

The Pink Grape's Anthony Metzger Interviews Dave Specter, Owner and Winemaker at Bells Up Winery

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Anthony Metzger, The Pink Grape (00:00):

Here at the Pink Grape, I interview winemakers from all over the world. Our purpose is to have fun, be entertained, discover new wines, and meet great people. I hope you'll join our journey around the wine world by subscribing to my channel. If you like this video, please be sure to hit that like button, share it with a friend, and please enjoy the interview.

Anthony Metzger, The Pink Grape (00:20):

David, welcome to the show of the Pink Grape. It's a pleasure having you on.

Dave Specter, Bells Up Winery (00:24):

Well, thank you, Anthony, for having me. Happy to be here.

Anthony Metzger, The Pink Grape (00:26):

Yeah. Great. So you're a winemaker from Oregon, correct?

Dave Specter, Bells Up Winery (00:30):

Yeah, we've been we've been in Oregon for about 10 years now. We moved here from Ohio to do exactly kind of what we're doing right now. We have a very small winery. We make about 600 or so cases per year. We sell everything direct to consumer. That's the only model we ever wanted to have. So we run lean and mean, and we, we have no employees, so I make the wine, drive the tractor, run the tastings. My wife Sara does the marketing, the scheduling. That's just kind of how we make it work.

Anthony Metzger, The Pink Grape (00:59):

Nice, nice. And how does that work? I mean tell us a little bit about your wine.

Dave Specter, Bells Up Winery (01:04):

Yeah, so one of the things that we love about being in, in Oregon is that stylistically we can really make the kind of wines that we like, which is on the red side, something a little softer, a little bit more elegant, which is where Pinot Noir really kind of plays into that. You know, Oregon is more known for, it's, it's not, it's at the same latitude as Burgundy, so your traditional Pinot Noar home. So we're not making old world wines, but we're making wines that definitely feel more like that than say, kind of the big more powerful wines coming from our neighbors down to the south. And so, you know, what we're seeing is that there's really an opportunity for us to bring some diversity and variety to the red side here, because historically this area has been so known for pinot noir that it's almost all you see planted on the red side.

(01:51):

We're starting to experiment and bring some new things to market. But then on the white side you know, we've got a lot of different things that we can bring into. We make our whites unoaked. We say like, good Oregonians, we don't oak our whites. But we do want to have a little bit more structure, a little bit more a little bit more intensity there. So we're not just gonna do stainless steel, we're gonna do a Lees treatment to kind of build some creaminess and bodiedness to those whites so that they're nice and, and shippable, but also good food pairing wine. So, you know, you can really see a lot of nuance in winemaking styles not just for us, but for everybody that makes wine here in Oregon, which is just one of the things that we, we just love about being here.

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Anthony Metzger, The Pink Grape (02:33):

Sure, sure. Yeah. And one thing that's unique about, about your operation is that you are so small, making only 600 cases a year. What, what's any challenges with that? What makes it different compared to, say, a winery that mass produces, you know, thousands and thousands of cases of

Dave Specter, Bells Up Winery (02:50):

Wine? Probably the number one biggest challenge we run into is how do people know we exist <laugh>? Because for us, as you said, we, we don't, we do not not distribute at all. We direct ship everything we do. We've got customers and club members all over the country, but that is the only model we're gonna have. And so, you know, the question is, especially now when, when we started production in Oregon, there were probably about 500 wineries in the Willamette Valley, give or take. There's now up to 750. So just as we, as customers come in, one of the first questions that we always ask them is, how do you find us? Because, you know, we've, we've had a lot of nice people write a lot of nice things about us. We've had a lot of really nice reviews put out there. It's, it's taken about seven years to sort of build this, but waiting through sort of how much information there is out there and, and the numbers is really, really hard, but the benefits that we get from it are really just, it, it's really hard to beat.

(03:48):

I mean, one of the things that we say is, you know, when you come here, you call us, email us, you're gonna be talking to one of two people, or maybe both people depending on, on who's there. But that's the thing. We get the opportunity to build and established relationships with everybody that comes in. When folks we're meeting for the first time, we tell them, we will, we're an open book. We will tell you every single thing that we do. There are no state secrets, <laugh>, in any of this. So, you know, we give people the opportunity to say, Hey, ask questions, you know, get to know us. You know, there, there's nothing we won't tell you. and so we also sort of give people the opportunity to take whatever their level is, you know, why we see everything from, you know, real geeky wine people to just newbies in the business. So, you know, you, it, it all are great. You know, you're gonna see a lot of different things, and we're able to kind of cater and structure that to whoever it is that happens to be in the room at that time. Right.

Anthony Metzger, The Pink Grape (04:43):

I love that. Yeah. That's, that's amazing to be able to, like you said, you're doing a little bit of everything, and then to be able to go even and speak directly with the end consumer and and show them around your winery and around your vineyard, that's, that's pretty amazing. So, but what, what would you say, and you may have touched on this and what you were just saying, but what would you say is your favorite part about being a winemaker?

Dave Specter, Bells Up Winery (05:03):

Without question. It, it's getting to share what we do. I mean, I, I think that for a lot of folks, you know, there's this idea about what being a winemaker is, and I think it's often really romanticized. You really have to get, I I, you know, I always say the difference between being a good winemaker and a great winemaker is de attention to detail and just being willing to do a lot of things that other folks aren't willing to do. And cleaning, you know, we, we, you've probably, I imagine had other winemakers that have talked about this, but 90% of winemaking is cleaning. And you really have to just be willing to do just, just the very, the nitty gritty part of this job really well, you know, if you're gonna do, let's say, a job

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that's gonna take about an hour, you're gonna spend an hour prior to that cleaning and then an hour after that cleaning.

(05:52):

And, you know, it tests patience. You know, when you've got a million things to do or you're at, at harvest and you're tired. But, you know, the thing is, anything you miss is gonna show up on the backend. So you know, what we, the, the part that we love to do when you kind of get out of that environment and into something that's a little more relaxed and a little less mundane, is really being able to kind of share your process and then also the art part of it. You know, I mean, you always hear that wine is an art and a science, and you need both of them. So, you know, we can kind of talk about both in a way that can really connect people to what it is that we're trying to accomplish. So just being able to tell our stories and the story of, you know, not just the winery, but each individual wine. And, and what that intention is, is, is just, you know, for us, really the payoff.

Anthony Metzger, The Pink Grape (06:40):

Now, what would you say is different compared to Oregon Wine, your wine in particular compared to other wines of the world, even like you said to your, the neighbors to the south, or maybe even your neighbors up across the border in British Columbia. What makes Oregon wine special?

Dave Specter, Bells Up Winery (06:55):

De definitely, I mean, it's, it's a combination of things. You know, you always, I I always hate throwing that terroir word around, but I mean, it really is true in, in Oregon, we're very unique, you know, west of the Cascade Mountains, but east of the coastal range, we have a cooler wetter climate and a shorter growing season than California than let's say our friends in Washington and British Columbia. So we're somewhat limited in what we can consistently get ripened. And so it kind of forces us to be a little bit more focused on those particular grapes that's, you know, really the reason why you see so much pinot noir, but you're now seeing a little bit more diversity into some other reds that kind of have similar type growing seasons. Then you add soil types. I mean, the Willamette Valley has a, oh my goodness, it has such a diverse geology and history to it.

(07:50):

You can go five minutes to the west of where we sit, and you're gonna be on a completely different soil type. Your elevation is gonna play such a key role. you're, you're facing, whether you're facing your vineyard's, facing to the south, facing to the east, to the west, all of those things are gonna have, are, are really gonna produce tangible results in our wines. And I think it's one of the reasons, even though there are so many wineries in the valley, why there's room for them, because every little microsite is gonna have its own unique characteristics and, and yes, terroir, but the point, point being that there's no two experiences you're gonna have in this area that are gonna be the same, whether it's the soil, whether it's the, the winemaking style, whether, and, and that's why I think so Oregon has developed such an amazing reputation particularly over about the last 10 to 15 years where folks are realizing this is an incredible area for, for approachable, elegant wines but that are really well crafted. You know, you don't see the big commercial places here the way you do, say Napa Sonoma, you know, know in California or up into Washington state, you know, so we can really focus more on the craft side of it, which is something that I think a lot of places would love to be able to spend more time doing.

Anthony Metzger, The Pink Grape (09:04):

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Yeah, I think it's such a great point because wine to me represents place, right? I mean, it's coming from that vineyard that's, we're as winemakers so dependent on what the vineyard gives us. And so the wine really represents place, and that's what, it's a great answer, because what makes Oregon wine special and different? Well, it's Oregon, right? Just like yesterday, I, I interviewed a, a winemaker from British Columbia, which was really cool. And she was telling me about the, the soils in her vineyard, going back to an ancient arctic sea that was there, and the shoreline was raining or divided her vineyard and like, was telling me all this stuff. And I go, you know, that's true. So like, when I go to pick a bottle of wine, you know, that I want to drink. Sometimes if I don't know what I want, I think about where do I want to drink from? You know, do I wanna have a bottle from Tuscany? That sounds cool today. You know, that's, that's one of the cool things about wine, is how you can get it. and it represents place. So that's pretty sweet.

Dave Specter, Bells Up Winery ([09:58](#)):

Totally. Totally. And, and, and like I said, in Oregon, it even gets down into to smaller areas than that. So, you know, it, it's kind of, it gives you that opportunity to really dig even deeper beyond just say, let's say like a region like Tuscany, right? I mean, you're really down into that specific microclimate. I mean on our site, for example, all of our soil on our 10 acre piece of property is volcanic. But we are one of the very, very, very few wineries in our area that has the volcanic soil in, in our particular a v a, the Shahala Mountains. The Dundee Hills, which is right next to us, is more known for having the volcanic soils. And that's where like, you know, that's where you find the, the, the really, I'd say the really ritzy, you know wineries that you see over there. So we always say, Hey, we have that soil. We're just a lot more, you know, down to earth as a general rule.

Anthony Metzger, The Pink Grape ([10:50](#)):

<laugh>, <laugh>. I like it. I like it. Well, great David, it's been wonderful, haven't you, on the show today, what we're gonna do is put a link to your website in the description below so people can come visit you, check you out, join your wine club, whatever you got going on, and send 'em your way. But again, really appreciate your time and being on the show today.

Dave Specter, Bells Up Winery ([11:05](#)):

Fantastic. Anthony, thank you so much for having me.

Anthony Metzger, The Pink Grape ([11:08](#)):

I hope you enjoyed this week's interview with the winemaker. Be sure to tune in next week as I'll be interviewing another winemaker. I hope you'll join our journey around the wine world by subscribing to this channel. Be sure to like this video and share it with a friend. We'll see you next week. Thank you.