with 6 tonnes of grapes frozen. Savoury, spicy nose, dried honeycomb, tangy, citrusy, medium length, a little dusting of oak on the finish.

We then went back to the Acadia Hall in the events pavilion for lunch and tasting more wines. This stunning room can seat 150 guests, has magnificent views across the estate and a large roaring fireplace. It also has a dedicated kitchen for catering.

It was here we tried some of the Nebbiolos. The Nebbiolo vineyard is planted on the only shale soils within the estate. There are 4.2 hectares in production, at elevations between 250 and 350 metres above sea level. Distinguished by its large loose clusters, the Nebbiolo ripens relatively late in the season here.

Nebbiolo 2006: spent 30 months in barrel, 75% French and 25% American oak. Garnet/brick in colour, a smoky/spicy nose initially giving way to bramble fruits, cherries dusted in chocolate. Svelte and smooth in the mouth. The tannins are very present in a ripe, silky textural way. Medium bodied with a smooth long finish.

Breaux styles itself as an 'event' destination to cater for large gatherings (weddings) and smaller groups in a variety of settings, indoor and outside. With its stunning site, panoramic views and closeness to Washington, this has to be a very popular choice.

The three-course lunch we were served there by the Bluewater Kitchen catering company provided unpretentious elegant combinations on the plate that were subtle, perfectly seasoned and spiced, and altogether delicious. All too often chefs seem to get over ambitious and try to cram too many flavours and textures into one dish, resulting in disaster. That was not the case here – and I have the recipe for the delicious squash soup!

**Monday 3rd November continued:
Tanya Mann learns the secret of the pear
at Fabboli Cellars**

"What does all this have to do with wine?"

*Balance the grapes on the vine, balance the wine
in the glass, balance the land where we live and balance
the life that we lead. Wow, that's deep!"*

Doug Fabboli

Well, who told you that a wine must be placed in a certain category, or gain points from wine critics or sell millions of boxes to be classed as a success?

Doug Fabboli, owner with his wife Colleen of the Fabboli Cellars, which produces around 3500 cases a year, is a very charismatic personality and could be an ideal candidate for the role of Virginia Wine Region Ambassador. His lovely winery, which reminds me of a house of Ellie from *The Wizard of Oz*, has been in production for more than 30 years.

His approach to wine tasting proves that there's no single, proper way to approach the matter of consumer communication. We sampled seven juicy style wines accompanied by carefully selected gastronomic snacks. Some combinations were pleasantly surprising – for example, local Chambourcin with Karen's homemade stuffing, or a blend of Merlot and raspberry wine with raspberry Merlot truffle.

It seems that Doug gained all his skills in New York State and California and presented these to Virginia with love.

For me, the second surprise is the passion with which Fabboli is working on wine-fruit products, which are gaining great momentum in America nowadays. Fabboli's raspberry-Merlot wine, light and delicate, would be a great addition to a chef's cooking ingredients, for example in a dressing for a berry cheesecake.

At the end of our tasting, this enthusiastic winemaker produced with some delight his creative baby: limited edition Aperitif Pear Wine, intricately produced, each bottle containing a whole pear.



**Monday 3rd November continued:
Tanya Mann is impressed by history and
elegance at Tarara Winery**

This excellent, premium-style winery is set in an indescribably beautiful hilly landscape by the Potomac River and surrounded by ancient forest. Tarara is one of the oldest wineries in Virginia, now producing around 8000 cases a year, and was founded in 1989 by Whitie and Margaret Hubert.

The winemaker and general manager is a Canadian by birth, Jordan Harris. From the first moment he captured our attention, starting with his designer shirt advertising his winery and ending with stories about Project Tapaca.

The official tasting was held in the elegant tasting room, surrounded by Riedel glasses of various shapes, each perfect for use with a certain wine, and under impressive chandeliers that lit the room beautifully. It's a shame that no-one in our party was a musician, as in the next room a grand piano stood idle.

Tarara wines are clearly made with great professionalism.

*Doug
Fabboli
with fruit-in-
the bottle
limited
edition
Aperitif Pear
Wine; right,
a welcome
to the cellar,
photos by
Steven
Morris.*

The winery produces a good quantity, too. Modern technologies are used expertly throughout the whole process, from harvesting onwards, through the winery and into the cellars, as we could taste from our sampling.

We began the tasting with an unusual white wine with hints of wild aromas – herbal, grassy with Earl Grey notes developing into tastes of stone fruits. This, believe it or not, was achieved by the blending of eight grape varieties, including rare Rkatsiteli, Gordonsville, Carter Mountain, Front Royal and Nevaeh. Jordan himself introduced this wine: initially I was not too keen, but finally I genuinely enjoyed it! Tarara's red wines, too, are good options with the special blends of Cabernet Sauvignon with Tannat and Bordeaux-style Meritage.

Right, Tarara Winery vineyard at dusk, photo by Mick Rock; below, Tarara's Jordan Harris describes the wines, photo by Steven Morris.



Tuesday 4th November: *Lindsay Oram* muses on history and the European connection at Monticello and Barboursville Vineyards

We often seem to assume that all the great history of wine belongs to the old world, but from reading *Dinner with Mr Jefferson* by Charles Cerami last year this is certainly not the case. This book fuelled my desire to visit both Monticello and the vineyards of Virginia.

Jefferson developed his love of the fine light wines of Europe during his appointment as Minister to France at

the end of the 18th century. He saw how fine food and wine dining could often oil the wheels of political life. On his return to America, he was appointed Secretary of State, and it was his job to iron out some extremely contentious issues, such as the national debt and the location of the new capital city. This Jefferson achieved in part by inviting his rivals to dine with him at Monticello, plying them with fine food and European wines from his cellar – all paid for from his own pocket, UK politicians take note. The dining room can still be seen today at Monticello, with an ingenious lazy waiter that could deliver fine wines from the cellar directly to the dining



room without any eavesdropping staff. Undoubtedly wine played a seminal role in the establishment of the America we know today.

However, Jefferson's attempts to establish a vineyard at Monticello were less successful and did not thrive. This despite his farm, Monticello, (unusually) being built on a mountain (Monticello means little mountain in Italian), with

a southern exposure and drying winds to limit the fungal disease associated with this humid climate. But there is a thriving vineyard at Monticello today, growing Sangiovese, and tended by a legend of the Virginian wine industry, Gabriele Rausse.

Gabriele, a native Italian, has been highly instrumental in the wine industry here, with many successful winemakers,

such as Kirsty Harmon, acknowledging him as their winemaking mentor. Gabriele has also been responsible for grafting trials to establish the most suitable scion/rootstock combination for the Virginian climate. Currently he is involved in establishing a new vineyard planting of Pinot Noir at Montalto, a windy 1,280 ft-high mountain site.

So why did Jefferson's original plantings fair so badly? Well, we all know that the best manure is the grower's footsteps, and I suppose if you are establishing a new country that takes priority over a vineyard.

There is a direct link between Monticello and Barboursville, as Gabriele was the original viticulturist and general manager. Barboursville Vineyards is owned by Casa Vinicola Zonin, the largest private vine-growing and winemaking company in Italy. The vineyard is located in Central Piedmont with the winemaker is Luca Paschina, who hails from other Piedmont, so unsurprisingly there is a strong Italian/European ethos at Barboursville. As you stand outside the Tuscan-style winery you can almost believe that you are in Italy.

The winery was established in 1976, which makes it one of Virginia's oldest wineries. More importantly, from an historical context, prior to the arrival of the Zonin family at Barboursville virtually all wine produced in Virginia was from French hybrids. The arrival of Zonin with a European heritage, pioneering spirit and money, saw investment



Top, from left, Luca Paschina, Gabriele Rausse, Barboursville vineyard; far left, Barboursville again, photos by Steven Morris. Left, restored Thomas Jefferson vineyard at Monticello, photo by Mick Rock.

in the planting of vinifera varieties, adopting one-metre row spacing, modern winemaking and a restaurant at the winery. All these are pretty standard now, but at the time were highly innovative.

The problem with thinner-skinned vinifera varieties is that in the damp, humid climate of Virginia fungal disease can be a problem, at least to non-European winemakers. For Luca at Barboursville, the climate is similar to La Morra in Barolo, so what is the problem?

Unsurprisingly, the wines have a strong European influence, and like many Virginian wines marry the best of old world restraint and new world fruit. Virginian wines seem to be able to produce ripe fruit with fresh acidity at lower alcohol levels than most other American wines.

And that is the case at Barboursville, shown by the elegant green peach and apricot kernel of the stainless steel-fermented Viognier, 13% abv, without malolactic fermentation to preserve the acidity, and with 12 months lees ageing for a lovely silky mid-palate texture. There are several Italian varieties grown including Moscato, Pinot Grigio, Barbera, Nebbiolo and Sangiovese. The Moscato, with Vidal, is made into a truly delicious, succulent and sweet passito-style wine.

Perhaps to sum up the philosophy of Barboursville Winery it is best to give the last word to Luca Paschina. "To make wine means to understand the potential of the place, without too much effort. The vine develops at its best if it is accompanied and supported by men, who then allow the results to be reflected in time through wine."

Well said, Luca!

Tuesday 4th November continued: Virginia wine history continues as Rebecca Murphy recounts the Jefferson Vineyards story

Jefferson Vineyards has an illustrious history, beginning in 1773 when Thomas Jefferson gave Italian viticulturist Filippo Mazzei 193 acres of land south of Monticello to plant the European grapevines he brought with him from



Serious tasting at Jefferson Vineyards, photo by Steven Morris.

Tuscany. In 1774 Mazzei formed the Virginia Wine Company with such illustrious shareholders as Jefferson and George Washington. Events during the American Revolution proved a distraction from grape growing and while Mazzei was in Europe on a fund-raising mission his vineyards were destroyed by a renter's horses.

Fast forward to 1939 when Shirley and Stanley Woodward senior purchased the property, where Mazzei had built a house he had named Colle. In the late 1960s the Woodwards added 400 acres to the estate and in 1981 they hired Gabriele Rausse, the original winemaker at Barboursville Winery and currently director of gardens and grounds at Monticello, to plant vineyards. In 1986 a winery was built and they called their business Simeon Vineyards.

The second generation of Woodwards, Marie Jose and Stanley junior, changed the name to Jefferson Vineyards in 1993. Today the third generation carries on the family

business, under the leadership of Alexa and Attila Woodward.

Christopher Ritzcovan, who has worked in the cellar since 2007, was appointed winemaker in 2013. He gets Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Viognier, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Petite Verdot and Malbec grapes from almost 22 acres planted in four vineyard sites.

The style of his wines is lean, light and fresh. The 2013 Pinot Gris had light pear and citrus flavours with bright acidity. Cabernet Franc 2012 had light red cherry fruit, while the blackberry fruit of the Petit Verdot 2012 had notes of violets and sturdy tannins. The 2012 Meritage had cassis, and plum fruit showing a bit of spice.

Tuesday 4th November concluded: at Trump Winery

Lisa Shara Hall introduces the visit:

We arrived at Trump Winery in Charlottesville in early evening. (Yes, that Trump – Eric Trump, son of Donald Trump, is president. He was not present for our visit.)

The winery makes 30-35,000 cases, from grapes including Chardonnay, Viognier, Sauvignon Blanc, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot and Malbec. It is Virginia's largest winery and is especially known for sparkling wines.

The team planted most of the vineyards in 1999. They are netted to protect from birds, bees, raccoons and deer; the netting alone cost \$120,000. To combat humidity, Trump de-leaves around the grape cluster and sprays. The winery uses commercial yeasts.

Vivienne Franks describes the wines and food:

Our hosts for the delightful tasting and dinner were general manager Kerry Woolard and winemaker Jonathan Wheeler. We tasted four superb sparkling wines: a crisp, fresh Blancs de Blanc 2008 (\$24), with three years maturation on the lees; a 95% Chardonnay and 5% Pinot Noir rosé 2008 (\$29), with very strong berry fruit notes, also with three

years on the lees in a mix of stainless steel and French oak; a Blancs de Noir 2008 (\$35), with a long complex finish; and a 100% Chardonnay Reserve 2007 (\$45) with four years on the lees. This wine is a serious competitor to Champagne with a rich baked apple and spicy creamy complex finish.

A number of still wines were tasted before dinner: Chardonnay 2012; Sauvignon Blanc 2012; Viognier 2012; a rosé blend of 60% Merlot, 23% Cabernet Franc, 17% Cabernet Sauvignon 2012; a 'Simply Red' 2008, 48% Merlot, 26% Cabernet Franc, 21% Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Petit Verdot; and a 'New World Red' 2008. All the wines showed elegant fruit.

Dinner was served in the very elegant Carriage House, where chef Tucker Yoder provided an excellent menu to accompany yet more still wines. The aperitif NV 'Cru' 18% ABV, 100% Chardonnay, fortified to 18% with a Chardonnay brandy, was an unusual choice, but worked well.

The seasonal vegetable salad with house-made tofu, black cocoa and garden herbs was paired with Meritage 2012, 45% Merlot, 35% Cabernet Franc, 18% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2% Petit Verdot. The wine had 10 months in French oak and has a black fruit and spicy note.

Roasted terres major with braised maitake mushrooms, roasted broccoli, farro and melted onions was served with New World Reserve 2012, 42% Merlot, 33% Cabernet Franc, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Petit Verdot. After 16 months in 70% new French oak, this is a rich, powerful wine.

Dark chocolate cremeux with fennel, red wine sauce, puffed rice and pear was paired with a sparkling rosé 2009, 92% Chardonnay and 8% Pinot Noir, with three years on the lees. It was an elegant example to end a delightful evening.



Clockwise from top right: stars and stripes flying over the Carriage House at Trump Winery, the CWW group tasting in the Carriage House and table laid for dinner there, photos by Mick Rock.





Red is the focus at King Family Vineyard, photo by Steven Morris.

Wednesday 5th November: **Rebecca Murphy** learns of the rapid growth of the King Family Vineyard

King Family Vineyard began in 1996 when the founders, David and Ellen King, moved from Texas to Crozet, Virginia. In 2000, they produced 480 cases of their first commercial wines from just over eight acres of vines. Today, they produce just over 10,000 cases of wine annually from 31 acres of vines in the Monticello American Viticulture Area (AVA).

Winemaker Matthieu Fainot is the only non-family member at the winery. After his studies in Beaune he worked in wineries in northern Rhône, Bandol, St Emilion, Jura, Friuli and South Africa. He arrived in Virginia ten years ago.

Matthieu first showed us the Brut Non-Vintage, which he said is always from a specific vintage even though it's not

indicated on the label. It's fermented in neutral oak, spends 13 months on lees and has 6 grams per litre of sweetness. It had a yeasty nose with citrusy, green apple flavours.

King Family makes a flavourful Viognier and barrel-fermented Chardonnay, but the main focus is on the reds. The 2013 Cabernet Franc is made in a light style for early consumption with short skin contact and nine months in neutral barrel. It was light-bodied with pretty black cherry, cassis fruit with notes of dried rose petals. The 2012 Meritage, made from estate-grown Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot blended with locally sourced Malbec, was a complex wine with dark ruby colour, raspberry jam fruit layered with smoky bacon, dried herbs and a touch of sandalwood. The richness of the fruit was balanced by crisp acidity and lightly chewy tannins.

Matthieu explained that Merlot is his workhorse grape that he doesn't want to get overripe. The Merlot site

produces grapes with a good pH level. He said some of the other sites can have a high pH, so he does acidify reds because he wants ripe fruit phenolics. He tries to make it in an old world style, which showed in the 2012 Merlot's linear structure and subtle red fruit.

Wednesday 5th November continued: at Albemarle Ciderworks

Vivienne Franks gives her impressions:

There are at least eight companies in Virginia producing cider. Most of them are based around Charlottesville and the opportunities for tourists to follow the cider trails in the same way as winery trails is growing.

Charlotte Shelton introduced us to her fascinating family business, Vintage Virginia Apples and Albemarle Ciderworks. From grafting and selling fruit trees in 2000 to making cider from more than 200 apple varieties from 2009, the family business is booming.



Thomas Unsworth, cidemaker, with Arkansas Black apples at Albemarle Ciderworks, photo by Mick Rock.

We tasted 2012 Jupiter's Legacy, a dry blend of 20-plus varietals, ideal with a Thanksgiving dinner; 2012 Royal Pippin, an off-dry single varietal of the Albemarle Pippin, great with shellfish; 2013 GoldRush, a dry single varietal to serve with oysters; 2013 Red Hill, a dry blend to go with light meats and fruity sauces; 2013 Arkansas Black, a dry blend, which works well with seafood; 2012 Old Virginia Winesap, a dry single varietal, a charcuterie partner; 2012 Ragged Mountain, an off-dry blend, which pairs well with cheese; and 2013 Pomme Mary, a sweet blend which is great with spicy food and especially local fried chicken dishes.

All the ciders showed amazing differences in both acidity levels and flavours. Alcohol levels varied between 7.2% and 9.5%

This was a really interesting visit and demonstrated the true diversity of cider and food pairing.

Lisa Shara Hall adds:

I had never been to a cidery before. I don't like lots of bubbles. But Albermarle Ciderworks cider is not sweet and not that bubbly; my favourites were the 2013 GoldRush, a dry cider with a sweet/tart flavour and high acidity, 2013 Red Hill which showed tart apple and high acidity, and the 2012 Old Virginia Winesap, which showed apple, a small amount of residual sugar, high acidity and had a very long finish. Our hosts were delightful and asked us to select apples outside to taste.

Wednesday 5th November continued: at Pippin Hill Farm

Vivienne Franks describes the visit:

Pippin Hill is a boutique winery and vineyard, which has a sustainable viticultural programme and beautifully landscaped gardens with stunning views over the valley. This winery is very focused on creating an environment suitable for one of the major businesses in Virginia... custom-made weddings and both corporate and family events. This is a destination venue which happens to make wine.

We stopped here to taste and have lunch. The raw



At Pippin Hill Farm, photos by Steven Morris.



materials are sourced locally, from artisanal meats, ecologically grown vegetables and farmstead fresh cheeses. The lunch menu is varied with interesting and unusual dishes and the wines compliment the style of the menu.

We tasted six different wines which we then paired with our lunch choices:

2013 Viognier, 80% stainless steel and 20% neutral oak, vibrant stone fruit flavours which paired well with mild cheeses; 2013 Chardonnay, vinified in neutral French oak, with a creamy complexity and which matched well with my croque monsieur; 2013 Chardonnay Reserve, fermented and matured in French oak, which would work with creamy sauced dishes; 2013 Winemakers Select Red Blend, 80% Chambourcin and 20% Merlot, in 10% new oak, with the remainder in neutral oak, a simple, juicy quaffer; 2012 'Red Pump', 50% Chambourcin and 50% Merlot, a soft juicy fruity style, ideal for summer picnics; 2013 Cabernet Franc, a leafy earthy style which paired well with the menu's carpaccio of Buffalo Creek striploin.

This visit was a pleasant interlude in a very picturesque location.

Lisa Shara Hall's favourite wines:

Of all the wines I enjoyed the 2013 Viognier the most. It featured a classic Viognier nose and very good acidity. It was also very floral. Chambourcin, which featured in several of the reds, is a French-American hybrid from the 1960s that does well in the Virginia climate

Wednesday 5th November continued: there's a supersonic experience for Chuck Byers at Lovington Winery

The very slim, fit-looking Riaan Rossouw's animated presentation reminded me more of a 'rock star' persona as he described his winemaking theories and practice. As I looked around the premises as he spoke upon a multitude of issues concerning winemaking, it occurred to me that this man spent most of his waking hours (and probably those of his sleep) thinking and dreaming about ways to improve his wine.

He touched on many subjects concerning his winemaking principles, moving from one to another the way a supersonic projectile goes through clouds. Not every winemaker could do it that way, but Riaan makes it work. He is in love with his job and with wine.

Obviously he comes from the 'no frills' school of winemaking and sales. Nowhere to be seen are the knick-knacks of many wineries – the little gadgets, trinkets, badges, glasses and other wine-related items that many wineries sell to improve their sales quota. No, for Riaan it is wine and only wine.

It is obvious also that this man is a risk-taker who pushes the limit and lives on the edge. His wines reflect this approach. Hardly any mechanics are used in the winery,

which is built into a hillside which allows the use of gravity in transporting the potential wine to the fermentation vats. Small amounts of grapes are used in each fermentation and the cap is naturally allowed to drop without much effort from Riaan and his crew.

His whites, such as his Seyval Blanc, are crispy, fresh with plenty of fruit on the nose and palate but also with a lingering pleasant acidity that makes one want more. His reds, such as his prize Estate Reserve, are immediately pleasing but complex with levels of fruit-driven flavours, earth tones and mushroom notes which culminate in a long, long finish. Then of course there is the Pinotage. It would have been a disappointment 'not' to have seen a South African wine at this winery. This wine was not a

disappointment. Red fruit on the nose on the palate with multiple levels appearing as the wine came in contact with air. Pleasant tannins and a lovely balance.

One could say more about this winery, but the two words that best describe the visit are Thank and You!

**Wednesday 5th November concluded:
Vivienne Franks is delighted by wine and food
at Veritas Vineyard and Winery**

An invitation from Patricia and Andrew Hodson, owners of Veritas Vineyard and Winery, led to a fabulous change to the itinerary, seemingly effortlessly achieved by the VA



Petit Manseng vineyard of Lovington Winery, photo by Mick Rock, and autumn colours on the estate, photo by Steven Morris.

Wine Board. Although scheduled to visit the winery on the following day, we were treated to some extra special library wines over dinner.

On arrival, we were served glasses of delicious sparkling wine and were warmly welcomed by Patricia Hodson and her daughter, winemaker Emily, at The Farmhouse, a beautifully designed six-bedroom B&B next door to the winery. Andrew Shipman, the talented chef, created a delightful menu and Emily told us she had fun choosing appropriate wines.

We started with butternut squash bisque with candied pepitas, herb breadcrumbs and spiced bacon paired with Viognier 2006 and 2012. The 2006 is 100% Viognier, rich and fruity with zesty orange and apricot flavours. The 2012 has 7% Petit Manseng in the blend, which gives the wine more fresh citrus and floral notes.

Second course of arugula salad tossed in an apple cider vinaigrette with pecan-crusted goat cheese and dried cranberries was paired with a 2013 50% Merlot and 50% Cabernet Franc rosé. This wine with its red cherry fruit characters worked really well with the cheese and cranberries.

The main course of kalimotxo (cola and red wine)-braised short ribs over whipped sweet potatoes and roasted brussels sprouts was paired with a 2007 Cabernet Franc. The slight earthy and black pepper characters of the wine complimented the distinctive flavours of the dish really well.

Dessert consisted of apple brown betty with cinnamon ice cream, blackberry syrup and brown sugar whipped cream. This was beautifully matched to a 2005 and 2013 Petit Manseng. The older wine, as expected, had a lot of dried fruit notes and the younger wine had fresh tropical fruit flavours. Both worked well with the dessert.

Emily introduced each wine with passion and enthusiasm. We could not fail to enjoy them.

Patricia was an elegant and gracious hostess. We all thoroughly enjoyed our dinner and looked forward to returning the following day to taste more wines with Andrew and George Hodson from Veritas and other Nelson producers.



Anti-frost wind machine at Cardinal Point Winery, photo by Mick Rock.

Thursday 6th November: Rebecca Murphy finds a dream realised at Cardinal Point Winery

Cardinal Point Winery is owned and operated by the Gorman family. Paul and Ruth Gorman fell in love with wine while Paul was on military assignment at Bad Kreuznach in Germany. When Paul retired in 1985, the couple realised their dream of a farm and planted a two-acre vineyard of Riesling and Cabernet Sauvignon. Their oldest son, John, was responsible for the renovation of an old farmhouse on the property, daughter Sarah and younger son Tim worked in the vineyard after school. Today, Tim is the vineyard manager and winemaker responsible for the 15 acres of grapes on the 90-acre farm.

For many years, the Gormans sold their grapes to wineries, but in 2002, said Tim, Sarah suggested they should start making their own wine, so they built a winery and Tim added winemaker to his title. He warned us in advance: "I can answer questions about grape growing, but not winemaking!"

Like many Virginia wineries, most of their wine is sold in their tasting room and to their wine club. Tim likens the 300-member club to a co-operative: "I can experiment with two to four barrels for the club and still make enough wine to sell in the tasting room."

He told us he would like to specialise in a limited number of wines, but "in the tasting room people expect a full range of wines".

He makes a Vinho Verde style wine called Green that is co-fermented Chardonnay and Petit Manseng and bottled soon after fermenting with a bit of CO₂. It is light, fresh and a little fizzy. The idea of a Chardonnay-Viognier blend came to him while on his tractor. It's called A6 for the Burgundian highway from Lyon to the Rhône Valley. It was a charming mélange of citrus, green apple, peach fruit, well balanced and creamy on the palate.

Perhaps the most unlikely combination was the Hopped Chardonnay, for which he used hops from a local brewery. It had very nice grassy, citrus zest aromas and flavours, light and fresh on the palate.

Thursday 6th November continued: Richard Leahy adds to Nelson County experience at Afton Mountain Vineyards

This was the day to discover Nelson County (a mountainous county south west of Charlottesville and within the Monticello American Viticultural Area). After leaving Cardinal Point Winery we drove just a few miles to Afton Mountain Vineyards, at the base of the mountain of the same name, and with stunning views across the Rockfish Valley (the Afton Mountain motto is 'grapes don't grow in ugly places').

The oldest vines date from 1978 and the vineyard/winery is in its third ownership under Tony and Elizabeth Smith, both natives of nearby Albemarle County, who bought the operation in 2009. Two important changes they brought were moving the tasting room to the house occupied by the previous owners (the previous tasting room was smaller and had no stunning views), and building a covered picnic gazebo between two vineyard blocks offering some of the best views of vineyards and mountains anywhere in the state. On the production side they have doubled the winery's planted acreage since 2009 to the current 24 acres, growing 15 varieties.

Wine quality has also taken a marked improvement under the new management, which includes French winemaker Damien Blanchon. The winery is still famous for its fresh and balanced Gewürztraminer (sold out when we visited), and for its flagship red, a skilful Tuscan blend with 40% Sangiovese and the balance Cabernet Franc and Merlot, which the Smiths call 'Bacco', alluding to 'Bacchanal' (trademarked by another winery). Unlike the IGT super-Tuscans dominated by new oak and high extraction, the bright red cherry fruit of the Sangiovese remains primary while the Cabernet Franc/Merlot components add tannic structure and black fruit flavours.

Damien's French winemaking style shows well here; the 2013 Chardonnay matches expectations of the \$30 price. It is barrel fermented in neutral French oak with 25% new and two yeasts are used, for complexity. The nose shows clean lemon, mineral and light yeast aromas. On the palate,



Spectacular setting and autumn colour at Afton Mountain Vineyards, photos by Steven Morris.



the wine is rich, round and layered but finishes with bright lemon acidity; a fine example of the new 'Burgundian' model for most Virginia Chardonnays today. Afton Mountain's Cabernet Franc 2012 (\$32) is also a fine cool-climate example of this leading Virginia red varietal, with aromatics of brilliant, scented red cherries, racy firm acidity on the

palate with zesty bright red cherry flavours and a fresh finish.

The winery is typical of Nelson County with small production (averaging 2,500-3,000 cases annually) and with 90% of sales at the cellar door. The Smiths have interplanted new vines in the oldest block (1978) of Pinot Noir to boost production while bringing a new generation online. Also typical of the region, their yields have been low at around 2 tons/acre.

Tony explains that the grape shortage is the biggest industry issue. Damien says that wineries themselves should take the initiative to increase grape acreage, following Afton Mountain's example, where the Smiths have been planting aggressively since they took over the estate.

Looking to the future, Afton Mountain has just harvested its first crop of Albariño, and since the Pinot Noir here does not make table wine up to industry expectations (common in most of the state), it will be put into sparkling production to make a *blanc de noirs* in the traditional method. Also new will be a red *vin doux naturel* in a Banyuls style which

Damien will age in large glass demi-johns instead of port-style oak.

The group enjoyed gourmet sandwiches of turkey breast and pesto in the covered gazebo, which was fitted with clear plastic sheeting and equipped with a gas fireplace and revealed fine vineyard views while we stayed warmly comfortable, enjoying the play of sunlight and shadow on the golden-leafed vineyards.

Thursday 6th November continued: *Richard Leahy* is immersed in alternative alcoholic drinks at Bold Rock Cidery

Our next stop was an immersion in the non-wine locally made alcoholic craft beverages of Nelson County, as we drove down the Rockfish Valley on Rt. 151, which is the name for the county's new Beverage Trail incorporating wineries, cideries, meaderies, breweries and even a distillery. At Bold Rock Cidery in Nellysford we met Brian Shanks, a New Zealander and master cider maker, who was "apple-solutely" delighted to welcome us to the cidery and "apple chape".

As a sign of the rapid growth of the cider category in the US, Brian explained that just two years ago it represented 0.1% of the national sales of beer, and today it represents a whole one per cent of national beer sales. Part of this is the gender-neutral appeal of cider. The cidery opened two years ago and is now the largest 'winery' in the state, being regulated as such, producing 200,000 cases (of 8.25 gallons each) annually. The press processes 20-30 tons of apples and 19,000 bottles are bottled daily. Since Bold Rock draws from cold storage facilities in the off-season it can process year-round.

Bold Rock sources its apples from local farmers in a 20-mile radius, some of whom have had orchards in their families for 200 years, and can include many local apple varieties in its blends. In contrast to some smaller artisanal cideries, it produces only blends instead of varietals, and they range from 4.7% to 6.9% abv.

Brian explains that he spent a year with the owners



Bold Rock Cidery, outside and in, photos by Steven Morris.

researching the American palate for ciders, and as a result their wares are not as dry as English traditional ciders, but not as sweet as the mildly alcoholic fizzy apple juice 'ciders' distributed by industry giants. Also, Bold Rock ciders all have the typical fresh crisp acidity of mountainous Central Virginia, and one Circle member described the taste as a 'liquid apple' with acid to match sweetness. Most of the production is in 12 ounce six-pack form but drier, more traditional ciders are made under the Crimson Ridge label, which is being kegged for restaurants in the northern Virginia market with popular response.

After tasting the ciders, Circle members were introduced to Kimberly Pugh of nearby Hilltop Berry Farm & Winery, making 'true-to-the-fruit' fruit wines, meads and mead variants (cysers, melomels, etc.), and to Christine Riggelman of Silverback Distillery.

Half of Hilltop Berry Farm's production is in fruit wines, half in mead and its variants. For this author, the most impressive products here were the peach wine (fragrant, drier than expected and true to the fruit with fine fruit/acid balance), the Rockfish River cyser (apple mead) that had





*Veritas panorama,
and sheep in
the vineyard,
photos by
Steven Morris*

spicy, lively apple aromas and flavours, and the Dragon's Breath, made from hickory smoked hot peppers and honey. Warm and spicy, the smoke elements balanced it well and would be a great match for Virginia barbecue (pulled pork with a tangy vinegar and brown sugar sauce).

From Silverback Distillery we tasted a very smooth and subtle gin, and a less subtle vodka with a bit more heat. This taster enjoys fine gin very occasionally, and was impressed with the finesse of this one, while carefully sipping it straight.

Thursday 6th November continued: Chuck Byers is inspired at Veritas Winery

The previous evening's dinner at the Farmhouse at Veritas Winery had indeed been exciting. The older wines matched with the delicious meal were excellent and whetted our appetites for what was to come.

Our second visit to the excellent Veritas winery gave us the opportunity to taste wines from several other wineries all under the one roof, including more from Veritas and others whose products we had not yet tasted. Among these were Democracy Vineyards, DelFosse Vineyards and Mountain Cove Vineyards.

The evening was an eventful one with each winery offering samples of its wines. It certainly proved that the



wine of Nelson County could stand on its own against any other region not only from United States but also the world.

The white, rosé and red wines tasted all showed a great deal of integrity and balance, while the ciders were delicious and refreshing.

What was so inspiring was not only initiative and passion shown by owners and winemakers alike but also the camaraderie that each showed to each other. At one point they were discussing a period of seasonal difficulty and how all shared in helping their winemaking neighbours.

This is something that I personally noticed with every winery that I visited with my Circle colleagues. Nowhere was competition so great that the helping hand was not offered nor the commendation not given.

According to several of the winemakers/owners, they were seeing a substantial increase in sales as well as weekly attendance. One of the winery owners/winemakers was wondering out loud if there would be enough fruit to go around. This can only be seen as good news if one is wondering about ways of getting more to sell rather than just hoping to sell more!

I especially enjoyed the rosé and Sauvignon Blanc wines tasted, though all the wines generally were very pleasing indeed.

Nelson County wineries have a great deal to be proud of and if their 'patron' and 'inspiration' (Jefferson, of course) were alive today, he would be very proud – proud indeed!



Andrew Hodson
in the Sauvignon
Blanc vineyard at
Veritas, photo by
Mick Rock.

Thursday 6th November concluded: beer and food pairing proves a happy experience for Richard Leahy at Wild Wolf Brewery

Our final alternate beverage experience on the Rt. 151 Beverage Trail was dinner at the Wild Wolf Brewery, a three-year-old establishment, also in Nellysford, owned by the Wolf family (Danny Wolf is a Master Brewer). This is also a brewpub and restaurant. We began with a beer tasting in the production brewery itself, with impressively smooth and full Belgian blonde ales, the second one flavoured with blackberries in a tastefully restrained way, matched with crostini of mushrooms and arugula. Wild Wolf brews 3600 (3 gallon) barrels annually and brews five days a week, and is already considering how to expand.

The dinner skilfully paired individual beers and local wine with locally sourced food prepared by executive chef Alex Alward. It was the first such local beer and wine paired with local ingredients meal I had had, and it worked impressively (except for the roasted rack of lamb which was almost raw). I found I could enjoy a sip of the beer, a taste of the food, then a sip of the wine, finding a harmonious balance with each beverage and the course.

First we enjoyed turnip beets, mixed greens, with pumpkin brewer's grain croutins and fresh parmesan, paired with seasonal beer Kick IT, an IPA which is the official beer of the Richmond Kickers' football (aka 'soccer') team; and the Afton Mountain estate reserve Chardonnay.

I especially enjoyed the Indian Summer risotto with the Howling Pumpkin (a 7% abv fall ale which despite the name had just enough pumpkin and spice) and the Cardinal Point A6, one of Virginia's first Chardonnay/Viognier blends, as well as the bold originality of the Caramount Farm raw goat's milk Esmontonia seasoned with critzer everberries, pistachio, with a homegrown habanero honey drizzle. This was paired with the Primal Instinct, a 7.4% abv unfiltered American IPA, and Veritas Sauvignon Blanc. The spicy/sweet seasoning and the rich texture of the cheese were well-balanced by the hoppy IPA and the crisp, herbal Sauvignon Blanc.

For pudding, we had a large cinnamon roll with vanilla currant icing, which we enjoyed with the Wild Wolf dry stout which offset the bun's sweetness.

The quality of the beers was impressive, as was their stylistic diversity and true-to-model brewing. The US craft brewing scene has gone through an excess of hops in beers very similar to what the wine industry saw with an excess of oak and extraction in the late 1990s, but Wild Wolf's beers are all elegantly balanced with typical but subtle flavourings in all styles.

I left with the sense that Wild Wolf makes superior beers that wine lovers and beer lovers can enjoy, without the fear of constantly being assaulted by excessive hops across the product line. Also, I was impressed with the skill of both chef Alward and brewer Wolf in creating fine pairings showcasing local beer and locally sourced foods.

... and a comment from Chuck Byers

Our hosts were extremely generous and this was the first time that I had ever had a food pairing with BOTH beer and wine at the same time. I found the whole experience very informative and most of all very enjoyable.



A quick catch-up on emails before the dinner at Wild Wolf begins, photo by Steven Morris.

**Friday 7th November:
Chuck Byers is impressed by the products
of Flying Fox Winery**

Once upon a time there was a grape grower who didn't wish to just grow grapes any more. So he decided to become a winery instead. The acreage was small (6.5 acres) and the establishment tiny but the wines produced were excellent. They still are!

Lynn Davis and Rich Evans operate the facility and grow their own grapes on the property, with the exception of the Viognier and Pinot Gris which are grown at a family-operated farm called Ridge Run at Stuart's Draft near the South River (a tributary of the Shenandoah River). Interestingly enough, the term 'draft' is used here in relation to the constant draught or breeze present at this site, thus making it a healthy place to raise grapes. The red grapes, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot, are grown in the home vineyard.

During the reception held at the Veritas estate I had the pleasure of tasting the Pinot Gris and rosé wine.

The Pinot Gris had citrus lemon, apple/pear on the nose with a palate of citrus rind, pear and melon. It was light to medium in body and had a fresh, crisp finish.

The rosé actually reminded me of some first-rate Cypriot wine that I tasted in September. Both were made from the same grape varieties (Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot). The nose was of red fruit, mainly strawberry and cherry, with a fine balance. The palate had essentially the same flavours but with a touch of pomegranate. The finish was refreshing with a touch of sweetness.

I enjoyed the red wines served at the winery. The Petit Verdot was dark, vanilla spice with 'cut wood' and full of dark fruit (blackberry) flavours on the nose with a somewhat tannic, full body on the palate with, again, flavour of blackberry, plum and cherry. Finish was mildly tannic. This could develop into something quite nice.

I did like the Bordeaux blend, also with dark and red fruit flavours, cassis and a touch of coffee/chocolate. Nice finish.

Our hosts were wonderful and I would definitely

recommend this vineyard for a visit. Oh, by the way, I have an idea that this is widely known but, just in case, the name Flying Fox comes from the weather vane atop the building. It is of a fox that appears to be flying.

I do have a gnawing feeling about one thing and that is with all the growers starting to become wineries what is going to happen with grape production?

I do know that since the wineries will be supplying more and more of their own grapes, the answer logically is 'problem solved'! However, there is merit in having growers who are there when grapes are needed and who specialise just in growing grapes. All that has to be done is to make it more profitable to be just a grower. Catch 22 situation and I certainly do not have the answer. This certainly does not take away from the superb wine being made at Flying Fox.

The gnawing does remain, however.

**Friday 7th November continued:
Angela Reddin at the much-lauded
Devil's Backbone Brewing Company**

Much as we are communicators on the subject of wine, the fact that the Virginia trip offered other beverages was a very welcome itinerary addition. At Devil's Backbone the tap room is not to everyone's taste, with amazing taxidermy scenes being enacted on the high vaulting ceiling. Wild turkeys bolting in flight chased by hungry foxes. Bears climbing the central chimney. Goats in mid-leap. And a number of moose and antlered heads that were huge!

The company has added another impressive title to its achievement list. In 2014, it took the third consecutive national title at the 2014 Great American Beer Festival.

Steve Crandall started up in 2008 with the brewpub Basecamp after a European tour where he sampled many – well, beers! Inspired, he started to study the subject of making European-style beer by reading all he could get his hands on how to make beer and researching and researching. He worked with a consultant and they devised



*Beer and food matching at
Devil's Backbone, photo by
Steven Morris.*

the Basecamp Brewery. The brewhouse was hand built, the working brewing parts were from a Japanese system, which took some uncanny thinking as Steve did not speak Japanese. They used a lot of recycled materials, first because they were cheaper, but also because these work so well now, giving the feel of a touch of the outback to the establishment. The Brewpub is situated in Nelson County, against the impressive Blue Ridge Mountain backdrop. As the name suggests, there are a lot of outdoor activities and the company offers biking trails, running trails, camping and festivals on the 100-acre plot.

Brewing initially produced just enough beer to supply the pub. In 2011 Steven decided to expand and package the wares to encourage sales through retail outlets and developed a 40,000 square foot facility for packaging. Now, Devil's Backbone cannot keep up with demand. Expansion continued with another brewpub named The Outpost, which opened in 2011.

This year 48,000 barrels were produced, against 27,000 barrels in 2013. The projection for 2015 is 75,000 barrels.

Cascade hops are used, but there are now experiments with Nelson Sauvin hops from New Zealand, with aromatics apparently reminiscent of Sauvignon Blanc. Eight seasonal beers are produced, plus occasional beers and canned beers. The tap room has 12 different cuveés to pour. There are also a number of beer trials on the go, offering a select three-tier tasting in 2 oz shot glasses.

The brewery tour is noisy, but incredibly interesting. We retired to a back room for a five-course lunch with paired beers, which I found inspiring. The chef, French and classically trained, has formed a working collaboration with the brewmaster. He did not have that much experience with food/beer but is happily innovating and experimenting.

Among highlights of the meal was the mushroom feuilleté of pastry as light as a feather with a mix of shitake, enoki, etc, in a lovely rich reduction which matched so well with the beer.

Devil's Backbone provides lovely services and great ambience. It is ideally situated for the mountains and holds various festivals, and obviously has a winning formula.

Friday 7th November continued: Tanya Mann finds girly pleasure at DelFosse Vineyards and Winery

Our first acquaintance with winemaker Paul Mierzejewski was at the workshop held in Veritas, where almost all wineries of the Nelson region were represented. Paul was in a merry mood, full of jokes as he told amusing stories about the lives of the winemakers of Virginia.



Left and below left, glorious colours of autumn at DelFosse, photos by Mick Rock.



The official meeting was held in his small winery the next day. DelFosse was founded in 2000 by Claude DelFosse, a Frenchman who retired from the aerospace industry, and is now run by his children. It is located in central Virginia, just south of Charlottesville.

Our friend of yesterday, Paul, was more reserved, perhaps a little shy because of the large number in our company. He presented the wines with impressive seriousness. White and rosé (Merlot/Malbec) wines with good acidity and light grapefruit bitterness could be his signature wines. For their production Paul uses French and Hungarian oak. One of his aromatic whites immediately grabbed my attention, such an easy, girly wine – Reserve d'Oriane (34% Petit Manseng, 22% Viognier, 22% Chardonnay, 22% Sauvignon Blanc).

It's impossible to say which Virginian winery is set in the most beautiful scenery. All the wineries in the Monticello, Nelson, area, are not far from the energising beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains and sit on a base of red clay soil. DelFosse is lucky to benefit from an excellent, breezily refreshing micro-climate and a uniquely different type of soil.



Sunset over the Blue Ridge Mountains viewed from winery of Ankida Ridge, photo by Mick Rock.

Friday 7th November concluded: there are heavenly pleasures for Vivienne Franks at Ankida Ridge Vineyards

It was a cold autumnal afternoon when the coach drove 1800 feet up the Blue Ridge Mountains to the Ankida Ridge winery, where we were met by owner Christine Vrooman and her son Nathan, the winemaker.

After a welcoming glass of sparkling wine we climbed onto the tractor-led chariot for our journey up to the three-acre vineyard of 3500 plants, 50% Pinot Noir and 50% Chardonnay. En route we passed the hard-working sheep employed to graze the vineyards. Returning to the winery we were introduced to Lucie Morton, the viticultural consultant, who persuaded Christine that she could definitely achieve good results if she were to plant Pinot Noir in the soil of their mountain retreat.

Lucie joined us for dinner, beautifully prepared by chef Corey Abdella, Christine's son-in-law.

The appetiser of seared rockfish with pumpkin and sage was paired with Ankida Ridge Chardonnay 2012. This was an elegant wine with a creamy consistency and citrusy flavour. It matched the rockfish really well.

The next course of oysters three ways, raw mignonette, Rockefeller and flash fried, was paired with Rockgarden Vert 2013. The blend of 85% Vidal Blanc and 15% Pinot Noir was a lovely refreshing, zesty, fruity wine, ideal with this dish.

The following course of grilled pear, arugula and manchego with mushroom strudel and a champagne lime dressing was paired with Ankida Ridge Chardonnay 2013, a very delicate example and much fruitier, fresher style than the 2012.

The main course of braised pork belly, pork loin and

sweet potato-kale hash with ham glacé was served with Ankida Ridge Pinot Noir 2010 and 2012. Both wines showed very different profiles. The 2010 was quite hot and spicy and the 2012 was more delicate and smooth.

We finished with a cranberry cake and chocolate truffles enjoyed with a glass of Rockgarden Vin Doux, 100% Chambourcin, a nutty sweet red wine a perfect match to end the meal.

Christine is a wonderful host, Nathan's skill as a winemaker is growing, and with his new wife Rachel, winemaker at her family winery, Stinson Vineyards, they are a formidable team!

'Ankida Ridge' means where the 'heaven and earth join'; we certainly enjoyed a heavenly visit at 1800 feet on the earth of the Blue Ridge Mountains.



Ankida Ridge vineyard workers, photo by Steven Morris.

**Saturday 8th November:
Lindsay Oram finds that big can be beautiful
at Williamsburg Winery**

Around 10 years after Gianni Zonin established Barboursville, Patrick Duffeler senior, of Belgium descent, purchased a 300-acre farm and established the Williamsburg Winery in 1985. Patrick's previous career was in marketing; with this background as well as a winery the property now houses retail shops, a restaurant and a luxury hotel. The winery entertains 70,000 visitors annually who choose either a fine wine tasting for \$6 or a reserve tasting at \$8.

Williamsburg is one of the largest wineries in Virginia, producing around 55,000 cases annually, of which 15,000 are sold either on site or at wine festivals. However, the farm can produce only 25% of the required fruit; the rest has to be bought in. This includes some out-of-state fruit that is used to produce the two top-selling, well-crafted wines, Governor's White and Two Shilling Red.

Both these wines are attractively priced at \$9 and are labelled as American, rather than Virginian; those wines using Virginian fruit are at least double the price. This highlights one of the issues of the Virginian wine industry: as grape plantings in the state are still small, and production costs high, there is a lack of Virginian fruit to produce entry-level wines.

While the Governor's White and Two Shilling Red may be the highest-volume sellers in the tasting room, the highest by value is the Gabriel Archer Reserve, a Bordeaux blend. We tasted the 2012; this is an elegant wine, layered, with a firm but fine tannic structure, and only 11.5% abv, so it is not at all tiring on the palate. Gabriel Archer contains 35% Petit Verdot, while the top wine, Adagio retailing at \$65, contains 50%; this varietal really seems to flourish in Virginia.

In the tasting room we tasted the 2012 Adagio, with lovely dense red fruits, compact fine tannins and a perfume of violets, again a modest 12% abv. At dinner we were treated to the 2010, which had developed more truffle and forest-floor aromas and supple tannins, and paired perfectly with a delicious lamb tagine.



Dawn breaking at Williamsburg Winery, photo by Mick Rock.

So, after a week in Virginia, what are my overriding impressions of the Virginian wine industry?

Firstly, that the business model here is very different than in Europe: the wineries are much smaller, costs of growing fruit are often higher and most estates are key part of the tourism industry rather than of drinks production.

Secondly, that the wine style tends to be much more elegant than many 'new world' wines, due mainly to the generally lower alcohol levels. My only word of caution here is that the sometimes lavish use of oak by some producers could be tempered.

Thirdly, that both Petit Verdot and Petit Manseng make some damned fine wines.

And, lastly, that while Virginia is unlikely ever to challenge California in terms of size and in the production of entry-level wines, it certainly has proved itself to be a very legitimate part of the US fine wine industry. Therefore, ultimately, Jefferson's dream has been achieved.



Spectacular daytime colour there, photo by Steven Morris.

Finally, a taste of the trip...



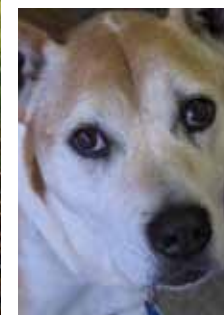
Top row, left to right: Trump, Ankida Ridge, Salamander Resort, Trump, Ankida Ridge; middle row, l-r, Rodes Farm, Salamander Resort, Grandale, Devil's Backbone; bottom row, l-r, Wild Wolf, Wild Wolf, Wedmore Place, Barboursville, Lovington. All photos by Steven Morris (some are of accommodation/ dinner destinations).



... and some extra memories



Clockwise from top left:
the Circle in a circle
at Boxwood, Colonial
Williamsburg, Fabboli,
Jefferson, Trump, a
moment's relaxation for the
photographer at Salamander
Resort, Trump, Cardinal
Point, Rodes Farm, North
Gate, Fabboli, Boxwood. All
photos by Steven Morris.



Richard Leahy reviews *American Wine Story*

The most real, authentic and inspiring documentary

American Wine Story, the latest documentary on wine, was officially released on October 13th. The film's plot is described thus: 'After an upstart winemaker's untimely death, his sister steps in to try to save his fledgling winery for his eight-year old son. The movie blends this with other tales of risk and re-invention in the wine industry.'

While this is an accurate summary, it doesn't give you the emotional impact of the straightforward, honest and heartfelt statements from so many people interviewed in the movie. This is probably the most real, authentic and inspiring documentary I've seen about how having the dream to live and work in wine requires major sacrifices, and how people deal with them and persevere.

The opening is a shock, seeing the funeral of Oregon winemaker Jimi Brooks, who died suddenly at age 38 just before harvest a decade ago. Wine movies don't start this way. There follows a touching interview with the Jimi's son Pascal and sister Janie Brooks Heuck discussing their feelings about having Pascal Brooks pick up his father's torch. The honesty is impressive; Pascal says: "There are moments where I feel I don't want to do this, and then more moments where I do really want to do this." This feels authentic and vulnerable, not something coached.

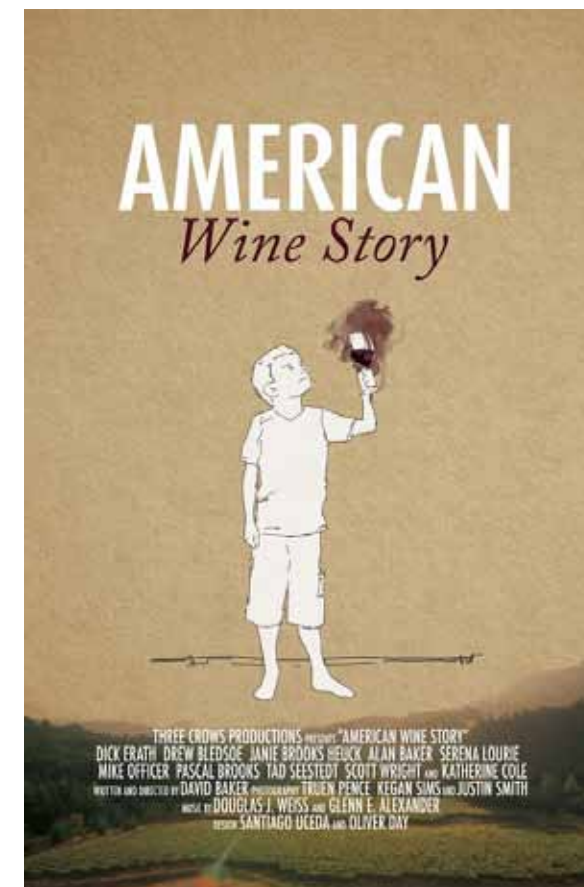
Similarly, the narrator is frank about saying that wine in America is young; we don't have families who have been cultivating vines here since the Romans. The common thread in America is "that they discovered wine in the undiscovered parts of themselves", and for most,

before they took major risks, "they had an epiphany, and understood that every bottle of wine contains a little magic". This includes the mystery and the personal epiphany which is key to understanding why people choose wine as a profession in America instead of being born into it. A shot of a cork branded with the slogan 'born again' is a great visual.

I like the background music; it pulses in a sensual way like good wine does and supports the dialogue without getting in the way, adding to the emotional impact of the script. I also like the cinematography. Even scenes of retail wine shops (shot in black and white) seem sensual, and that's a hard act to pull off! I like how people interviewed seem to be encouraged to be as personal and informal and authentic as possible; it makes the subject seem both fresh and exciting, which for someone like me having spent decades in the industry is impressive. One of the best quotes, by Jay Selman of grape radio, is: "Once you get bitten by the bug, the choice [whether to go into the wine business] isn't yours anymore, you *have* to do it."

The cinematography is both sensitive and sensual, with personal interviews with those remembering Jimi, or moving shots of wide-angle vineyards, to detail shots of budding shoots or raindrops on barrels.

Alan Baker left a 17-year career in Minnesota Public Radio to start over in the wine business in California. "I talked about it long enough that I had to do it or look like an idiot," he laughs. We hear shots of his podcasts about his experience. "This is about dreams. It's about the unknowable



future. It's about those stirrings deep inside that ask us who we are and what we are," states one audio clip.

Probably my favourite quote from the narrator is: "If there's a recipe for making wine in America, there are two key ingredients: the capacity to dream, and the courage to act upon it." It's inspiring then to hear the personal stories of music industry executives, computer code writers who made wine at home and others who dared to dream and then took the leap of faith to make it real... and took the risks as well.

"My plan was to go to law school," says one. "I worked for the phone company," says another. "I was an IT guy"... "I was a stay-at-home dad"... "I worked for a venture capital



Janie and Pascal in the vineyard. All photos courtesy of Three Crows Media, LLC.

company"... "I was one of the privileged few that got to play a game [football]"... "One day I just realised I was doing more wine-oriented stuff than I was doing my actual job; and that should tell you something when you realise what your passion is all about." You come to realise that all these people with diverse backgrounds had the two ingredients in the recipe for making American wine and get to hear their stories. "I kept on seeing myself under an olive tree, drinking a glass of my wine," says Al Schornberg, now of Keswick Vineyards in the Monticello AVA of Virginia. The next time you see Al, he and his wife Cindy are describing a harrowing flight in a plane which seemed likely to crash; they had 30 minutes before they were able to land, and thought a lot about priorities and the future. When they landed safely, Al sold his company and started looking for a place to plant a vineyard and start a winery.

A rewarding part of the movie was having Pascal and others remembering his father and seeing the seed of wine taking root in him and growing, which is bitter sweet. Jimi confided in a friend that he didn't have anything to leave as a legacy for Pascal except the winery, which has since come to pass. The salient thread of the movie is Jimi Brooks and the hole he left in the lives of friends, family and the Oregon wine industry, but also how he enriched all of them. It's a touching personal tribute, but it fits with the personal stories of Americans from all over the country interviewed in the film who found their lives transformed by the magic of wine.

Probably the most emotionally moving part of the film for me was Jimi Brooks' sister Janie telling how she drove to Jimi's house the day he died (at the beginning of harvest) and found a crowd of people she didn't know telling her

they wanted to make Jimi's wine to help out his family and not charge for it. "I was very taken aback. I remember wondering why they wanted to help us so much; it took me a while to understand it," she says. Since she had a business background, they asked if she would step in and manage the winery; "I said 'yes' because I didn't know what else to say." "Seeing the celebration of his life after [the funeral], I realised I didn't know *that* guy," says Jimi's father.

As the author of *Beyond Jefferson's Vines*, the book about the history of Virginia wine from the Jamestown Settlement to the present, I appreciate that the filmmakers went to Monticello and included mention of Jefferson and his friend Filippo Mazzei's efforts at establishing vineyards planted with European grapevines. They acknowledge his major contribution as "planting the seeds of a national obsession... today vines are planted and wines made in the least likely corners of every state in the Union", and it's true that every state now has a winery (Alaska gets juice to make into wine from British Columbia next door). The narrator points out another truism of the story of American wine: "When pioneers hear something can't be done, they take it up as a challenge." Missouri winery owner Michael Amigoni explains: "What continues to motivate me is that I'm doing something to push the envelope on what kinds of varieties are being grown here in Missouri."

One of my favourite things about this documentary is that it doesn't hold back on how emotionally and financially difficult are the realities of making money growing grapes and making wine. There is frank talk about "being at war on all fronts" with nature, from weather extremes like freezes and hailstorms to fungal diseases and fighting animal and insect pests. Anyone who is considering following the dream needs to be fully informed of the risks, and the interviews in the movie (along with the scenes of hail, snow, etc.) do a good job of being a reality check.

Vintners such as Luca Paschina, of Virginia's Barboursville Vineyards, explain that in sub-optimal vintages they won't make their flagship wine (Octagon for Paschina), because they're committed to having only top-quality grapes in that bottle. You can imagine the financial

loss (Octagon sells for \$49) in sub-optimal vintages. "If we look at what makes the most money, we wouldn't be making wine," says another winery owner.

Interviewees talk about relationships ending, going down to 20% of their former income, or realising they'd left their support networks behind in another time zone. "You risk everything; you risk being out on the street. What do you do if you fail?" asks Jay Selman. "It was very discouraging to work 80-hour weeks for years and go backwards in cash flow," says another. "I'd projected a seven-year breakthrough to profitability," says Oregon Pinot pioneer Dick Erath, of Prince Hill Vineyards in Oregon. "It took more like eleven."

"One bank I went to had a loan officer who used to be in the wine office and he made it clear I wasn't going to get a loan. We literally didn't have the money to buy groceries; it was very difficult," says Kendall Carlisle, of Carlisle Winery in Santa Rosa, California. "Neither of us were getting much sleep; it was really, really emotionally trying the first few years."

Another thing I think commendable about this film is that California does not dominate the scene; actually Oregon gets the most attention but there are interviews with vintners in Washington, Missouri, Arizona and Virginia, demonstrating the nation-wide nature of the wine industry today. Dick Erath comments on this; he talks about Arizona being where Oregon was 20 years ago, and sees regional wine elsewhere in the country fighting the same battle for respectability that Oregon fought then. "We're established," says Paschina. "I know we can make world-class wine here. Some people will find out and some won't, and that's OK."

Another solid truism is explained elegantly by an industry member in the film: "In order to work in wine, you have to have a curiosity about that whole world, all sides of it, you have to be a Renaissance person interested in biology and chemistry but at the same time interested in art and poetry. Nowadays with the economy is so large, you see someone making something with their hands, and they're fighting the good fight."

After Jimi's memorial service it's heartwarming to hear



Jimi Brooks

how his sister Janie came around to agreeing to manage the winery after calling friends and distributors and asking them what Jimi was doing that was different and why it mattered. "I didn't have any fears because I didn't understand what I was doing," she laughs. Jimi's friends in the wine industry acknowledge and admire her for her focus and professionalism despite her lack of industry experience and point out that she grew the winery from 3,000 to 12,000 cases. "The connection I have to Jimi and so many people through him by doing this, I can't replace that," says Janie. "It would be a really big void."

The final segment of the movie, like the friends and family of Jimi moving out of their loss, focuses on affirmations by the people who you've heard being interviewed; they went through sacrifice and tough times, but they made it through. "Make sure it's your passion," says one. "I talked to a few winemakers, and not one encouraged me to do it," says another. "Follow your heart, and if you truly believe this is what you should do, then do it." "We saw one problem after another as a challenge," says another. "We weren't in it for

the money, but for the passion," says another. "I feel so fortunate to do what I love and what I'm passionate about," says another. "In a way, it's not work," says another. "You have to be willing to give it your all," says another.

"Wine in America is about the absence of rules and the freedom to imagine. It's the understanding that the American dream is not just an abstract idea but something you write for yourself with the faith that if you choose to pursue it, you just might have a shot at achieving it," says the narrator. "Wine touches us deep in our hearts and grabs our emotions, and for that reason I think you can reach people and move people through wine... I can tell you times when I've opened and tasted a bottle of wine and burst into tears," confides

an interviewee. "Wine has made me more passionate and more interested in people," says Jay Selman.

It's appropriate the movie ends with Pascal Brooks talking about following in his father's footsteps and trying to connect with parts of his father he didn't know, and quotes Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*, "A man's greatest profession is to learn to know himself." "I'm not afraid to die," says Pascal, "I'm really afraid not to live." I think when he sees this documentary he'll be confident that he needn't worry about that, with a life in wine.

I came to feel a sense of validation through listening to the many interviews, being in the wine industry myself, and despite the necessary reality check it's inspirational; anyone considering a career in wine should see it.

American Wine Story is a Three Crows Production, written by David Baker with cinematography by Truen Pence, Kegan Sims and Justin Smith, produced by David Baker, Truen Pence, Kegan Sims, and Justin Smith. To purchase the film visit <http://americanwinestory.vhx.tv/>.

