

VARIETAL FOCUS

Winemaker Favorites

Lance Cutler



Pinot Grigio



Annia



Gewürztraminer



Dolcetto



Sagrantino

THE MOST DIFFICULT PART of working on our Varietal Focus series has always been handling the logistics. There are so many moving parts: three regions, nine winemakers and three separate tastings that require meshing schedules, travel and research. Working during a pandemic intensifies this logistical conundrum, so we looked for a way to modify the story and still get in-depth details on how winemakers chose a style and then worked in their vineyards and wineries to achieve success.

We decided to reduce the number of winemakers from nine to five, and we kept the selected winemakers in close proximity to avoid travel to other states or far-off regions.

Rather than focus on a single variety, we asked winemakers to pick their favorite non-mainstream variety on the assumption that their reasons for making wines from these uncommon grapes would most likely be personal and impassioned. We could then explore that passion and concentrate on the specific techniques they used to fulfill their vision.

We ended up with an eclectic group of talented winemakers with a diverse selection of grape varieties. Phil Long started out as a home winemaker before founding Longevity Winery and becoming enchanted with the Italian “Ramato” style of Pinot Grigio. Dan Petroski is winemaker for the historic and legendary Larkmead Winery in Napa, but he launched his own Massican Winery dedicated to producing white wines exclusively. Morgan Twain-Peterson and Chris Cottrell are friends who became partners to run Bedrock Wine Co., with a focus on reviving historic vineyards to make their wines. Bill Nachbaur left behind a successful legal practice to pursue winemaking based on field blends at his ACORN Winery. Ridgely Evers passionately argues that our Northern California climate most closely approximates Europe’s Mediterranean climate, thus choosing to focus on Mediterranean varietals at his DaVero Farms and Winery.





Phil Long

RON ESSEX PHOTOGRAPHY



Longevity Winery 2019 Pinot Grigio, 13.5% alc., 283 cases, \$26

Phil Long is a professional designer. He created the lacy heart-shaped label design for Longevity as part of a project that he and his wife, Debra, began in 2003 as home winemakers. They started making wine commercially under the Longevity label in the Livermore Valley in 2006, renting space at other facilities. Working as founder/winemaker, he soon had his own facility and increased production from 500 to 3,000 cases annually.

“Great wine starts with great fruit: there is no way around that,” he observed. Even after 14 years of making wine, he consistently strives to re-evaluate and improve his winemaking techniques to elevate the quality of his wines. Long also serves as president of the Association of African American Vintners, which lately has occupied a lot of his time. Most recently, Longevity has become a nationally distributed brand thanks to a new partnership with the Franzia family of Bronco Wine Company.

According to Long:

“Initially, we were drawn to this vineyard because fruit was available. We were so small to start: it often wasn’t about getting the fruit we wanted but rather getting the fruit we could get. Over time, we noticed that depending on contact time, the color of the pressed juice deepened, and the flavor intensified. Doing some research, we realized that we were producing a “Ramato” styled Pinot Grigio, like those in Italy. The Ramato style became our goal. We are looking for a beautiful deep blush Pinot Grigio that is medium-bodied with pure fruit and floral aromas on the nose. We want a wine that is light, fresh and bright without any bitterness. In short, we want to make the perfect summertime pool wine.

“The Buttner Vineyard is principally Zamora silt loam, sitting at an elevation of 280 feet. Vines are spaced 5x6 feet. The rootstock is Duarte 101-14. Owner Ted Buttner was the only one who knew the clones, and he has passed away, so the clone is unknown to us. The vines were planted in 2002, have drip irrigation and are sustainably farmed. Yield was 3.2 tons per acre.

“We adhere to IPM strategies. IPM focuses on long-term prevention of pests or their damage through a combination of techniques, such as biological control, habitat manipulation, modification of cultural practices and use of resistant varieties. Vines are VSP-trellised, spur-pruned and short-thinned to two shoots per spur in late spring/early summer, with no leafing or cluster thinning. We use squirrel bait stations as required, and the entire vineyard is netted for birds prior to harvest. We make a post-harvest liquid fertilizer addition. To harvest, we try to balance pH, sugar, acidity and ripeness. We taste the fruit, waiting for the general lack of flavor to blossom into more full flavors. We wait for seeds to brown and get crunchy.

“We hand-sort all fruit, cluster by cluster, eliminating MOG, as well as under- or over-ripe fruit. We destem and crush the grapes, adding 40 ppm SO₂. The must sits overnight and only then does it go to the press. The pressed juice settles in a tank for two to three days at 40° F to 50° F. We rack off the lees, establish a temperature of 60°F, adjust acid to a TA of .65 and then add yeast, using QA-23. We add Go-Ferm during yeast hydration. We ferment at 60° F in jacketed stainless steel tanks.

“After fermentation, the wine sits on the lees with no stirring. We cold-stabilize using temperature and Claristar and heat stabilize with bentonite. We rack only to filter at bottling time. We plate and frame-filter after heat and cold stabilization and membrane-filter at bottling. Wine is cork-finished and gets one to three months in bottle before spring release.”

TASTING SUMMARY: It has a beautiful, bright, salmon-pink and coppery hue. The aromas are floral, pear, berry and citrus, with hints of clove to heighten the senses. It has wet floral and saline notes that bode well for food pairing. This medium-bodied “blush” wine is dry with a lively acidity that is refreshing to drink. A weighty palate with ripe stone fruit and a creamy texture. A remarkably interesting, textured experience for Pinot Grigio.



Dan Petroski



Massican Winery 2019 Annia, 12.8% alc., 1,499 cases, \$30

Dan Petroski was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. After attending Columbia University, where he studied history and played football, he worked for Time, Inc. and began a career in magazine publishing. He often entertained clients at some of New York's finest restaurants and learned to eat well and consume fine wine. While working in the publishing business, he earned his MBA from NYU. Petroski went to Sicily for a year in 2005 where he interned at Valle dell'Acate winery.

He intended to return to New York in 2006 but was invited to work a harvest in California at DuMOL Winery. After harvest, Petroski was hired as a cellar master at the historic Larkmead Winery. The following year he was promoted to assistant winemaker and became winemaker in 2012. Just to keep himself busy, he launched his own label, Massican, dedicated to white wines made in a style he came to enjoy while living in the Mediterranean. In 2017 the *San Francisco Chronicle* named him Winemaker of the Year.

According to Petroski:

"Massican is named after the southern Italian mountain range where my great-grandparents were born. Annia is named after my mother and allows me to work here in California with two favorite Italian varieties: Tocai Friulano and Ribolla Gialla. Both of these varieties have a wonderful texture that makes them incredibly food friendly. Annia succeeds in carrying its weight very well. The naturally high pH in the wine offers a broader, textural component to the mid-palate while the lower alcohol allows for a lighter, fresher finish to the wine.

"The grapes for this wine are sourced from six different vineyards: five on the valley floor and one at 1,600 feet on Mt. Veeder. The soils are mostly clay. Vine spacing is mixed, from Heritage head-trained 8x8 feet to bilateral cordon and cane-pruned vines, ranging from 3x6 feet to 5x7 feet. The clones are Tocai and Ribolla Clone 1 and Chardonnay Musque planted to 110-R, 101-14, 1616 and St. George. One vineyard is dry farmed while the others are irrigated: three are organic, three traditional and vines range from five years to 73 years old. We do nothing out of the ordinary in the vineyards, but these

varieties are scarce, so I try to maximize yields where possible, averaging 4.5 tons per acre. I figure if the vineyard can maintain quality, the more grapes I get, the more wine I have.

"The lots are harvested separately and fermented independently in French oak and stainless steel tanks until blending six weeks before bottling. Tocai and Ribolla are lower acid varieties, so I pick based on pH. Once they hit 3.3 pH, I'm picking even if the sugar has not yet reached 20° Brix. We do not sort the grapes. They are classically whole-cluster pressed. The juice is settled overnight at 55° F and then racked to barrel for fermentation. Individual lots will be left to ferment on native yeast while others will get inoculated with DV-10. I prefer native yeast in most instances but will inoculate, especially when I am working with young vines or a new vineyard. We add no acid but will use Fermaid-O after primary fermentation has started. We ferment in neutral 300 L hogsheads for the Tocai and Ribolla and new 300 L French oak barrels for the Chardonnay. Fermentation temperature maxes at 70° F, and we stir lees every other day during fermentation.

"Post-primary fermentation, we'll top up the barrels and add 20 ppm SO₂. The wine rests in barrel for six months, usually starting some native malolactic fermentation. Tocai and Ribolla can get pretty funky, so sometimes we will stir again, if necessary, to blow off H₂S. We neither heat- nor cold-stabilize the wine. The wine spends six months in barrel. We rack and blend one month prior to bottling. Annia has high pH for a white wine, usually between 3.4 and 3.5. It retains its freshness due to natural bitterness from these varieties, low alcohol and that malic acid, green apple character. We sterile-filter because the wine maintains malic bacteria. The wine is cork-finished and released just a few weeks after bottling."

TASTING SUMMARY: A pretty nose of lemon, pear and apple. Structured, mineral-driven with explosive flavors of lemon zest, green apple and wet stone. Incredibly balanced and soft. Great flow across the palate, followed with a kick of more citrus, sour grass and kiwi. This wine has a great center and length with a hint of minerality. Bright and fresh with a long finish. Really worth taking your time with this one.

Bedrock Wine Co. 2018 Alta Vista Vineyard Gewürztraminer, 13.5% alc., 150 cases, \$35

Morgan Twain-Peterson is about as close as it comes to Sonoma Wine Country royalty: His father, Joel Peterson, was the main figure behind Ravenswood Winery. Twain-Peterson was tasting wine with his father by the time he was five. After college at Vassar and Columbia, wine work at Ravenswood, in Australia and in Bordeaux, Twain-Peterson started Bedrock Wine Co. in 2007.

In 2011, Chris Cottrell joined Bedrock as a partner. Cottrell had met Twain-Peterson when they worked together at a wine shop in New York, and they had been friends for years. Cottrell worked at Crush Wine Co. in New York from 2005 to 2013, before moving to California full-time. The friends have dedicated their company to preserving and rehabilitating old vineyards in California. The reasoning behind revitalizing old vineyards is summed up by Twain-Peterson this way, “If something has been growing for over 100 years, it not only deserves the respect of us humans, but it probably makes some darn good wine too.”



Chris Cottrell

According to Cottrell:

“When it comes to this wine, it was the site and vine age of the Alta Vista Vineyard that first captured us. We believe this to be the oldest Gewürztraminer planting in the state. It’s a mountain vineyard, which gives us extra malic acid, allowing for better freshness, vibrancy and depth. We want this wine to exhibit the classic exotic Gewürztraminer nose of spice, honey and stone fruit with an almost oily mid-palate, like Alsatian Gewürztraminer, and we want the whole package to be balanced with acidity.

“The Alta Vista Vineyard sits at an elevation of 1,000 feet. It is made up primarily of Tuscan red clay loam. Vine spacing is 10x10 feet, and the vineyard consists of Heritage clones planted on St. George rootstock. The vines were planted in the 1940s but had been neglected for several years before we started working with them. We worked hard at replenishing the soil with organic matter and carefully pruned the vines back to health into a modified California sprawl. They are dry-farmed organically with

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enough shoot-thinning to promote airflow. The vines are self-regulating, providing a production of 1.5 to 2 tons per acre.

“We determine picking by flavor. We are waiting for the taste to plateau, moving from moderate flavors to flavors with extra depth. The change occurs quickly, and we pick as soon as we recognize that change to preserve the acid and maximize the flavors. Grapes are sorted in the vineyard prior to picking. They are whole-cluster pressed with 30 ppm SO₂ added before settling for three days in a stainless steel tank at 58° F. Juice is racked, and fermentation is carried out with native yeast. There are no acid additions. We add DAP at the start of fermentation. The wine ferments in stainless steel between 62° F to 64° F.

“After fermentation, we rack the wine: some to another stainless tank and some to neutral barrels. The wine sits on lees until bottling, but we do not stir. We cold-stabilize the wine and crossflow-filter. We use a cork-finished bottle and age the wine three to six months before release.”

TASTING SUMMARY: A bit of burnt match fades quickly to intensely floral, dense and textural lychee tones that carry through the palate with a high acid pineapple lift that begs for a second sip. Restrained at first then strongly aromatic, and with time it becomes flinty, almost like fresh gun powder. There is a suggestion of key lime pie, green apple and spice. It is smooth but without a tremendous amount of finesse.



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Bill Nachbaur

ACORN Winery

2017 Alegria Vineyard Dolcetto, 13.5% Alc., 153 cases, \$42

Bill Nachbaur has had a couple of interesting lives. He was a VISTA volunteer before beginning an 18-year career as an attorney in Washington, D.C. and San Francisco where he worked in financial services. In the mid-1980s he took the opportunity to reinvent himself by studying viticulture and winemaking and bought some property just outside of Healdsburg. “Crafting legal documents or legislation is not nearly as satisfying as growing grapes and making wine,” is the way he summed it up. He and his wife Betsy purchased the 32 acres that they named Alegria Vineyards in 1990 and have been making wine for 30 years. They keep production between 2,000 and 2,500 cases, selling the rest of their grapes to other eager winemakers.

According to Nachbaur:

“I started out with two ideas: I wanted to plant uncommon varieties, and I wanted every wine to be a field blend. I was inspired by our 1890 Zinfandel field blend vineyard. In 1990, when I was deciding what to plant, there was hardly any Dolcetto in California. I interplanted Freisa and Barbera because they come from the same region in Piemonte as Dolcetto. My wife and I had enjoyed Dolcettos, but we had no particular wine in mind as a model. I wanted to make the best wine we could from our grapes and terroir. Most Dolcetto in Italy never sees oak. It’s an everyday wine that’s not aged. We take the grape a bit more seriously, barrel-aging for 16 to 18 months. We want a wine with alluring aromas of dark blue and black fruit that is medium-bodied and opens up with expressive fruit flavors that flow into a lingering finish. We try to make food-friendly wines that improve with age.

“Our Dolcetto vines are planted in three different parts of our vineyard in three different types of alluvial clay loam: Positas gravelly clay loam, Haire clay loam and Manzanita silty loam. It is ancient river benchland, so it is full of a mixture of oceanic and volcanic rounded rocks. We are half a mile from the confluence of the Russian River and Dry Creek at about 110 feet in elevation. We have gently rolling benchland, with half the rows running NE-SE and half running East-West. We have a VSP row (Clone 1) on 1616 rootstock where the vines are 6 feet apart. Other rows are GDC trellis (Clones 2 and 3) on various rootstocks that started out as 6x11 feet but are now 3x11 feet because we interplanted. Rootstocks include 1616C, 779P, 41B, 4453 and 110R.



“The farm is irrigated, Certified Sustainable, Fish Friendly Farmed and organic (but not certified organic). All work is done by hand, with the exception of mowing, and every vine is touched eight to 12 times a vintage. In the vineyard we remove suckers, extra shoots and laterals in the fruit zone, but don’t remove other leaves because we need some shade to protect the fruit. We drop fruit based on shoot length. Dolcetto clusters are large with several shoulders, so we remove about three shoulders from each cluster. The vines are 30 years old, and we harvest 2.5 tons per acre on the 2.2 acres planted to Dolcetto. We pick based on flavor, seed ripeness and Brix. We wait for blackberry and plum flavors to develop and for the seeds to turn brown and taste nutty when we chew them. We usually harvest in the 23.5° to 24.0° Brix range.

“The vines are hand-harvested. We remove leaves and any rotten clusters as we pick. We picked three separate field-blended lots. After crushing, the lots are kept separate for cold soak and fermentation. Grapes are crushed with rollers separated to maximize whole

berries. We add 30 ppm SO₂ at the crusher. We add dry ice to T-bin fermenters, trying to cold soak for three days, but we don’t have temperature control. Native yeast was active by day 3, and we supplemented with D254 on day 7. We like that yeast because it seems to add an interesting dry fruit character, enhance color and build body. We add 1 to 2 g/L of tartaric acid, as needed, early in the fermenter. We use Nutriferm Arom and Enartis Pro Round yeast hulls at inoculation then Nutriferm Advance at one-third sugar depletion. Wine is fermented in T-bins and is punched down two to three times daily. Fermentation temp runs to the low 80°s.

“To help control tannins, we usually press before dryness around 4° Brix, using a basket press. Because we do a light press. we combine press juice and free run. 2017 was a drought year, and harvest was very early. We were fortunate to have all our wine made and barreled before the Tubbs fire swept through parts of Santa Rosa. We inoculated for malolactic, which occurred in barrel. We racked after ML and maintained 30 ppm FSO₂ until bottling. We’ve used French, American and Hungarian oak. We particularly like Boswell Medoc and Demptos AO for this wine. We find that 10 to 20 percent new oak or a high percentage of once-used barrels adds structure. We used no new oak for this vintage, but 42 percent of the barrels were once-used French oak. The wine received 18 months’ barrel-aging. It was racked for bottling and sterile-filtered. Cork-finished, it received two years’ bottle-aging before release.”

TASTING SUMMARY: Alluring aromas of dark blue and black fruit are woven with inviting mocha-laced oak notes. A veritable cornucopia of dark fruit aromas. It has a spicy brambly nose with great lively fruit and more savory notes than I would expect. It is wonderfully spicy with a dusty book quality that feels Old World. The dynamics on the nose overvalue the palate. The nose is the best part. Intense warm-vintage California red wine aromas and flavors of macerated blueberries and red cherries, with barrel-aging for depth, richness and nuance. Dusty tannins on the palate that integrate with more air and time.

DaVero Farms and Winery 2013 Estate Sagrantino Riserva, 14.1 Alc., 300 cases, \$95

When you talk to Ridgely Evers, you can almost see his mind working. He has run companies in farming, software, real estate, investment and consumer products. One night, while dining at Babbo in New York in 1999, longtime olive oil customer and friend Chef Mario Batali offered Evers a bottle of 1994 Paolo Bea Sagrantino di Montefalco, and it changed his life forever. He loved the wine so much he and his wife, Colleen McGlynn, decided to plant Sagrantino and make wine from the grapes. At least that's the story.

Evan LaNouette was born in Santa Rosa but grew up outside Columbus, Ohio. He went to Cornell University, majoring in viticulture and enology. Upon graduating, he worked at the prestigious Italian Wine Merchants in Manhattan, New York. A mentor introduced him to a bottle of 2005 Paolo Bea Sagrantino, and he had a total mind-body experience. He'd never been so moved by a single glass of wine. Two years later, he moved to California with a mission to introduce Sagrantino to California. He met Ridgely Evers and Colleen McGlynn, who had already harvested their first crop. The rest is history. At least that's his story.

According to Evers:

"The 2013 Sagrantino Riserva was the seventh crop from Hawk Mountain Vineyard. Our intention, then and now, was to capture a terroir-driven wine and learn from what it represents. Sagrantino from our mountain vineyard presents a combination of red and blue fruits, along with a floral element of violets. With this grape there is a natural rustic quality. The wine is not about being silky and smooth with lots of finesse. There is a 'beast' component to Sagrantino, but it reveals as a friendly expression of the grape itself in a way that we find inspiring.

"Hawk Mountain Vineyard is clay loam with areas of serpentine. The vines sit on an eastern-facing hillside at 400 feet. The upper two-thirds of the block is 110R rootstock, and the bottom third is 3309. The budwood was collected from a friend, but the actual clone remains unknown.

The vines were planted in 2000 at 6x8 foot spacings. The vineyard is irrigated and Certified Biodynamic.

"Our Sagrantino usually ripens in mid-October, so in a typical year we often go through one or two fall rain events.

We're proactive about leafing in the vineyard to maintain good airflow and try to balance that against the grape's tendency for high pH, which is to say we don't want a 'naked' fruit zone. This balancing act between ripeness, pH and sun exposure is always a dance. This vintage there was minor leaf pulling on the north-facing vines and no fruit dropping. In a good year, we are lucky to get 2.2 tons per acre.

"Determining when to pick is also a balancing act. Sagrantino is a low acid, high pH grape. We have tried everything we can think of in the vineyard to



Ridgely Evers and Colleen McGlynn



lower pH, but the grapes on Hawk Mountain resist all our efforts. We often pick at 3.8 pH with acids just below 0.5 TA. Given our non-interventionist philosophy, we work extremely hard to protect the wine from bacterial issues by carefully monitoring SO₂ levels and regularly topping the barrels.

"Sagrantino is one of the most tannic wines in the world. You either embrace this reality, or you try to direct it. Since our focus is on natural winemaking and low intervention, we choose to embrace it. We invest in barrel- and bottle-aging to soften the wine accordingly. The grapes are fully destemmed, and a mix of crushed and uncrushed berries was established for primary fermentation. We cold-soaked for four days at 58° F until the wild yeast developed an initial cap. Fermentation was carried out exclusively with native yeast.

"No acid additions were made, but 2 pounds per 1,000 gallons of Fermaid yeast nutrient were added: first at 20° Brix and then again at 14° Brix. Five tons were fermented in an open-top stainless steel tank, and the remaining one and a half tons were fermented in an open-top T-bin. Cap management included two punch-downs a day, along with one pulse of air per day from 22° to 10° Brix. Below 10° Brix one daily punch-down was given. Fermentation started at 55° F and maxed out at 88° F. Maceration on the skins lasted 18 days. The lot was pressed at -0.8° Brix in a bladder press with a maximum of 1.4 Bar pressure.

"Wine went directly to barrel, and we did not separate free run from press juice. Spontaneous malolactic occurred in barrel. We usually stir the barrels every seven to 10 days after pressing to help this along. A mix of French and American barrels was used, all of which had seen a minimum of four years' previous use. After ML, we did a 'dirty rack' where heavy sediments are left behind and finer lees are carried along for long-term aging. We made our first SO₂ addition of 40 ppm and generally maintained that level all the way to bottling. The wine remained in those barrels for 34 months until it was racked again for cleaner settling before bottling. It was bottled with no filtration and cork-finished. The wine was bottle-aged a minimum of three years."

TASTING SUMMARY: Dusty, cherry aromatics from an aged wine with great notes of macerated plum and black tea. On the nose, incredibly complex aromas that change constantly in the glass over time, including cedar, bay laurel red currants, rosemary, dried orange peel and new leather. On the palate, big tannins revolving around red cherries, black tea, dried roses and wet earth. Big, rustic, extracted wine. Great texture with mature dusty tannins and some light Brett notes. More blackberry fruit comes with air. It opens up beautifully over time. A gorgeous "beast" of a wine.

THERE IS AN OLD SAYING in the wine business that you should make wine that you love so at least you can enjoy drinking it if it doesn't sell. What became apparent when talking to these winemakers, was that not only did they love their chosen eclectic varieties, but making those varieties also fit into a larger, equally passionate, personal philosophy about winemaking. Talking with Phil Long revealed the ongoing delight of a home winemaker, who discovered techniques that captured his imagination. Observing that extended skin contact enriched both the aromas and flavors of his Pinot Grigio, while imparting a beautiful salmon color, was enough to send him in that direction. Discovering that there was a rich tradition in this "Ramato"

style of winemaking served as confirmation that he was on the right track.

Dan Petroski became enchanted by the crisp, bright, easy-drinking white wines of Italy while he was living in Sicily. Those wines were fresh with moderate alcohol and delineated acidic finishes that went beautifully with food. Returning to California, he sought out those varieties and blended them into wines that closely approximated his memories. Basing a winery exclusively on crisp white wines in Napa Valley tells you all you need to know about Petroski's imaginative, but stubborn, nature. His Annia is that rare white wine that keeps getting better as you drink it, until the last sip is the best.

Chris Cottrell noted, "Bedrock Winery is, first and foremost, a mission-driven operation dedicated to preserving and rehabilitating old vineyards around California. These vineyards, planted by California's viticultural pioneers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, are living pieces of history. Not only are we able to draw inspiration from those very pioneers, but we get to actually use the materials they planted." The Alta Vista Vineyard was planted in the 1940s and has required years of expensive and loving care to bring it back into limited production. The mountain location allows the fruit to maintain high malic acid, which lends the Bedrock Gewürztraminer acidity, verve and freshness while carrying the spicy aromatics of the variety.

Sometimes you get an idea, and it sort of runs wild. Bill Nachbaur purchased a vineyard in 1990 that he named Alegria Vineyard. Anchored by a block of Zinfandel (actually a field blend of 17 different varieties) planted in the 1890s, Nachbaur's vineyard was further planted to expand the tradition of field-blending wines. He now operates a 32-acre Certified California Sustainable vineyard that grows more than 70 varieties and produces a bit more than 2,000 cases annually. He planted Dolcetto, along with Freisa and Barbera, in three separate areas of his vineyard. He has three clonal selections in three distinct soil types. His plan was to take the earthy black cherry character of Dolcetto, add strawberry notes of Freisa and use the Barbera for acid structure then hope the variation in soils and sun exposure enhanced the wine's balanced texture and complexity. It's always good to have a plan, especially when things work out.

Ridgely Evers based his entire DaVero Farms and Winery venture on a simple premise: Grow what belongs here and be patient. He believes our climate is Mediterranean, almost exactly like the Italian peninsula. For centuries, all across Europe, people have sought out the vines that make great wine in their climate. They grow what they grow because it wants to be there. Evers decided to trust their centuries of experimentation and focus on growing plants that come from a similar climate to ours. That would explain why he focuses on Italian varieties, but Sagrantino holds a special place in his heart. As a lover of great wine, Evers doubted he could make something to compete with the great Bordeaux or Burgundy, but our Mediterranean climate gave him an honest shot at producing a world-quality Sagrantino. His patience has paid off.

This Varietal Focus introduces us to five passionate winemakers who are pursuing their dreams, which are decidedly not mainstream. Each has a philosophy and a plan, but for whatever reason, they have decided against conventional grape choices to build their businesses. It could be remarkable bravery or a loose screw, but they insist on following the road less traveled. Whatever their reasons, after tasting their wines and engaging in limited conversations, this writer looks forward to a post-pandemic time when I can get to better know them, their wines and their thinking processes. If nothing else, it will be entertaining, and the wine will be good. [WBM](#)



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