

INTERVIEW – Owen Bargreen / Dave Specter via Instagram Live – May 12, 2021
-Transcript- <https://www.instagram.com/tv/COyrSm7JHeA/?igshid=kzl3nm9cvf1p>

Owen Bargreen (00:01):

Back for an exciting Instagram Live today. It is Oregon Wine Month. It's May celebrating all things, Oregon, some gorgeous wines being produced out of Willamette Valley. I can't wait to get back there and taste, and we're going to be trying a really exciting newer producer. I love Willamette Valley. I've been impressed with these wines. They're very, Burgundian stylistically a lot of good acid, earthy tones. We're talking about Bells Up today. We're going to be tasting with our winemaker, Dave Specter. And we're just going to go live with him. Now, wait to catch up with Dave. I've known he and his wife for many years, and they're doing some really great things. So I'm excited to chat with him. So see if we can get him on here.

Owen Bargreen (00:51):

Okay. Hope you guys are having a great Wednesday. We're going to be tasting two of their wines today. So we have their rosé wine from the 2020 vintage. Probably not the easiest vintage to make rosé but this is a very beautiful bottling. They do a great job with that. And we are also have a new wine from the 19 vintage, which I think has not been released yet, from Chehalem Mountain. It's from their estate. It's a brand new wine. I'm excited to taste that with Dave. Let's see if we can try this again and get him on. Okay.

Owen Bargreen (01:31):

I'm just going to pour a little bit of rosé. Okay. So Dave, if you're by the Wi-Fi it's best to get really close to the Wi-Fi. It says you're not able to join right now. So hopefully get you on here. Yeah. So we have the 2020 Prelude Chehalem Mountains bottling really pretty color, kind of hard to see in here, but it's got kind of a I dunno, a brownish tinge love the nose it's so a delightfully earthy, almost kind of in a Big Table kind of way. Texturally this wine is really beautiful too.

Owen Bargreen (02:17):

I'm going to try this again. Hopefully this will work had some issues lately with Instagram connections. So there we go.

Dave Specter (02:34):

Can you hear me? Yeah. Okay. Yeah. Sorry. Having all sorts of technical issues.

Owen Bargreen (02:40):

No, I mean, it's like a little, well, Willamette Valley, right? There's no cell signal?

Dave Specter (02:46):

Yeah. It's, it's part of our charm out here. So we just try to make this work. And I was, I was, Sara wanted me to sit outside originally where it was all pretty and everything, but I don't know either.

Owen Bargreen (02:59):

Well, anyway, I'm just glad we figured it out now.

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Dave Specter (03:01):

Yeah, I know. Really. .

Owen Bargreen (03:03):

I don't know why, but for this platform it's really touchy. So the closer you get to wifi, the better.

Dave Specter (03:09):

Gotcha.

Owen Bargreen (03:09):

Oh yeah. I guess we go, kind of substance over style here.

Dave Specter (03:15):

Yeah, you're right.

Owen Bargreen (03:20):

So tell me about your year here.

Dave Specter (03:21):

Well, it's, it's, it's, it's been a ride. What can I tell you? I mean, this, this last year has really just been more than anything about just trying to figure out how to make things work. We're a very, very small producer and, normally in a year we'll get, as we get into the summer, we'll have a lot of out of town travelers come in and, last year we just saw, we, I think we saw probably 20% of the people we normally do, but, what we're very fortunate about is that, we've because we're so small and because of the way we normally run our tastings is we only have one group in at a time. And I'm the one leading most of them. So not many people are doing direct wine-maker tastings anymore.

Dave Specter (04:06):

So you're really getting an opportunity to make connections with folks when they're here. And that really helped us quite a bit last year. I mean, cause we could, we could really have those, those great talks with our customers about kind of how things were going in our lives and all the craziness of homeschooling and just kind of trying to make it through this pandemic thing and, and then kind of same thing on their side. And, you really feel like you're, you're either your customers and your club members are some of the best friends that you have. So it, it really helps you in times like that to kind of just make it through and, hopefully get into the end of this thing. So.

Owen Bargreen (04:46):

Fingers crossed. Yeah, man, it's definitely been a crazy year and not only on top of the pandemic, of course, guys were hit with some crazy weather dealing with problems during harvest and the Willamette Valley really up and down the west coast, people were hit. It's just so sad and unfortunate that on top of kind of what you're saying, traffic being down at the winery is you have to deal with this this crap with a very challenging harvest.

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Dave Specter (05:17):

Yeah. The, the smoke definitely definitely made life interesting as if it weren't interesting enough, we we've been saying it's, it's such a 2020 way to end last year. The nearest fire to us was about two miles Northwest and up at the top of the mountain that we're on. And if the winds had been blowing in a different direction, it was going to be a really, really rough time. But fortunately we were fortunate not to have to evacuate. We actually were able to host another family, a friends of our daughters for about a week. The, the firefighters did an unbelievable job of knocking it out before it could really greater than it already had.

Dave Specter (06:00):

And then as, as we look at our 2020 vintage, in the barrels, I have been absolutely amazed at how little in fact I don't see any smoke influence showing up in our barrels at the moment, fingers crossed all that good stuff. And, and, we get a lot of industry folks in here and, and whenever they do, I'm always bringing them over to the barrels. I said, put your nose in there and tell me what I'm not smelling. And so fingers crossed again that I think our 2020 vintage is going to make it through and be just fine. But yeah, it certainly was just that last kick in the teeth that at the end of what was already a very challenging year.

Owen Bargreen (06:42):

Oh, it's just crazy. And I, I feel so badly because I'm now working on rosés for my rosé report and I'm, I've actually come across quite a few wines that I can't score because of smoke influence from Washington and Oregon. Maybe a little bit more Oregon so far than Washington, but certainly an issue, both, both states and it just breaks my heart, honestly being on this side and tasting a wine that I have reviewed and enjoyed many times. And and then just, not being able to post a review and write about the wine because it just because of the influence of smoke. And so I know a lot of people I've really suffered from that, but I, I want to I want to talk, I want to get into your wines and we have two wines to taste, but first, if, okay, I'd love to share your story. You have a very unique story coming from a completely different state. You both are originally from the Midwest. And and I'd love to hear also about how you got into wine making as well, Dave.

Dave Specter (07:54):

Sure. So, we, I, I think, I, I've always said that life doesn't go in a straight line and we're certainly proof of that. I, before I was a winemaker, I was an amateur winemaker and a lawyer and a French horn player. And at times at the same time and at times not I was I was, I played French horn for 20 years. Through college I knew I couldn't really make a career at it. Just the odds are really against you. So I ended up going to law school after that. And for 10 years I was doing corporate transactions work with multinational, big multinational, public accounting firms — mergers and acquisitions, corporate transactions. And I did that for about 10 years, kind of on the road a lot under high pressure, a lot.

Dave Specter (08:49):

And, and while I worked with a lot of great people and some great firms, I started to just get to a point where burnout was, was coming. And I, I knew I kind of needed to, I needed to make some changes in life. I mean, I was quickly becoming the person that nobody liked to be around. And, and this kind of started about the same time when my wife and I, Sara started to make wine just as a hobby. We've always loved wine. And the thing that we loved about it more than, and anything were sort of the

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experiences part of wine, where, we, we were kinds of people that wanted to go to wineries, talk to the people that, have gotten their hands dirty and spend all day, on the craft and the toil and all that stuff that, that gives the wines their soul.

Dave Specter (09:38):

And we just, we love to hear the stories and we love to learn. And, and we, so those are the kinds of things we wanted to do. And when we started making wine, we viewed this as just kind of just a natural extension of what we were doing on the experience side. So the first wines we ever made were about 15 years ago, and they were from kits in a box, probably tons of people have done it. And it's, as I always say, you'll make a product that won't kill you. But, but honestly, what I love about the kits is that they're great introductions to the process, you know because for most of us, we have not spent any time around something that's actively fermenting. So, what am I supposed to smell and see and taste?

Dave Specter (10:25):

And, and those are the sorts of, kind of low risks, sorts of introductions that you can get with the kits. But of course, as time goes on, you, you want to step up your game. So we used to live back in Cincinnati, Ohio. I lived, my wife kind of grew up more or less in that area. Lived a few different places, but, but pretty close to that area. And I was moved to that area between my junior and senior years of high school and went to college in the area, went to law school in the area and had my career in the area and lived there a long time. And never at the time was really thinking about how am I going to make or do a winemaking career or anything, but, as, as the whole wine making thing started to catch on, I, as what most amateur wine makers will tell you, it's a hobby that gets out of control very quickly and starts to expand, to take over more and more of the house.

Dave Specter (11:17):

And, I, I often say I'm probably the only guy whose hobby increased in square footage over time. Most guys, when, they have a start having a family, it starts to get shoved into the back corner of the garage, but at least in my case, I was making stuff that was decent enough. And so, people enjoyed it, and they kept coming over and wanting to help. And, I started taking over more of the house and then, we started to take some more interesting vacations. We got to more wine centered vacations, but, we're not really, we're really more interested in sort of the, the more offbeat destinations and back in '08, I mean, Oregon was just kind of starting to become what it is now. And that was one of the places that we visited and we absolutely fell in love being here.

Dave Specter (12:08):

And, and what was funny is back then, there were, I mean, these days, there are about 600 wineries in the Willamette Valley, there were less than half of that back then, but there were more of these really small places that were owned and operated by folks who were very much like me and folks that had been in some kind of technical careers, engineers and lawyers and scientists, and, folks that had been in these careers, where there had been a lot of attention to detail and a lot of desire to practice the craft. Then, they weren't rewarded and fulfilled in what they were doing before, and they got into making wine. And that's when Sara and I started to get a little bit more and a little bit more interested in, maybe we could do this.

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Dave Specter (12:50):

Maybe we could do this. And, even then, and we thought after that trip we probably could do it, but we're a ways from that, well, about a month after, when we got back from that trip and we were in our mid-thirties at the time, and Sara's professional mentor who at the time was aged 40 was diagnosed with stage four pancreatic cancer. And then over the next couple of months, you started to see her, fade away. And she had three young children and a husband, and it was just a reminder, a kind of a kick in the butt for us that, you know what, life is really too short. And we made the decision at the end of that year that we were going to pursue it. With the understanding that, we knew we could not go just from your basement to what we're doing now.

Dave Specter (13:37):

And so we knew there had to be a transition period and, and sort of a real immersion process. So what I did was I quit my job. And for the next three years, I was the cellar hand for a little urban winery in Cincinnati Henke Winery, which has been featured multiple times in Wine Enthusiast is one of the top 10 urban wineries in the country. The gentleman I worked with Joe Henke, I mean, could not have been a better mentor. Joe is just, he's, he's been there. He's done that. He makes 2000 cases a year in the basement of a hundred year old Victorian in a west side neighborhood. It is, you talk about more with less it's, it's, and it's one of the best lessons I learned that suits me very well with what I'm doing right now.

Dave Specter (14:25):

Because as a very small place, we, we don't have, we don't have the resources to compete with the big well well-funded places. So, what we do, we do with a lot of grit and love and elbow grease and really being very customer focused. So, so Joe really didn't have to say much just my observations of how he ran the ship was invaluable to what we did. And of course, in addition to all the technical things, the tools, techniques, and all of that, after three years with Joe, we started to feel like, okay, we're comfortable enough being able to operate without a safety net. And then we, we moved out to Newberg, Oregon in the summer of 2012. We started looking for property in earnest at that point.

Dave Specter (15:13):

And we were very fortunate to find a 10 acre parcel. We networked into it before it went on the market. That was the benefit of having moved here. We didn't have to bid against California money. And so, yeah, we, we bought it at the end of 2012. We moved in, in 2013. What we bought was essentially 10 acres that included a house, a pole barn, and nine acres covered in dead Christmas trees and blackberries. But it had all the advantages that you would want to see in a piece of vineyard property in Oregon, the soils, the beautiful jory clay loam soil, the volcanic stuff, gorgeous red color and great nutrients. South facing slope, this wonderful view, looking south across the valley, it just needed some work. And so that was sort of our first year was, was learning how to drive a bulldozer and a backhoe and getting all that junk out of there.

Dave Specter (16:11):

Our first vines went in, in 2014 and we've been rolling forward ever since we opened the doors in 2015. When we started, we were purchasing all of our fruit and now we're at a point where, we're only having to buy about half of the fruit that we're doing that we're using. And over the next couple of years, we see being able to be almost a hundred percent estate in the next three to four years. So it has really

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been a process with a lot of, I always say blood, sweat, and tears. I can vouch for each one of those things personally and literally. But it is so worth it. And, we've, we've really been able to be very, very focused on, on giving people great experiences when they're here making really good wine and, showing people a good time.

Owen Bargreen (17:02):

Yeah. Thank you so much. I mean, I just love hearing this story. I know we've, we've that you've shared this several times with me and I'd like to talk a little bit of backup a little bit. I'd like to talk a little bit about your inspirations prior to coming to the Willamette Valley, because you are one of the region's champions for this unusual wine, and unusual varietal that you really don't see anywhere in the Northwest. We're talking Seyval Blanc, which we're not going to be tasting today, but I'd like for you to share a little bit about this experience, your wine making experience with this varietal. And can you talk a little bit about the varietal itself for people at home that may not know anything about Seyval Blanc?

Dave Specter (17:40):

Okay, absolutely. So, so Seyval Blanc is a grape that I have just loved for a long time. You will primarily find it grown in the Mid-Atlantic states and in the Midwest. And it's a hybrid grape. It is the crossbreed between the traditional French grapes Siebel and a native American grape, which I, I, it's one of those that has a number on it. And it's not as important to the story as, as to know that it is the result of that crossbreed done up at Cornell years ago. And the reason that it was done is because when you're planting in these areas, you get these much colder winters than we tend to see fortunately, out here on the west coast. So for us, it's, for, for there, it's really about breeding in the cold tolerance for planting in those areas. Now, of course, in the crossbreed process, you're going to come up with something with a very unique flavor aroma profile.

Dave Specter (18:34):

And it's, it's such a fascinating grape, because it has a lot of characteristics of Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, even though it is descended from neither. But it's got, it gives you a lot of options in how you make it. I've seen people that barrel ferment it like Chardonnay — my old mentor, Joe used to do that. I prefer to steel ferment it myself. I'm, I'm not as big of a fan of barreling whites, but you have that option. But it's a grape that gives you very distinctiveness, distinctive differences between nose and palate. So a lot of times I'm presenting that wine here. I'm always making sure to go through an introduction because it can be kind of jarring for a lot of folks. There's a very earthy nose to save all. And regardless of whether that's grown here, there anywhere, that's a care pure characteristic of that grape.

Dave Specter (19:28):

Like it's very earthy almost at times kind of very diesel-y but the taste is completely different. There's a lime-ness. It's very citrusy, there's a lime to it and in a lemon lime type of character, which, which I absolutely love and my customers really love. But yeah, it is one of those things where I have to talk folks through that cognitive dissonance between the smell and the taste, and then kind of, once you get used to it, you start to realize, wow, this is an amazing grape, that's so versatile. You can use it in so many ways. I've always said, this is the best fish taco wine you're going to find.

Owen Bargreen (20:03):

Wow.

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Dave Specter (20:03):

But it just, it, it goes beautifully in so many ways. And, and what we found is here in Oregon, it grows extraordinarily well. The deer love it, unfortunately one of our issues with trying to get it is to keep the deer away from it. But yeah, it was something, it was something that I wanted to introduce here in the valley. There is one other grower in Oregon that has some. There's about an acre down at Girarde down in Roseburg, but our, one of the things we wanted to do just sort of strategically as we opened our place up was we wanted to have some great plantings that other people just didn't have. I mean, the reality is that when you have so many other wineries, having pinot is awesome, but you talk to your customers and they will say, it's nice that I can come to your place in the middle of a day of drinking so much Pinot and so much Chardonnay, and I can get something that's different and, we can get an experience that is something that other people don't have, so, we kind of can play very well into that, you know?

Dave Specter (21:09):

And, and so that Seyval was sort of our first venture into this concept of saying, we don't need massive plantings of this, a half acre here, a half acre there, but have some things in our lineup that other folks won't have, and can't find an answer for. So it makes it a lot more fun for us. It makes it a lot more fun for the customers. And then you, you, like I say, you kind of get this great interplay and it just shows, Hey, Oregon, we're capable of growing these other types of grapes, give our customers a lot more variety to their experience. It's just a question of going in there and doing it.

Owen Bargreen (21:43):

Yeah, I know for my palate, I, I I'm, I'm far from an expert on the varietal. I maybe have tried a Seyval Blanc one or two other times in my entire life. So I was really excited when you wanted to introduce this wine. I know that it was a meaningful wine to you. I want to say that you you want a really big wine competition with this making a wine from this grape. Is that, is that correct?

Dave Specter (22:08):

Yeah, that that's right. One of the, one of the reasons that we felt like we could go professional eventually is that back in 2011, after three years of working with my mentor I won two national amateur wine making competitions, and one of them was with the Seyval Blanc which kind of surprised me in a lot of ways, because I never really thought that a white wine would take best in show in a competition, but, it just shows that, sometimes things just come together and it, and it works out. But I, I've been very, very happy, with, with how that grape is and really how it's been received here.

Dave Specter (22:47):

I, I remember initially when we were talking to some of the, the old pro seasoned veterans here in the valley about doing it well, let's, let's just say that at the w we got some sideways looks and, a few people really mumbled at us, but, we really felt that the future of the valley has to be about making, about making some diversity and bringing in some grapes that are going to really broaden the horizons of what we can do here. We, we have the capabilities to do it. And I think the best thing about small wineries like us is we can be the ones that sort of lead the charge on a lot of this experiment.

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Dave Specter (23:26):

I mean, it's not experimental for me, but it was experimental for the Valley, this particular grape. I mean, we have the ability to kind of be the test subjects to sort of bring these things online and to introduce it. And who knows, what inspiration might come from that. But it's, it's been fun the last couple of years to kind of see some different types of grapes starting to take off here and, getting some of that variety. I think it's only going to help the Valley to grow more. And I think it's only going to help more people to enjoy their experiences when they're down here.

Owen Bargreen (23:57):

Yeah. I totally agree. I'm in Oregon, Oregon Wine Wonth and we're celebrating every, everything Oregon. So it's not just Oregon pinot noir, right? There's bubbles made in Oregon, you make a really nice Pinot Blanc as well, Seyval Blanc which people, probably if they haven't come to your winery and they're, they're from the Northwest, they've never had, I mean, this is all, this is all a part of what makes Oregon so great. It's not just not just, how having Oregon Pinot Noir, but all the other fruits that come from this incredible place.

Dave Specter (24:31):

Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean, I tell folks a lot of times, if you haven't heard of some of these grapes that I'm using, that's okay. I don't expect you to have, but it gives us the opportunity to kind of, to, to walk folks through it, to be the introduction. Certainly rather than just throwing it in a store shelf and then trying to find it that way. It's, it's, you really can kind of start to build, you start to build the, you start to build the demand and, and stuff. And, and like I said, just, just give folks some new looks and, you just see their eyes get bigger when they start realizing, wow, there is this bigger world out there. And just kind of a question of finding it.

Owen Bargreen (25:09):

Yeah, well, we we have two wines that we're going to taste there and I'm, I'm assuming you want to start with the rosé, the 2020, is that right?

Dave Specter (25:19):

Yeah. I think that'll work. That'll work.

Owen Bargreen (25:23):

I have the Prelude here. It's a a hundred percent Pinot noir, and I'd love to hear more about this wine, how the winemaking behind it.

Dave Specter (25:30):

Exactly. So what I have certain beliefs about kind of what I want these wines to accomplish, and we can say that about every single wine in my lineup. And when folks are here, one of the first things when I'm presenting the wine is I'll talk through, here's what I want to accomplish with this particular wine. So in this case with rosé, see, I am of the belief that rosé should be, when you think of rosé, so many people will say it's a summer wine. Well, okay. Yes. Primarily I'd agree with that. But when I think of what summers are like for me, it's about cookouts and campfires and, having food with your wine and for a

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lot of the rosés that I taste here in the Willamette Valley, they tend to be very, very light, and there's nothing wrong with that.

Dave Specter (26:17):

But if what you want to make is something that's more versatile. And, and I always focus on versatility with all the wines that I do, that I want my rosé to have a little more body and a little more substance. So it's really just a question of how long I let that skin contact stay in contact with the juice. When I've asked a lot of other folks, how long they let that happen, I've heard everything from two hours to 12 hours. And what I've just learned is for what I want to do, my baseline starts at 24 hours. Whether that's for 24 hours, 48 hours, or somewhere in between, that's just, I'm pulling samples every few hours. When I see the color and I get the flavors that depth of I'm looking for on good to go. At that point we'll siphon off the juice. We'll do a light press on the skin. So I'll want to give it some of that, some of that body but then the skins will go away for composting, they're not going to get thrown into my regular Pinot batches.

Dave Specter (27:17):

At that point we'll ferment in either plastic or steel or a combination of the two. I will then put them in neutral Oak barrels for probably, five to six months. Just depends on how soon it gets in there by we'll put it through a full malolactic because I want it rounder. So what I get is something that has the body and the character. It does have acidity, but that acidity is much rounder than a lot of the rosés that I taste because I put it through the malolactic.

Owen Bargreen (27:46):

Yeah. I mean, this for me, I totally agree. I mean, I think I think rosé, it's not just a summer wine, it's a wine that I enjoy year round. It's a bigger style, which is I, there's a bunch of comments I'd like to make. First of all, I love that you do the barrel ferment, kind of á la Big Table Farm wine that just gets, gives texture and body. When you do that, I bet as a wine reviewer, it's something that I really enjoy, you can have a methodical and really thought through that.

Owen Bargreen (28:17):

The other thing I want to say is it surprises me because your wines tend to be very Burgundian in style in general, your lineup, you taste your Pinot Noirs. They're very linear, they're earthy. They're, they're not big Pinot Noirs. But this rosé is actually done in a little bit bigger style, which is really interesting. It's kind of a foil in your lineup, I guess, in some ways,

Dave Specter (28:39):

Well, they're, they're the reds, my, my reds, I would probably agree with that. I, I tend to approach the whites and the rosé a little bit differently into some way, it kind of, the reds, it kind of lends itself to the more Burgundian style I can tell you. As I said, for, for me, I really asked myself what is going to make this wine the most versatile I can make it. And so we were talking about the rosé a minute ago, right? This is a rosé that you can have at Thanksgiving dinner every bit as good as it will go for poolside barbecue. And just sitting on the porch at the end of a long, hot day, you have a lot of options.

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Dave Specter (29:17):

So in that case, and it's always, for me, the, the, the challenge every year becomes that balance, that balance between the bringing the acidity, bringing enough body, but not overly so. There's that line that you walk a little bit every year, and as long as you don't cross the line, you're good. How close can I get to that line each year without just, jumping right over it?

Owen Bargreen (29:41):

Yeah. I mean, it's, it's really, really tasty stuff. Talk a little bit about the fruit source and also what kind of flavors that you try to impart in this wine.

Dave Specter (29:51):

So the fruit source for this is our estate vineyard. We've been doing an estate Pinot since 2017 and, and we will always be doing an estate rosé. Going forward in 2019 was actually the first year — and we'll get to that in a few minutes — where our fruit started, where our vines were then old enough to start to make actual estate Pinot from. But with this one what I'm trying to do is kind of bring we're trying to bring the strawberry cherry, and then there's, because of the, of the of the the clone mix in here, we've got, it's about half Pommard and half 667 clones. And what we found here on our property is that the 667 clones bring a whole lot of watermelon particularly when it's very young. And then it's interestingly, as it gets a little older, that that watermelon becomes more of a background note to the cherry and the strawberry that that goes go, kind of, predominates through it.

Dave Specter (30:51):

So a lot of the red fruit characters, you, you will taste and, and harvest wise, by the way, I'm picking it pretty much at the exact same time on rosé that I'm picking everything else. I'm not doing an early pick for rosé. We're so small that there really isn't. I mean, just, it doesn't really make any sense to try to do a separate pick. So what we do is I try to figure out, okay, how much rosé do I want to make in a given year and kind of backwards from there, say, all right, I'm going to need a certain amount of fruit in terms of weight to accomplish that. And then it's just, when we harvest, we separate certain bins are gonna go for rosé and certain bins are going to go for regular Pinot. And that's it. It's, it's, it's when you're a small operation like ours, it is trying to keep things as simple as you possibly can.

Owen Bargreen (31:40):

Right?

Dave Specter (31:40):

And so when you start adding different picks and all those, they really starts to complicate things. So trying to keep it as simple as we can is really where that lot of that comes from.

Owen Bargreen (31:50):

Yeah. That makes sense. I noticed, over the years, one thing I like about this wine, and it's consistently been one of my one of my top wines on my Pacific Northwest Rosé Report. And they added dimension in this wine. I've really liked the wild mushroom kind of peat Moss character that you get in, obviously a lot of Willamette Valley Pinot Noir, especially a cooler vintage, Willamette Valley Pinot Noir. I'm curious,

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in terms of clonal selection, do you find that you get those earthy notes from the Pommard as you would with a lot of times with the regular pinot bottlings or is that from something else?

Dave Specter (32:29):

So far from what I've seen, it seems to come primarily from the Pommard. I'll throw in the caveat here that with our vineyard, it's still, so that we're learning this and it is developing sort of all the time. I, I tell people that there's this, you can almost kind of graph the quality of the vineyard, and we're kind of hit that point where every additional year you start to see just these exponential jumps in, in the quality, just coming from that age. And so it's developing characters that, that we're still learning about all the time. There have been times when I thought that that earthiness you're describing seems to predominate a little bit more. And, and as you said, I think it's a little bit more in years that maybe you're a little cooler. So 2019, I think it seemed to come a little bit stronger in that, which is neither good, nor bad. It just kinda is. But I always say, if a lot of this stuff, it comes down to those characteristics since they're things that we really can't control, how it develops, they become those wonderful, happy accidents and part of wine making.

Dave Specter (33:37):

So we just kind of start, it's sort of like being a parent in a lot of ways, you have influence over things, but no control. So as these things develop, you, you kind of look just the way you look at your kids and say, oh, that's great. They've developed these really neat, characteristics and personalities. And so, like I said, we're learning this sort of in real time, the way our customers are as they're tasting the wines.

Owen Bargreen (34:03):

Yeah. Beautiful rosé man. Well, we have another wine that I'd like you to introduce. It's a '19, so a brand new wine, I, this hasn't been released, right?

Dave Specter (34:12):

Yeah. Well, it's, it's being released now to our wine club members. So we, what we said now, this is one where normally, you know for a red wine, my preference would be to release this in the fall. But since we've, our customers have been beating our doors down to try to get the first estate Pinot out of it I just kind of said, all right, fine, we'll release this a little early. And I was a little concerned initially, because I was like, I don't know, releasing a 19 now, are we, are we it's going to be a baby? And we knew it was going to be a baby, but is this thing going to show well enough to be able to really show people where it's headed? And I've been very, very pleased with it to this point because I, I will still recommend holding onto it for a year, but it is showing it's. I mean, you're, you're getting that red dirt, that jory characteristic in here big time and the fruit and, and especially being a 19 where it was a little bit of a cooler year, and wasn't sure, but I have been thrilled to see just the roundness that I'm getting.

Dave Specter (35:18):

When I talk about my Pinos, I tend to describe them, not as much in terms of flavors, because I always think flavor is such an individual thing that people are tasting. I kind of focus on the shape of the wine as I put it together. So, for example, I make a, I make one wine that rolls like a wave across your palate, make one, that's more like fireworks. The way Jupiter has shown up. I call it more like going off a water ski jump. The clonal makeup here is about half Pommard and half 667. So neither of those are big on the front palate, but it starts to build in the middle. And when the 667 kicks in on the back palate, it builds

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all through the finish. And then that just, it carries you kind of, as you're jumping off that, jumping through the air for a little while and just kind of a nice finish at the end of the arc.

Owen Bargreen (36:07):

Yeah. I'm very impressed with this wine. It's very youthful. I love the I love the feeling of weight mid palate. It's already feel, feel like it's very round and generous. Talk a little bit about 2019 a different year. Obviously we had this huge run of warm vintages, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18, just you know for a lot of winemakers, almost ideal growing seasons, a lot easier to make Pinot Noir than 19 where we had a, very difficult harvest situation in particular.

Dave Specter (36:42):

Right. And, it's always interesting, you, you get the question, oh, is this a good vintage? And, I always say that every vintage out here is a good vintage. It just depends on what your preferences are. For me I'm kinda like you own, I'm more for the classic, the elegance of some of those cooler vintages where, sometimes it takes a couple of years for things to open up and develop. 19 was kind of getting back to a really, kind of the, the more classic Oregon vintage, we had some warm days certainly, but overall it was cooler. We saw a lot more rain than we normally do, especially in August.

Dave Specter (37:19):

And then very much into September, ripening kind of really stopped as we got into that second week of September. We picked when we normally do, which was at the end of September and early October, but really it, by that time, we kind of seen about the sort of ripening that we were going to have by earlier. So in general, we're going to expect to see a lighter vintage not withstanding this particular wine has, it's all has a lot more roundness than I had expected, particularly at this point in its development. So that's, it's going to be interesting to start to see the nineteens as they show up, but, there's always stories with every vintage and, and the one story I'll always have is that this, this particular year was the first time that we did all of our crush here on site at the winery.

Dave Specter (38:09):

When, when we started out, we were so small, we were making wine at a shared facility until we kind of had enough volume to be able to justify putting the investment in. And so we have this new building and all this new equipment, and we're really excited. We get into harvest and our, our pretty much every day of harvest, it was about 45 degrees and drizzle and rain. And you talk about just miserable for all of volunteers that were coming up to help us do the fruit sorting. That was just an absolute mess. And, and so the funny thing is for that year my wife always makes she always goes and creates these gifts to, to give to the people that are up for our harvest crew. So for that particular year, she made t-shirts. And short sleeve t-shirts.

Dave Specter (39:02):

So, what are you going to do? And then in 2020 the one good thing about 2020 was that it was much warmer at harvest pretty much perfect. 60 degrees, sunny. She had wool hats.

Owen Bargreen (39:17):

That sounds about right. But Sara's got a Sara's got a good sense of humor. So.

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Dave Specter (39:24):

Yeah, she has a way of predicting what's going to happen. And I apparently now this is the secret. We just need to make sure that we have like parkas and kind of anything, cool weather ready to go right at harvest. But, it was the 19 harvest. It was challenging. It was also challenging in, in the winery itself. We, and this happens sometimes, we had pHs in the wines that were a little bit higher than normal. So all the everything took a little bit longer than it normally does.

Dave Specter (39:56):

And, but you know what, I've been very happy with our, the flavors coming out of there. We're seeing things that are a little bit more acid focused, which for, more of a traditional list is a good thing. And it's really also going to, as you said, be able to give us some counterbalances between those earlier vintages. A lot of times, what I love to be able to do when folks are here is to pour wines from these two different vintages so that folks can talk. We can talk to folks about how weather means so much when you're making wine between a warm vintage and a cooler vintage. And, and this really gives us that opportunity to start doing that again. So I'm, I'm excited to bring, the rest of the Pinots will come out later in the year, but, but this one at least kind of gives us that opportunity to have these conversations and then to show off how our vineyard has matured.

Owen Bargreen (40:43):

Yeah. Really a banging new wine. I'm just, I'm so thrilled for you guys to have this, estate vineyard now, I know I'm kind of chomping at the bit to have your own fruit and fruit source, and you have this really great terroir that you, you haven't been able to showcase until recently. So I just imagine it's a, coming from your corporate job in Cincinnati now to have your, be able to make basically wine off of your land. That's a really great site. It's gotta be so gratifying for you guys.

Dave Specter (41:12):

It's, it's a real, it's sort of amazing. When we look back at, we have a bunch of pictures of course, of the land when we started out. And when you look back at that and you compare it to where we are now, I mean, it's unrecognizable practically. And it's also funny because the land was in such awful shape that, the neighbors were, were so furious at the people that used to own our place from the neglect. And we still, even today, we will have people that will drive by and will come up and just say, we wanted to just say, thank you for making this place look so much better.

Dave Specter (41:47):

And it's, it's really great to hear, but then like, when you, like you say, when you literally start to see the payoff of all of that work that we put into this for years and years, we all know those first few years, you're not seeing anything and you're going on faith that all this is gonna pay benefits down the line, and now we're starting to see it. And, and also to hear that our customers are excited and people like you are excited about it. It just, it really it's so great. It's so gratifying. And, and it just going to get, it's going to get better and better because we're going to keep learning that. And we get to kind of share that with folks that are in, we get to say, Hey, here's what we learned this year. And just kind of talk about how that's developed and, and what we're seeing going forward. And yeah, it's, it's, it's such a relief to have gotten to this point, but I think this is really where from on our side where the fun really can begin.

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Owen Bargreen (42:43):

Yeah. Well, cheers to that, man. Thank you so much for meeting up with me virtually. I can't wait to come visit and chat in person and taste. I always love visiting your winery. It's such a beautiful part of the Willamette Valley. Really hope I get a chance to do that very soon.

Dave Specter (43:01):

I hope so too. Cause cause we miss you and your better half and Laffite so we'd love to see you soon.

Owen Bargreen (43:06):

We would love that. All right, man. Well, thanks so much for your time today. And for those at home, if you've never had these wines go check them out online. The Bells Up — what's the website?

Dave Specter (43:19):

bellsupwinery — all one word — .com.

Owen Bargreen (43:22):

Okay. bellswinery.com, small boutique producer, really beautiful new rosacea. Great. Tina, and Awarrr go check them out. Dave, thanks for your time, man. And happy Oregon Wine Month.

Dave Specter (43:33):

Thanks. Good to see you too Owen. And thank you so much for hanging with us through the years. You've really seen it when it was practically nothing. So I want to thank, can't thank you enough for being there and, and rooting us on and, and for giving us this opportunity to chat with you today. Thank you so much.

Owen Bargreen (43:50):

Absolutely man, and hope to see you soon.

Dave Specter (43:52):

Cheers everybody. Thank you so much. Love to hear from you.

Owen Bargreen (43:55):

Bye.

Dave Specter (43:57):

Bye now.