



Circle Update



October 2010

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Featured photographer:

This issue's featured photographer is **Bob Campbell**.

Front cover: Harvesting Pinot Noir at Dog Point, Marlborough, 2009 vintage. Back cover: Barrels and vines at Coopers Creek. See also page 67.

New Zealander Bob joined the wine industry as an accountant, but quickly saw the errors of his ways and moved into marketing and export roles. He abandoned the security (as it was then) of salaried employment in 1986 and has been writing about wine in a number of publications as well as running his own wine school. More than 21,500 people have graduated from Bob's wine courses, which have been taught in five countries.

Bob has been a keen photographer since he won second prize in a photo competition at the age of 13, an achievement only slightly dulled by the fact that his sister came first. He has a large library of wine photos and lives in the probably vain hope that the sale of these may one day exceed the vast amount he spends on photography equipment.

Membership of the Circle of Wine Writers (www.winewriters.org) is open to accredited wine journalists and other professionals communicating in the media about wine. As such, it is editorial policy to give the Editor and each writer for *Circle Update* freedom to express his or her views. It must therefore be stressed that the Circle as an organisation does not formally associate itself with the opinions expressed by contributors, except where this is specifically stated.

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The Circle trip to Virginia: Steven Morris provides an overview in a montage of images.



Virginia, hi!

Neville Blech introduces the Circle Virginia trip

Those of us on the trip who had tasted Virginian wines at the London Wine Trade Fair earlier this year or at the tasting at The Oxford Wine Company last year had no doubt that these wines represented more than a passing curiosity. For those who hadn't come across them before, this was a giant leap in wine education.

As we gathered on a balmy late summer evening at the Westin Hotel, Reston, in preparation for the start of our tour the next day, discussing the itinerary, nibbling local foods and sipping some excellent local wines, we couldn't help surmising that we were in for a treat. We were hosted jointly by Chris and Janine Parker of New Horizon Wines, whose company was (and still is) instrumental in bringing Virginia wines to the notice of the rest of the world, Annette Boyd and Amy Ciarametaro of the Virginia Wine Marketing Board and Richard Leahy, the leading wine writer from Virginia and incidentally a member of the Circle of Wine Writers although he was not part of the group.

But first, *un peu d'histoire*. Vines were planted in Virginia almost as soon as the first settlers landed in the early 17th century and whilst they continued to be planted on and off since, they seemed to produce only a long list of failures for various reasons until the late 19th century – with one notable exception. Most growers were choosing European/American hybrids, more suited to sweet wines, and so because of their 'foxiness' table wines from these grapes were almost impossible to enjoy. Virginia's most noted gastronome, Thomas Jefferson, brought over many *vinifera* cuttings from France in the hope that he could emulate the French wines, but even he had to admit, after 25 years of

fruitless endeavour, that only native grapes could succeed.

The one exception referred to above is the Cynthiana grape, more commonly known as Norton, after the name of the man who first successfully developed it. It is said that it came from a crossing between native wild grapes and *vinifera*, but this is by no means certain. It produces some pretty butch wine – one could say that it is almost like a cross between Amarone and Durif, so you can see that it is not for children or the faint-hearted. By 1830, this varietal was being produced commercially and garnered some considerable success at international wine shows in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Then came prohibition, which effectively killed off the wine industry in Virginia, so much so that it was not until 1967 that the first post-prohibition winery was opened in the state. In the mid 70s Chardonnay and Cabernets began to appear and the Italian owners of the Barbourville Winery began to introduce some Italian varietals. By the mid 80s, technical ability and a greater knowledge of the *terroir* ensured that the *vinifera* grapes overtook the plantings of the autochthonal ones, although Norton was successfully reintroduced. When I last visited Virginia in the mid 80s, there were really only two wineries of note – the Williamsburg Winery, just outside historic Williamsburg, and Barbourville, on the way to Charlottesville. I seem to remember that Williamsburg

produced a pretty neat Chardonnay but was less impressed with some of the Italian varietals that were being made at Barbourville.

It is heartening to note that both have survived magnificently over the last 25 years and that Barbourville is now producing some excellent Viogniers and Bordeaux varietals, which are so much more suited to the Virginia soil and climate. Since the mid 90s, there has been an explosion of new wineries in the state and they now number almost 180, with more to come.

Geography and geology

There are six AVAs (American Viticultural Areas) in Virginia out of 190 in the whole of the United States. These are meant to define the type and style of the wines each AVA produces.

Virginia's **Eastern Shore AVA** is located on the southern end of the Delmarva Peninsula with Chesapeake Bay on one side and the Atlantic Ocean on the other. It benefits from sea breezes and a maritime influence and the sandy soil of the area. The **Monticello AVA** is in the central Piedmont area which nestles underneath the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains, with mixed clay soils. The **North Fork of Roanoke AVA** is a small area on the eastern slopes of Allegheny Mountains in the south west part of

The happy band on the trip. Photo by Steven Morris



the state, whilst the **Rocky Knob AVA** is even smaller and further south towards the border with North Carolina, sitting atop of the Blue Ridge Mountains and consisting of well-drained loam and gravel soil. The **Northern Neck George Washington Birthplace AVA** is on the western side of Chesapeake Bay and again benefits from maritime influences, whilst the **Shenandoah Valley AVA** is located to the west of the Blue Ridge Mountains, spilling into the state of West Virginia where the predominately limestone soils are perceived to offer great future potential.

Climate

Virginia has a temperate climate and despite the capital, Richmond, having just about the same latitude as San Francisco, the climate is a lot less consistent than that in California. There is generally a lot more rainfall, except perhaps to the west of the Blue Ridge Mountains, which makes the grapes more prone to rot and mildew, and extreme heat can bring problems of vigour management. Spring frosts, hail and storms, particularly in the months just before the harvest, are another hazard, making the viticulture more akin to Bordeaux and Burgundy than Napa and Sonoma.

In a way it could be said that both geographically and stylistically Virginian wines are at a mid point between the exuberance of the West Coast wines and the finesse of their European counterparts.

Days 1 to 4: Neville describes the food, wine and accommodation

All photos in this section, and all shots of individual members, by Steven Morris

One of the big attractions about Virginia is the diversification of the landscape, its colonial history and



The Ashby Inn

the excellence of its many hotels, restaurants and wines. This makes gastro-touring an intriguing diversion, and the sophistication of Washington DC just to the north of the state is an excellent springboard for such adventures.

Our first stay was at the Westin Hotel at Reston Heights, part of a chain of modern business-oriented luxury hotels. Its proximity to Washington's Dulles International airport and to a cluster of some of the best wineries in Northern Virginia makes it an ideal starting point for a wine tour. The rooms are spacious and comfortable with excellent facilities and the Vinifera restaurant is dedicated to becoming a showcase for Virginian wines.

General manager/sommelier Jason Meringolo put together for us a dinner to show off some of his favourite Virginian wines. Sesame crusted *Ahi* tuna with cucumber noodles salad and sesame orange vinaigrette was accompanied by three Vioigniers – Loudoun Valley Vineyards 2008, Pearmund Cellars 2008 and Kluge Estate Albermarle 2009. All had a good degree of true varietal flavours but for me the Kluge – perhaps because of the younger vintage – had just that bit more vibrancy and was a better match

with the orange vinaigrette. A perfectly cooked pan roasted *filet* with *au gratin* potato cake and watercress was lined up against Fabbiosi Cellars Tre Sorelle 2008 (65% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc, 15% Petit Verdot), Winery at La Grange Cabernet Franc 2008 and Barbourville Vineyards Nebbiolo 2005. Frankly, there was little to choose between the three as an effective match to the food: the Cabernet Franc was the most velvety, the Nebbiolo the most *corsé*, and the blend the most complex. If I were forced to make a choice, I would probably plump for the cuddliness of the Cabernet Franc.

Only one dessert wine was presented with the mascapone stuffed apricots in phyllo with hand whipped cream, but a real cracker – Barbourville Vineyards Philéo, a non-vintage wine made with 60% Muscat Ottonel and 40% Vidal, 10% abv and 10% residual sugar, not cloying but on the contrary delicate and bright though with enough sweetness and acidity to complement the dish. A good start!

Lunches on the first two days of the tour were light affairs, not really designed to show off any food and wine matching abilities, but enough to keep us going, soaking up the alcohol as we went along. A serious dinner, however,

CWW in Virginia

awaited us at the Ashby Inn and Restaurant in the perhaps appropriately named village of Paris, Virginia (pop. 67), although it looked more like Ashby-de-la-Zouche! Here, the Ashby Inn, built *circa* 1829, has been a watering hole for the good, the bad and the ugly since then. It is now run by Neal Wavra, an experienced sommelier who ensures that wine features heavily in the restaurant. Head chef is Tarver King, who has done stints at The Fat Duck, The Waterside Inn and the French Laundry, to name but three. The wine list is a model of how a list of boutique wines (in the main) from around the whole world gives excitement to the beholder who is literally spoilt for choice. The accommodation consists of only 10 rooms, six in the main building and four in the schoolhouse annexe, prettily decked out with antique furnishings, reminiscent of Sharrow Bay in its early days.

On to the dinner, which was preceded by a tasting of wines from some 20 producers from Northern Virginia. We started off with Virginia blue crab, vanilla mayonnaise, sorrel and lemon balm – the flesh of the crab was surprisingly sweet, but was very fine and delicate and tempered by the slight tartness of the sorrel and lemon balm. There was also a mousse of rockfish with it (not mentioned in the description). The wine chosen was Rappahannock Cellars Viognier 2009, whose vibrancy and aromatic quality dealt admirably with the sweet/sharp flavours. Next came ham consommé, ham, green bean *agnolotti*, pecorino oil with a few chanterelles thrown in. Here Neal chose a Veramar Reserve Cabernet Franc 2009 which was very complementary, tempering the salty, garlicky character of this dish.

The main course was described as emu breast, kale, parmesan, polenta, pine nuts, sage. I have never eaten emu before, but I had imagined that it would be in the same vein as ostrich – flavoursome, lean and healthy – and I was not wrong. And the matching Nebbiolo 2002 from Breaux Vineyards was perfect – Nebbiolo is the hunters' wine – I could have just as well had it with a grouse or some haunch of venison!

I was a little concerned that the next dish, veal breast, celeriac, pickled lemon, coriander, nasturtium, tannic veal reduction, would be overwhelmed by the previous one, but I



Emu breast at the Ashby Inn, above, and beef flat iron steak at Palladio.



needn't have worried. A chunky piece of veal was engulfed by the intensity of the sauce – a great match again with the Bordeaux blend Topiary 2007 from the Boxwood Winery.

Finally, preserved nectarine, hazelnut cake, nectarine cream, spiced brown sugar was matched with Pearmund Cellars Mt Juliet Vineyard Late Harvest Petit Manseng 2009 and this perhaps was the only one that wasn't quite a perfect match. A quite delicate wine, but it couldn't *quite* match up to the sweetness of the brown buttered hazelnut cake. Maybe it will take on a bit more intensity with age.

Nevertheless, this was an awesome dinner, with the

evident skills of chef and sommelier certain to make this a destination stop on any Virginian wine tour.

We really had to get into shape the next day with the prospect of a big lunch at Barboursville Vineyards' highly-rated Palladio restaurant and a gala dinner at the sumptuous Keswick Hall.

The lunch at Palladio kicked off with housemade ricotta *gnocchi* with braised chicken *ragú*, Hen of the Woods mushrooms and corn shoots. Here winemaker Luca Paschina gave us two Viogniers – the 2004 and the 2009 reserves. The dish was rather rustic and there were a bit too many green corn shoots for my liking. The 2009 proved to be a little bit too aggressive for the dish – the 2004 was a much better match, more subdued and subtle. Spiced rubbed Piedmontese beef flat iron steak, roasted Yukon Gold potatoes, summer squash and heirloom tomato jam was matched with Nebbiolo Reserve 2002, Cabernet Franc Reserve 2002 and Octagon Fifth Edition 2001. The Nebbiolo was excellent with the flesh of the beef, but the inherent sweetness of the tomato jam gave an edginess to it, and the whole dish was much better matched by the Octagon – a mostly Merlot blend (80%). The Cabernet Franc in some way fell between two stools; the slight amount of greenness in the wine would have been better matched with a more savoury sauce.

Finally, banana, paw-paw and rum fritters with a cashew and pineapple *coulis* was matched with Malvaxia 2006 – 50% Moscato Canelli and 50% Vidal vinified as a *passito* – a little bit on the heavy side, but a good match with the dish, although I could have done with a bit more *coulis*.

Keswick Hall is a magnificent mansion situated between Jefferson's Monticello estate and Charlottesville in the foothills of the renowned Blue Ridge Mountains. It has 48 bedrooms of ascending size and luxury and rack rates vary between just under \$400 a night to nearly \$1,000 plus a 10% 'resort fee' (plus tax, I suppose). It does offer packages whereby, if you played your cards right, you could get up to 40% off these rates. See the website http://www.keswick.com/web/okes/room_rates.jsp for more details. There is an Arnold Palmer-designed golf course, three swimming pools,

a leisure centre, spa and tennis courts and other leisure activities can be arranged. In fact every prospect pleases. It is also a place known to celebrities, and some of our group went ga-ga at seeing Lady Gaga there!

Naturally, it has a first class restaurant and a good wine cellar so we were looking forward to a great dinner on the magnificent terrace overlooking one of the swimming pools.

The first course consisted of seared foie gras, fresh fig salad, red onion jam, pumpkin muffin and was accompanied with Janisson-Thibaut Fizz NV. Perfectly cooked foie gras and nice fizz, but the fizz was much too dry for the dish – a pity. I wish that they had put some late harvest Virginian Petit Manseng or even some Traminette with it.

Baby spinach salad, housemade *pancetta*, garden tomatoes, caramont feta, toasted pine nuts with a cracked mustard vinaigrette came next and the accompanying tangy and nettley Veritas Sauvignon Blanc 2009, whilst being a lovely wine in itself, was not really a match for the rather sweet vinaigrette. A much better match was the Keswick Vineyards Verdejo 2009 with the garlic Carolina prawns, black lentil cake, essence of celeriac and plantain confetti dish, clean and aromatic and a perfect fit with the plantain confetti as well.

Virginia being renowned hunting country, I suppose it was no surprise to be confronted with another game dish – grilled strip loin of Splendor Ridge elk, lima bean and tomato ragout, truffled sweet potatoes, crispy shallots and green peppercorn sauce – here matched with White Hall Vineyards Petit Verdot 2008. I am sure that the world of wine will be hearing a lot more about Virginian Petit Verdot – this is certainly one of the local success stories. It just gives that extra New World richness to the power of the variety in Bordeaux and here it produced a great match to the green peppercorn sauce as well as cutting through the sweetness of the tomato and the density of the meat.

Finally, a trio of Virginia Concord grapes, Concord grapes – sweet cream parfait, gorgonzola cheese *blintzes* with Concord grape compote, French macaroon with Concord grape marmalade paired with the 2001 Barbourville Malvaxia 2001. It was good to see how well the gorgonzola

Keswick Hall, and one of the dinner dishes, grilled strip loin of elk, excellently matched by Petit Verdot.



CWW in Virginia

went with the wine – the same wine as we had with the dessert earlier in the day at Barboursville but with five more years bottle age. This was lighter and more mellow and perhaps not quite as sweet, but a good match for all the components of this rather complicated dish.

Our last stop was at one of the oldest vineyards in Virginia – the Williamsburg Winery – and a welcome dinner at the estate-owned hotel nearby, Wedmore Place. Although constructed only about 20 years ago, all of its 28 rooms are furnished to resemble European styles of the 16th and 17th centuries. Room rates vary between \$165 and \$525 a night depending on size and amenities. The location plus point is its proximity to the historic town of Williamsburg. Dinner here was an altogether simpler experience than the dinners on the previous two nights.

Gravlachs on toast came with the Williamsburg Acte 12 Chardonnay 2008, a barrel fermented wine that went well with the dish. The next dish, a purée of peas, shrimp and bacon, was matched with the Estate Grown Traminette 2009, which was, perhaps, a little too sweet for the dish, but a fun wine anyway. A trio of meats with greens consisted of turkey, ham and beef and matched well with the 2006 Trianon Cabernet Franc (80% Cabernet Franc – the balance made up between Merlot and Petit Verdot) mainly because there was no sweetish sauce to go with the dish. Owner Patrick Duffeler then trotted one of the top wines, Adagio 2007, which was made from 40% Petit Verdot, 40% Merlot and 20% Cabernet Franc. A good, deep and unctuous wine but at \$65 maybe a bit pricey. Finally, French style apple tart came with a Late Harvest Vidal 2008 with nice sweetness without being too cloying.

Conclusions

After a tour of the Williamsburg Winery, we enjoyed a comprehensive visit to Historic Williamsburg, more of which is described elsewhere. Williamsburg receives around half a million visitors a year, but I wonder how many of them venture further to visit some of the more interesting places that we had the opportunity to see, including Thomas Jefferson's Monticello mansion, now turned into a museum

and where we were treated to a light lunch accompanied by wines made from some of the estate vines. These wines are at last being produced after the dismal failures of Jefferson himself. No cellar door sales, as the wines are made, vinified and sold at the Barboursville Winery, with proceeds going towards the upkeep of the Monticello property.

The quality of Virginia wines compares well with that in most other wine producing areas in the world. Of course, the growers are not peasant farmers but families with considerable resources, thus ensuring that state-of-the-art aids are being used to produce wines of real quality. The Virginian wine industry is still in its infancy and on a learning curve – it didn't take long to suss out the special qualities the Virginian soil can give to Viognier and Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot and Gros Manseng may find their way into the hearts of man to a greater extent than in their original provenance. It also goes without saying that some producers are making some pretty slick Chardonnays, Merlots, Nebbiolos and Sauvignon Blancs – not forgetting Virginia's very own Norton, which could well be just the job for some of the game dishes one would hope to come across.

This has been an extremely enlightening tour for all of us – superbly put together and organised to show us just what Virginian wineries are capable of producing and their rapid improvement over the last 20 years. I am sure that if we are invited again in just a few years time we will experience an even greater geometrical progression.



Day 1, Monday 6th September: David Copp at Veramar Vineyard

Our visit to Veramar was a great start to the tour. Warmly welcomed by owner Jim Bogaty and son Justin, winemaker Justin gave us a

composite introduction to Virginian wines in general and Veramar wines in particular.

Bounded by the Blue Ridge Mountains in the east and the Allegheny Plateau to the west, the Shenandoah Valley has a warmer and drier climate than most of Virginia. It also enjoys an extended growing season thanks to a thermal downdraft from Mount Weather. The elevation of the vineyards, at 500-700 feet above sea level with a 20-30°F degree day/night temperature differential, helps to intensify the varietal characteristics of the wines.

Justin, a UCD graduate, acknowledges the benefits of the microclimate but equally recognises the vital importance of planting varieties in the most appropriate soils. As elsewhere in Virginia, the first plantings were native varieties such as Seyval Blanc, Norton and Vidal. In the 1980s more *vinifera* was planted, but not always in the right place. Over the last decade serious growers have made the expensive and time-consuming but necessary adjustments.

Veramar's 12 acres of various varieties are planted in loamy-clay soil over limestone on well-drained eastern facing slopes. Justin considers that his prime function is to take good care of his vineyards, and he devotes a great deal of his time ensuring that his grapes grow healthily and ripen gradually. Healthy ripe grapes, he avers, ensure balance and harmony in his wines.

Veramar produces most of its own fruit but buys in from local growers as and when necessary. My tasting notes cover the wines made from the estate's own fruit.

2007 Seyval Blanc. Lean and delicately structured, with vibrant acidity and citrus flavoured freshness. Cluster pressing and long, cold fermentation have helped to accentuate the fruit flavours and produce an attractive wine.

2007 Chardonnay. Straw pale with an elegant vanilla nose, nicely balanced with a rich creamy texture. Fermented in wood, the lees are stirred frequently during cask maturation. This wine deservedly won a 2010 *Decanter* bronze medal.

2007 Cabernet Franc. Big, rich raspberry nose, fresh fruit, silky texture. The grapes were basket pressed and given extended maceration at low temperature to extract

more colour and fruit flavour and soften the tannins. This wine was one of three Virginian wines to be awarded a *Decanter* silver medal in 2010.

Norton 2009. My first tasting of this small, thick-skinned native cultivar grown in Virginia and the Mid West. We went into the vineyard to see the heavily-laden vines. Norton is an unusually vigorous vine with quite the smallest grapes I have ever seen (it was a dry summer). In 1873 a Norton wine won a gold medal at the Vienna World Exhibition and one of the judges forecast that one day it would become as popular as any red *vinifera*. The deep dark colour, vibrant acidity and rich tannins of the 2009 were impressive. I am still not quite sure what to make of it. It is a bit like Marmite: you either love it or hate it. Chrysalis Vineyards near Middleburg obviously loves it because there are 69 acres of it there.

An informative and impressive visit. Justin Bogaty makes precise wines and will surely add to the two *Decanter* medals he earned in 2010.

Day 1 continued: David Copp at Boxwood

Beautifully set in Virginia's renowned 'horse country' near Middleburg, Boxwood is a compact, purpose-built, state-of-the-art winery, the dream of wine-loving John Kent Cooke and his wife Rita. The former president of NFL Washington Reds, Cooke took the advice of top viticulturalist Lucie Martin before planting 16 acres with the Bordeaux varieties most suited to the farm's soils.

From the outset he determined to make just two top-quality red wines – a Medoc-styled blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Petit Verdot under the Boxwood label, and a Saint Emilion-style blend made from Cabernet Franc and Merlot named Topiary. He later added a rosé made from Cabernet Franc, which not only helps cash flow but also introduces consumers to the house style before they taste the red wines. The 2009 rosé has a pleasing balance of fresh fruit, alcohol and acidity.

Cooke handed over the running of the winery to his stepdaughter Rachel Martin, trained in the Napa Valley and graduate of a sensory evaluation course at Bordeaux University's oenology faculty. In 2006 she appointed

Stéphane Derenoncourt as consultant oenologist. Derenoncourt recognises Virginia's potential to make fine wines but acknowledges that there is greater humidity which encourages excessive vine vigour and mildew. The way round these problems is finding higher sites and managing the canopy carefully. He works closely with Adam McTaggart, the talented young Canadian viticulturalist and winemaker with day-to-day responsibility for the vineyards and winery. Boxwood made its first releases in 2007.

Topiary 2007. Low yields of carefully selected Cabernet Franc and Merlot fruit – 50% of each variety – in a hot, dry summer. Bunches were small but fruit was ripe so there is great concentration. Red fruit flavours dominate the palate, and well ripened tannins have been softened with maturation in new and one-year-old French oak, and further bottle ageing. *Boxwood 2007* is made from equal amounts of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot plus 12.5% Petit Verdot. Deeper coloured, it has a more intense nose than Topiary and darker fruit flavours.

Boxwood and Topiary are not big wines by Bordeaux standards but they are extremely well made and show the kind of elegance that will make them popular with enthusiasts of Bordeaux-style wines. The vines are still very young but it is clear that they can produce classy, Bordeaux-style wines. The 2007 Boxwood was awarded a *Decanter* bronze medal. Not a bad start!

This is a small but impressive winery with a current capacity of 5000 cases. The owners are aiming to produce top-quality wines because they believe their soil and climate are good enough to give them distinctive wines with their own character. The wines are hand-sold in modern tasting rooms in three prosperous residential centres – Middleburg, Reston Heights and Chevy Chase. Potential trade and consumer customers can taste prior to purchase and without having to go out to the winery. The wines are already listed by New York and New Jersey restaurants and by selected wine merchants in Canada and the UK.

Virginia still has some way to catch up with California but it will do so with sharply-focused small wineries making distinctive wines.



*Bird
scareers at
Veramar
Vineyard.
Photos by
Mick Rock*



Barrel cellar at Boxwood. Photo by Mick Rock.

after toasting. Dave said he was “happy with the sweet impression this French oak gives to wine”. Water Bent is exclusive to Breaux Cellar Club’s 1,000 members.

After tasting a good Viognier and Chardonnay we finished the whites by referencing the Breaux family’s Cajun origin with Jennifer’s Jambalaya, an off-dry blend of seven varieties that was, Jennifer said, their version of the popular California Conundrum brand. Dave said he was “trying to get floral accents” by using Muscat Giallo, and sent out for a box of just harvested grapes for us to taste.

It was the reds that surprised: a flight of estate grown Nebbiolos from 2006 (unreleased yet), 2005, 2002 and 2001. Who expected Nebbiolo in Virginia, and of such high quality? I found them attractive young and very beautiful aged. But they are difficult to sell. “Customers used to Cabs and Merlots say these wines are not dark enough to be any good,” Dave told us.

A Cabernet Franc Reserve from the perfect 2007 vintage was superb and didn’t show its 16.4%abv. This stunner will be aged for another 12-14 months before release. I see our leader Neville Blech chose it as his September Wine of the Month at www.winebehindthelabel.com. We moved outside to a long table with nibbles and ice buckets holding Nebbiolo 2009 Ice and a vertical of three Soleil-brand frozen after harvest ‘ice’ wines dating back to 2000.

Before leaving we were taken to the Nebbiolo vineyard high above the winery. “Nebbiolo is a grape that accumulates high sugar,” said Dave. “It’s late ripening and we never have any problem getting sugars to make wine even in cold years. It has high sugar, high acid, high tannins, and low colour: it is the bane of winemakers.”

Grapes at Breaux. Photo by Steven Morris



**Day 1 continued:
Peter May at Breaux Vineyards**

Breaux Vineyards winery building, surrounded by lawns, is set back from the road among sloped vineyards. Trees near the entrance shade picnic areas packed with adults quaffing wine and snacking while children run and play. It was Labour Day, a USA holiday marking the official end of summer

and the start of the school term. “If you think this is busy, you should come on Saturdays,” said general manager Chris Blosser who, with his wife Jennifer Breaux Blosser, greeted us to their winery which has been voted Best Winery in Virginia for the third consecutive year.

Through the crowded tasting room to the calm of the winery where upended barrels, with tasting paraphernalia on top, were in a semi-circle. Feeling like *Weakest Link* contestants we faced Dave Collins, winemaker and vineyard manager, who has been working with the Breaux family since they bought the property in 1994.

When we questioned the name of the first poured wine, 2009 Water Bent Sauvignon Blanc, Dave explained that barrel staves were usually bent by steam or heat but these ones had been softened by long immersion in water and he preferred the subsequent effect this had on caramelisation

Day 2, Tuesday 7th September: Peter May at Rappahannock Cellars

Our second day started by checking out of the hospitable Westin Reston Heights hotel to head south, stopping first at Rappahannock Cellars which was celebrating its 10th anniversary that month. Owner John Delmare sold his previous winery in California's Santa Cruz Mountains to move his children to the peace of rural Virginia.

John told us that Rappahannock produces 6-7k cases, 70% of which is estate production. 90% is sold on site and the rest distributed in Virginia. There are 20 acres planted around the winery and another six acres off site with room for expansion but "we are still finding what the market is doing and how grapes are growing". Chardonnay "grows extremely well", and there is also Cabernet Franc, Viognier, Cabernet Sauvignon, a little Malbec and Merlot. A vineyard of Seyval Blanc next to the winery will be replaced with Petit Verdot, and a block of Vidal Blanc used for dessert wine will be replanted with Norton. An existing small Norton block "grows like a weed and makes interesting wines", John said. "We thought it would be a great blender to give colour to other wines, but we found we didn't need colour and it gives too much flavour. Norton is very popular with locals and we make it in a Port style which is very successful. We like it so we are planting more."

"Growing grapes in Virginia is a thousand times more difficult than in California and very challenging," John continued. "We have a normal year about half the time. One year can produce Californiastyle wines and the next French style. This year we had drought conditions, 92-3 degrees [33°C] for two straight months, high sugar, high acidity, low pH; we've not seen grapes like this before. We don't get west coast fruit bombs, ripeness here comes from time on the vine giving complexity, but this year we are getting fruit ripe two or more weeks early. It is California type fruit and we just don't know what to expect from the 2010 vintage."

Winemaker Jason Burrus, who'd previously worked at Robert Mondavi and Delicata Winery in Malta, impressed us as a knowledgeable winemaker who seems to know precisely where he wants to go, though he admits he is "still

figuring out the route". Jason said most of the Rappahannock wines were aged up to 12-18 months in oak, made in a traditional way. "I am especially proud of our Chardonnay – more Chardonnay is made in Virginia than any other wine – and we make a fantastic Chardonnay," Jason explained that the NV Solera oxidised Sercial Sherry-style dessert wine was made by drying Vidal grapes on the winery roof for nine months and blending via a solera system with wines dating back to 2000.

As always our schedule was pressing so we moved to a side room for a quick sandwich and salad lunch while continuing tasting and talking with John and Jason.



Nebbiolo vineyard at Breaux and harvested Syrah grapes. Photos by Mick Rock.



John Delmare. Photo by Mick Rock.



Cabernet Sauvignon vines on a lyre trellis at Linden Vineyards, and, below, harvesting lime (linden) flowers for herb tea.
Photos by Mick Rock



Day 2 continued: Irvin Wolkoff at Linden Vineyards

In 1981 a young information technology professional from Ohio named Jim Law took a job in Virginia. He tasted “a few good wines” there and quickly became enchanted by the “unlimited possibilities” of the evolving region as a source of elegant high-quality wines.

In 1983 Law put his money where his heart was and bought a “hardscrabble farm on top of the Blue Ridge Mountains”. Impressed by the stony hills and good air and water drainage, he planted Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Chardonnay, Seyval and Vidal Blanc on the slopes in 1985. He named the enterprise Linden Vineyards. The winery opened in 1988 and released Linden’s first vintage, the 1987.

Linden Vineyards occupies 76 acres of rolling forest-crowned hills on the Virginia Blue Ridge just 65 miles west of Washington DC. The weather there is reliably cool thanks to its position about as far north as you can get in Virginia and atop the Blue Ridge at 1,350 feet. Orchards (mainly apple with the odd plantation of peaches) grew there until World War I and the Great Depression ruined the economy of the United States and killed the market

for Virginia fruit. The stony land was left to go “back to the woods”.

Law, who could pass for Willie Nelson’s healthier younger brother, is a relaxed perfectionist prone to saying things like: “When I see gneiss rocks I know it’s a good spot for Cabernet Sauvignon. In clay, which is cool, it goes vegetative and won’t ripen. Merlot likes clay.” A devout claretomane, he visits Bordeaux once a year to study vine-soil matches. He has spent a quarter century “fine tuning” his vine-site matches in pursuit of white wines with “subtle minerality and vibrant acidity, especially very Burgundian Chardonnay” and “earthy, deep structured” reds capable of useful ageing “that nobody wants to drink in America”.

The philosophy at Linden is decidedly terroirist. Law works collegially with other winemakers and growers in the region, notably Shari Avenius who serves as Linden’s manager. This “collegial family” consider it their “job... to express the forces of earth, weather and vine in the bottle and express each vineyard site in the wine”. He supplements his own fruit with grapes grown in nearby vineyards by “partners” he has worked with for years. In 1998 he brought in winemaker Marie H el ene Shaeffer who works at Ch ateau Bon Pasteur, Michel Rolland’s home winery in Pomerol. She has provided useful ideas that brought “increasing focus and precision over time” to his reds.

Law acknowledges that things in his vineyard aren’t perfect yet. He wrestles with rot in the autumn, and his Chardonnay is threatened by *flavesence dor e* (also known as yellow vine). He’s “not entirely satisfied” with his Merlots, which “are nice, but I want to improve them”. He admits that despite Virginia’s infatuation with Cabernet Franc, he’s “not a fan”, but has bowed to prevailing taste and planted it.

Linden Vineyards’ current varietals include Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Petit Verdot, which “does well in any soil”. He “loves” Petit Manseng, but is restricted to dessert styles by the market. Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon round out the range.

The wines are pretty much as Law wants them to be. He presented a clutch of elegant fresh whites including the 2009 Avenius Sauvignon Blanc (89+) and three vintages

of the Hardscrabble Chardonnay: the 1999 (89), the 2006 (89+), and the 2008 (90). The Chards have been getting better with each vintage and evolve well over time. The 2006 Petit Manseng (91) is a cryo-extracted dessert wine.

Linden's Bordeaux-blend reds are ripe without excess, long and age-worthy, focused specimens, intense but with their elbows in. The 1997 Reserve Hardscrabble Red (90+), the 2006 (89+) and the 2009 (unbottled, outstanding) show the same steady improvement and an authentic capacity to age.

The bottlings offer excellent value for money. The reds are about \$40 US and the whites less. Production volumes are small. The winery offers visitors the opportunity to sample and purchase Linden wines in a comfortable tasting room.

Day 2 continued: Irvin Wolkoff at RdV Vineyards

Rutger de Vink is not only a winery proprietor, he could also play one in the movies. He's Brad Pitt handsome, about 6'4" tall, buff and cut without excess bulk. He's the scion of a Dutch banking family whose father and grandfather were Chevaliers du Tastevin. He grew up "all over Europe", attended high school in New Jersey and studied business at college in California. After discovering that he didn't particularly like business, de Vink served in the US Marine Corps (including a stint in Somalia) before deciding to pursue a career in wine. He had the support of his oenophilic family. It's all true. You can't make stuff like this up.

de Vink spent three years searching for a vineyard site with the right rocky hillsides and shallow well-drained soils. He found it near Marshall in northern Virginia, on hills just east of the Blue Ridge. He proceeded to have the land "ripped" to a depth of 50 cm, turning up a bonanza of rocks which his manager Gabriel, a mason in his native Mexico, used to build walls and to act as heat sinks at the foot of the vines. The beautiful hilly property sheds rainfall, which tends to come in the form of thunderstorms, quickly and well.

Like Linden Vineyards, RdV is dedicated to producing



*RdV
Vineyards
(photo Mike
Rock) and
Rutger de
Vink (photo
Steven
Morris).*

Bordeaux-style reds with a hint of Napanese fruit ripeness. Ensuring adequate levels of Frenchness are Monsieur Rolland's sidekick Marie H el ene Shaeffer, viniculture expert Eric Boissoneau and viticulturist Jean Phillippe Roby, the latter two also from Bordeaux. The winery got some serious help from Jim Law of Linden Vineyards who engaged Rutger de Vink (and another principal at RdV) as apprentices in his two-year programme at Linden Vineyards and guided him through fermentation there.

RdV's plantings comprise 11 parcels spread over 16 acres. The varietal mix is 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Merlot, 12% Petit Verdot and 8% Cabernet Franc. All but one are Bordelais clones on UC Davis rootstocks matched to the soils. Although de Vink has installed an irrigation system, he'd "rather not use it". He also tries to spray his vines "less and less".

de Vink's winemaking philosophy is "extracting appropriate to the vintage, and blending". His reds are made by chilling the must to 7  Celsius and fermenting "slow and easy" with inoculated yeasts at around 30  Celsius. Maceration continues for 30 or 40 days before the wine is

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sent to rest in oak for 18 months in a lovely stone cave 10 to 30 feet below ground that took a year to build.

When RdV officially opens in the spring of 2011, two wines will be on offer: RdV, the flagship bottling priced around \$80, and Rendezvous, the 'second wine', priced near \$60. Both are what you would expect from a well-run highly Rollandisé operation: plush with grippy velvet tannins and ripe focused fruit, substantial without excessive bulk (rather like de Vink himself). There are enough pungent earthy and brambly aromas to distinguish RdV wines from the usual New World suspects.

The first vintage of RdV wines is the 2008. I scored the 2008 Rendezvous at 88+ and the 2008 RdV at 89. The 2009s, from a better summer, earned scores of 89 and 90 respectively.



Day 2 continued: Kathleen Burk at the Ashby Inn tasting

After three winery visits, including extensive tastings from morning until evening, we ended up in the rather stylish Ashby Inn in Middlesburg, where our rooms, although atmospheric and with comfortable beds, had a distinct lack of toothbrush space. An hour after our arrival I stumbled down the stairs and into the first of two narrow rooms, each of which held ten slightly nervous-looking winemakers, each of whom was allowed to show two wines.

As it happened, it was a pleasurable tasting, with no wines which made you turn pale and look for the nearest spittoon, and a number of which I very much enjoyed; here Glen Manor's Hodder Hill 2007, a Bordeaux blend, stood out. (The same winery also showed a very sophisticated Sauvignon Blanc 2008.) In fact, 15% of the wines were Bordeaux blends, many of which were made, in various proportions, with all five of the appropriate grapes. Another 13% were primarily Cabernet Franc, whilst 20% were Chardonnay and 10% were Viognier.

By common consent, the grapes which thrive best in

Virginia are Cabernet Franc and Viognier, so I was rather surprised to see these wines in a minority. There was also one very nice wine made by Pearmund Cellars with Petit Manseng: one of my biggest surprises over the week was how many wines in Virginia are made from this grape. These wines rapidly became some of my favourites.

There were also four wines made from hybrids, one of which, a Vidal Blanc 2008 from Chateau Morrisette, I found round and structured and very nice to drink. Thanks to the EU rules about permitted grapes, I had approached these four with some trepidation, but emerged happy and healthy.

One thing that many of the wines had in common was their winemakers' restrained use of oak. What was also noticeable was that the acid was very well integrated, so much so, in fact, that I would rather have liked one or two to be a bit more assertive. But that is undoubtedly a personal taste. What I did appreciate, however, was the European approach to alcohol: 14% and over was the exception, not the rule. Nice.

Day 3, Wednesday 8th September: Kathleen Burk at White Hall Vineyards

This winery is situated in the Blue Ridge Mountains and, at an elevation of 800-1,000 feet above sea level, is above the frost line. It does not make high-powered wines: most hovered around 12%. The style was very juicy and customer-friendly. Since most of the wine is sold on the premises, this is just as well. Indeed, by far the majority of Virginia wines find their buyers in this manner.

White Hall makes 18 wines, 13 of which we tasted. The owner pointed out – as did others – that it is still not clear which grapes will do well, although he had already decided that Riesling and Syrah were not amongst them. The vineyard planted experimentally, and as a result we tasted wines made from, for example, Touriga Nacional, Gewurztraminer and, to my great pleasure, Petit Manseng, a delicious example.

The winemaker also uses Petit Manseng as a blending grape to provide more acid to his Pinot Gris and to his Viognier (the latter also included Muscat and Gewurztraminer). His

Gewurztraminer varietal, which was not a terribly successful wine, also included Petit Manseng.

Curiously, a number of his reds had a distinctly cherry nose and palate; when questioned, he attributed it to his use of Cabernet Franc in the various blends. For me, given his house style, his best red wine was the Petit Verdot 2007, which was juicy and balanced and relatively light, with very little oak; it is, or will be, available in the UK. He also produced, in the Soliterre 2007, the only cryogenic wine which I knowingly tasted.



White Hall Vineyards. Photo by Steven Morris



Day 3 continued: Christos Ioannou at Barboursville Vineyards

Visiting wineries around the world one occasionally comes across a gem that is so special that you think to yourself 'how do they do it and why can't they all be like this'? Of the wineries in Virginia that we visited Barboursville stands out as a corner of the old world in the new,

showing its European heritage in so many ways.

The winery is owned by the Zonin family who hail from Valpolicella. It was established in 1976 as one of the early pioneers of Virginian wine, and after Luca Pashcina was recruited from the old country things really took off. Luca is originally from Piedmont and made his first wine at the tender age of 14 under his father's guidance. Asked by Gianni Zonin to study his winery operations in a year's consultancy at Barboursville in 1990, Luca returned to Zonin's headquarters north of Venice with an audacious suggestion – re-invest in ideal trellising systems and other techniques to suit the *terroir* and you will have the finest wines that can be grown on the East Coast. Thankfully the Zonin family put their full trust in Luca and the rest, as they say, is history!

The arrival of vineyard manager Fernando Franco in 1998 gave a further boost to the new regime of viticultural practice which Luca had started. Fernando has moved to high density plantings (2.3 metres by 1 metre), though he considers that yield per vine is more important than yield per hectare, and so aims to leave five-six clusters per vine after pruning to give 3-4lb of grapes per vine. Fernando also monitors the vineyard on a daily basis in order to decide when the green harvest will be carried out. This year it was done very early because he felt that there was a danger of drought conditions occurring. Indeed as we heard many times that week the harvest was the earliest ever (up to three weeks earlier than average in some places) due to the ferociously hot summer.



Drying Malvasia grapes for Malvasia Passito at Barboursville Vineyards and, right, machine harvesting of Cabernet Sauvignon before sunrise. Photos by Mick Rock.

The total vineyard area at Barboursville is 142 acres which gives an average annual crop of 520 tonnes which equates to around 32,000 cases per year. Cabernet Franc was first planted in 1992 and there are now five different clones. Although Bordeaux varietals predominate amongst the reds, Luca was keen not to forget his heritage and first planted Nebbiolo in 1994, followed by Barbera, Sangiovese and Pinot Grigio.

Most of the wines were tasted with a delicious lunch, and all were of extraordinarily high quality – Viognier, Cabernet Franc and Nebbiolo all showing wonderful fruit, perfect



balance and a lovely natural, unforced character. Older examples of the wines showed that they develop and age gracefully.

Octagon, which is the flagship wine made only in the best years, uses all five Bordeaux varietals, though Merlot predominates, usually accounting for 60-80% of the blend. The name Octagon comes from the shape of the nearby building designed by Thomas Jefferson. This is truly a world-class wine at an affordable price.

An added bonus was the chance to taste after lunch berries from various bunches of grapes which were 'hot off the vine' – and yes the Viognier tasted of apricots, the Sangiovese of cherries and the Nebbiolo had ferocious tannins!

All in all this was a magical visit.

Day 3 completed: Christos Ioannou at the Keswick Hall tasting

Keswick Hall is one those hotels which has elegance, sophistication and beauty but also a welcoming homely atmosphere. Everything seems to happen just naturally with ease, made possible of course by an army of staff working diligently in the background to ensure that happens. This was the setting for our second 'walk round' tasting and a huge amount of work had clearly gone into arranging this event, bringing so many winemakers together to show us their wines. A large, airy function room with good light was laid out with rows of tables with ample space between each row and plenty of spittoons around.

Several of us sat outside the room eagerly waiting to start tasting as we were told that there were 50 wines to taste in 90 minutes. Due to some last-minute preparations unfortunately we were not allowed to enter the tasting room until 20 minutes after it was supposed to start and this delay cut deep into our allotted time. I tasted all of the whites (17 in all) but managed to taste only eight of the reds because the hotel manager insisted on ushering us up to dinner at the appointed hour. I found some lovely wines and these were the highlights for me:

King Family Viognier 2009: 30% fermented in oak which gave a rich edge, though the wine was still fresh.

Jefferson Viognier 2009: peaches and other stone fruits on the nose, off-dry, delicious.

Delfosse Chardonnay Reserve 2007: very rich, reminded me of the style of Chassagne Montrachet.

Pollack Chardonnay Reserve 2008: clean, fresh, focused, would benefit from another 1-2 years in bottle.

Sugar Leaf Petit Manseng 2008: clean, lovely balance, very attractive wine.

Cardinal Point Clay Hill Cabernet Franc 2007: redcurrants and red berries on the nose, and a rich, lush texture.

Ingleside Petit Verdot 2005: black fruits, dark and brooding, a savoury character with firm tannins.

Jefferson Merlot Reserve 2007: tobacco and oak on the nose, firm structure, still needs a further 1-2 years in bottle.

Keswick Vineyard 'Heritage' 2007: plums and

blackcurrants on the nose, big and rich on the palate.

The tasting was followed by a fabulous five-course dinner on the terrace overlooking the swimming pool, but over to Neville for more details about that...

Day 4, Thursday 9th September: Susan Hulme MW at Veritas

Growing Sauvignon Blanc in Virginia? We'd been told it was impossible because of the climate, but here was a winery not only doing it but doing it very well. Here it seems vintages can be swelteringly hot and early (as 2010 was turning out to be), or cold, wet and late, and all else in between.

Perhaps less surprising, given Virginia's aptitude for the variety, Veritas also makes an excellent Petit Verdot. In fact it was partly the Petit Verdot that had brought me here in the first place; it was the star of a Virginian wine tasting the year before held by The Oxford Wine Company. I had always believed from the Bordelais that this variety was notoriously difficult to grow. It requires a certain boldness and courage to begin with but Veritas has been growing it since 2001. Not only that but the winery is making some really high quality wines.

Which brings us back to the question of how is Veritas able to grow Sauvignon Blanc in Virginia? The vineyard is at 1300 feet, which makes it much less humid, and a drying mountain wind blows through nearby Rockfish Gap, making the vines less likely to rot. The soil is made up of degenerate granite which also helps. Existing vines are being replaced by a more aromatic clone called Musque which has an intensely aromatic new world style.

At dinner the night before I had been seated next to the very affable Andrew Hodson, owner of Veritas. A leading paediatric specialist, he had moved from the UK with his



wife Patricia to work in California many years before. After a very successful career as a doctor, Andrew decided with his family to take on a vineyard and Veritas was established in 1999. It is very much a family business: Patricia looks after the vineyards and Andrew and his daughter, Emily Pelton, look after the winemaking; son-in-law Edward Pelton is in charge of the tasting room and events.

Arriving on a bright, sunny morning we stood on the wide wrap-around veranda admiring the view of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the distance. We were then gently ushered inside for a seated tasting which included some of their older vintages.

We tasted a comprehensive selection of Veritas wines: a rosé; five whites (a Viognier, two Chardonnays of differing styles and a very interesting Petit Manseng, all 2009 vintage); five reds showing different vintages of Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot going back to 2002. All of the wines were at least very good and well crafted and were beautifully textured and elegant in style. Here are a few comments on some of the wines which, for different reasons, really stood out.

2009 Sauvignon Blanc Reserve had a very good balance between classic SB aromatics without overdoing the herbaceous/green pepper aromas, but instead showed a more tropical passion fruit fragrance. On the palate, vibrant acidity was balanced by good flavour intensity and a fairly rich texture. 50% was in neutral barrels to give it a rich texture and mouth-feel.

2008 Petit Manseng (50g/l rs) was an interesting wine with a fragrance of quince and honey. On the palate there was a delicious balance between sweetness and vivid acidity, green plum and quince notes contrasting with ripe honeydew melon flavours.

2002 Cabernet Franc Vintner's Reserve, 18 months in oak. The second vintage made here and drinking beautifully now. This was a real treat to taste and stood out for its supremely silky, melt-in-the-mouth texture, beautifully poised and balanced. This is Cabernet Franc at its best with heady perfumed, violet notes as well as dark plum and cherry qualities to the fruit.

2008 Petit Verdot Paul Shaffer 2nd Edition, 60% Shaffer Vineyard and 40% Hodson Vineyard, 90% French oak, 10% American, 70% new 14 months, unfiltered. Paul is the cellar master. This was a really stylish and well-made wine with a lovely richness and depth of flavour without being heavy, again showing a wonderful melting texture with very clean, pristine fruit and high quality oak, as yet a little prominent in this still young wine.

Veritas makes good sparkling wine too, in collaboration with Claude Thibaut, 1200 cases in all – a white called Bubbly and Scintilla, a rosé mousseux, both *méthode traditionnelle*.

A few interesting facts and figures:

The name Veritas, Latin for truth, in part derives from family values but also from the motto of Harvard University which was attended by the previous owner. The first vintage was 2001 and produced only 2000 cases; present production is 12,000 cases. Emily Pelton won National Woman Winemaker of the Year in 2007

Veritas has 28 acres of vines, set out with an interesting array of grape varieties: Chardonnay – 5 acres, Sauvignon – 4 acres, Traminette (made into a very attractive ice wine) – 1 acre, Viognier – 4 acres, Petit Manseng – 1 acre, Cabernet Franc – 5 acres, Merlot – 4 acres, Petit Verdot – 2 acres, Tannat – 1/3 acre and Malbec – 1 acre (not yet in production).

Andrew commented that although Virginia as a whole makes 350,000 cases of wine, this is equivalent only to Kendall-Jackson's Chardonnay production! Virginian wine comprises 4% of wine consumption in the state.

Day 4 continued: David Copp at Monticello

The visit to Thomas Jefferson's home, garden and vineyard was one of the most eagerly anticipated visits of the week. We were met by Susan Stein, curator of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, and introduced to Gabriele Rausse, the man who restored the vineyards at Monticello and is



Sauvignon Blanc vineyards at Veritas, photo by Mick Rock, and the Veritas family, photo by Steven Morris.

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widely regarded as the grandfather of modern Virginian wines.

Born in Vicenza, Italy, he was invited by Gianni Zonin, head of Italy's largest privately-owned wine business and also from Vicenza, to advise on the development of Zonin's Barboursville Estate. Rausse came to Virginia, completed his assignment, and was so enamoured with the place that he has remained ever since.

Over the 35 years he has been in Virginia he has proved to be an outstanding plantsman with a particular skill for propagation. He has planted 40 vineyards and propagated several million vines.

And yet, soon after his arrival he was told by Virginian agricultural authorities that he was wasting his time trying to introduce *vinifera* vines. Quite reasonably, the authorities preferred vigneron to plant native varieties or at least hybrids. They pointed out that Thomas Jefferson, a skilled horticulturalist, had tried on seven occasions to plant *vinifera* vines in Virginia and had failed each time – even with the help of Italian horticulturist Philip Mazzei and his team of Tuscan vigneron.

Rausse told the authorities that he was confident that he could overcome the problems that Jefferson had encountered with *vinifera* vines and that he hoped to prove himself helpful to the industry. He has certainly carried out his promise.

However, it was not easy going. Even after he had grafted *vinifera* vines on to winter-hardy, disease-resistant native rootstock he still lost 50% of his first vines. But he persevered and it is largely thanks to his great skills in propagating *vinifera* successfully at Barboursville nursery that the state has a thriving trade today. In 1979 he produced 15,000 bottles of wine from *vinifera* varieties.

After six years at Barboursville he moved first to Simeon Farm (now called Jefferson), then to Kluge before starting his own winery. However, he frankly admits that he was not much of a businessman because he was far more interested in the propagation of plants than money. It was absolutely fitting that he should be asked to become assistant director of gardens at Monticello and restore its vineyards.

Rausse admired Jefferson for many reasons: his political vision, his championship of the role of the yeoman farmer in the newly-independent United Colonies and his genuine interest and knowledge of all kinds of plants. Rausse also approved of Jefferson's mission to encourage Americans to consume less hard liquor and drink more wine, particularly with food.

This benign and gentle Italian has reason to be proud of his achievement at Monticello because he did what the great polymath failed to do – successfully grow grapes at Monticello.

It was very thoughtful of the organisers to arrange our meeting with Gabriele Rausse in the orchard alongside the vineyard at Monticello, where an excellent light lunch had been prepared. Rausse endeared himself to us by bringing bottles of his own wine – a blend of Bordeaux varieties with Sangiovese!

We conversed for only a short time and yet learned so much from him. He considers young volcanic soils to be even better for vines than older ones. He believes that very good wines can be produced from the 'red clay' soil and also from the sandy-loam soils nearer the coast. He has never irrigated a vineyard in his life because he believes that vines should be encouraged to use their own efforts to find water and nutrients. He says that after *veraison*, vines that have developed long roots systems tend to devote their energy to fruit rather than leaves.

For those planning to visit Virginia I strongly recommend making time to visit Monticello. Jefferson designed his house in the neo-classical style of Antonio Palladio, similar to that of Chiswick House in west London. However, Jefferson's home was atop an 850-ft high hill near Charlottesville in Albermarle County.

Visiting Monticello not only told us a lot about Thomas Jefferson, principal author of the Declaration of Independence and third President of the United States, but also give us a valuable insight into the life of late 18th and early 19th century American society.

During our tour of the house we were naturally keen to see how he stored and served his wine and spent time

'below stairs' looking at the wine cellar (and the beer and cider cellars) and the kitchens which had to cater for an extended family and staff. We also saw the famous dumb waiter that Jefferson designed to bring wines direct to the dining room above the cellar because he disliked any interruption to the flow of conversation over the dinner table, preferring to serve wine to his guests himself.

The visit to Monticello underlined the difficulties of planting *vinifera* vines, importing fine European wines and keeping them in good condition. Jefferson's determination to establish a viable Virginian wine industry to support tobacco (its main cash crop) merited a happy ending. It was a real pleasure to meet Gabriele Rausse, a great plantsman and modest man whose great skills made our trip to Virginia possible!

Day 4 continued: Susan Hulme MW at Kluge

Kluge Estate must be one of the most well-connected and well-heeled of the wineries we visited; it has deservedly a big reputation for sparkling wine (both the Kluge NV sparkling and Kluge rosé were drunk at Chelsea Clinton's wedding).



Gregory Brun.
Photo by
Steven Morris.

Patricia Kluge had been married to MetroMedia billionaire John Kluge (at one time the richest man in America) and was granted this estate as part of their divorce settlement.

On our visit there was a feeling that no expense had been spared on hiring the leading French names as consultants and on lavishing attention on the vineyard. Indeed it was Patricia's friend, Robert Mondavi, who suggested that Michel Rolland should consult for Kluge. This he has done for the last six or seven years. This was deemed quite a coup as Kluge is the only East Coast winery he consults for. I had very high expectations of the visit so I was surprised when some of my colleagues and I were left feeling a little underwhelmed by some of the reds.

We were met and hosted for the first part of our visit by CEO and owner Bill Moses (Patricia's husband), his director of winemaking, Gregory Brun, and a team of helpers. We were taken into the vineyards for a small sample tasting of four of the wines. It was late afternoon, so a vineyard tasting should have been perfect. But in this exceptionally warm and early vintage, it was still far too hot to stand in direct sunlight, so we dodged the intensity of the light and looked for shade under a large tree.

On the magnificent 900 acre estate in Middlesburg, 220 acres are planted under vine, making Kluge one of the largest producers in Virginia. Gregory explained that the plantings are divided almost equally between varieties for red wines and those used for sparkling wines – 120 acres planted with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir for the latter, and 100 acres with red Bordeaux varieties. The Chardonnay comes under the Monticello AVA.

Gregory Brun arrived from the Macon three years ago with the particular aim of micro-managing the different vineyard plots. He explained that while the topsoil is composed of red clay and sandy loam, it varies in depth from one foot to four, also the sub-soils vary greatly in composition, being either impenetrable basalt or schist where the roots can go very deep. As vigour varies considerably, GPS is used to micro-manage individual vineyard plots and determine how to treat and when to harvest, etc.

With all this intense attention to detail I was expecting

great things of the wines, but found the two red wines back in the tasting room were a little subdued and flat, with somewhat rustic tannins (Albermarle 2006 and Kluge Estate 2006 pre-release, both Bordeaux blends of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, and Malbec).

When I asked Gregory when the effects of all the changes and fine-tuning in the vineyard would be reflected in the wines he said not until the 2007 vintage. Unfortunately we were not able to taste any barrel samples, so I look forward to seeing what the 07s are like.

However, Kluge is most famous for sparkling wine, and is probably the most renowned winery in the state for this style. While Jonathan Wheeler is the director of the sparkling wine programme, the French connection is continued with consultant Laurent Champs, owner of Vilmart et Cie in Champagne. These wines are mostly a blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir although Kluge also makes 200 cases of sparkling Pinot Noir which from this vintage will be kept on the lees longer, three years instead of the previous

two. Gregory said they may even keep it for four years on the lees. We weren't able to taste a barrel sample of this to get an idea how good it was or was likely to be.

The wines we tasted in the vineyard were all good, fresh, lively and appealing:

Kluge sparkling wine, 8g/l r/s. Mid-gold, lovely ripe apple and ripe yellow plum aromas on nose, creamy texture balanced by refreshing acidity.

Kluge sparkling Blanc de Blancs, 20% fermented in old oak. Lovely rich brioche and pastry aromas and flavours combine with a creamy texture. For me the best wine we tasted *here*.

Albermarle 2009 Sauvignon Blanc, vines planted in 2006. Crisp and lively on the palate with green apple flavours and a hint of tropical ripeness, though just a little short on the finish.

Albermarle Rosé 2009 saignée. Deep salmon colour with green and red apple aromas; a good round, smooth mouth-feel, balanced with fresher, green apple flavours.



*Kluge is one of Virginia's few large-scale wineries.
Photo by Steven Morris.*



**Day 5, 10th September:
Quentin Sadler at the
Williamsburg Winery**

Our last wine visit of the trip was to the Williamsburg Winery, which is to the south of Williamsburg near the James River. The area is drenched in history and the estate is actually on an old farm called the Wessex Hundred.

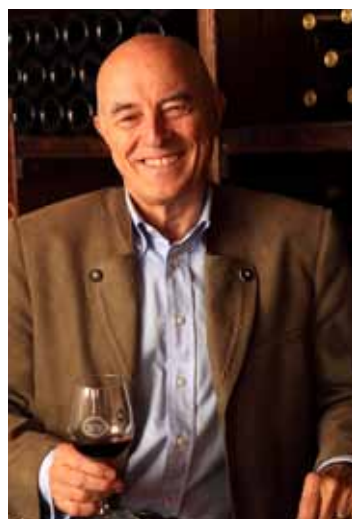
It was the brainchild of Belgian-born businessman Patrick Duffeler who bought the abandoned farm in 1985 and immediately started planting vines. This makes the winery a real pioneer as in Virginia only Barboursville Vineyards is older.

Duffeler chose this site as its proximity to Colonial Williamsburg ensures there is a great deal of tourist traffic. The winery has some 50,000 visitors each year who buy around 20,000 of the 60,000 cases produced. This makes it one of the leading wineries in Virginia, in terms of scale. As a consequence Duffeler is a person of some significance in the industry and has served for nine years on the Virginia Winegrowers Advisory Board, having received appointments from three different Ggovernors.

Interestingly and unusually Duffeler acts more as a negociant than an estate, with his own grapes providing just 10% or 15% of his needs. He buys the rest in from vineyards across the state and reckons that this policy of “not putting all his eggs in one basket” insures him against the very real problems that Virginia has. The area can suffer from serious hail storms and hurricanes are a regular feature here.

However, the winery now farms 37 acres of vines and is aiming to have 50 acres soon: this is the minimum that Duffeler thinks he needs in order to cover his costs.

As well as the impressively equipped winery the site is home to the Wedmore Place Country Hotel, where we stayed, and the Gabriel Archer Tavern named after ‘Virginia’s first lawyer’ and who was a contemporary, and enemy, of Captain John Smith in the early colonial period. He arrived in 1607 on board the ship *Susan* and apparently proposed



Above, bird netting protection on Vidal Blanc vineyard of Williamsburg Winery. Photo by Mick Rock. Left, Patrick Duffeler. Photo by Steven Morris.

that the colonists should settle on the land now occupied by the Williamsburg Winery. However he was overruled and a site with deep water access further up the river was chosen instead. This settlement became Jamestown, the first capital of Virginia.

Day 5 continued: Quentin Sadler at Colonial Williamsburg

Our very last visit was nothing to do with wine, but was fascinating and important none the less. We were taken into Williamsburg, which served as the capital of the Commonwealth of Virginia from 1698 until 1780 when Governor Thomas Jefferson moved it to Richmond to avoid the state government falling into British hands.

One reason for it becoming the seat of government was that it was on high, well-drained ground which was readily defensible and seems to have enjoyed a less humid and swampy climate than nearby low-lying Jamestown.

In addition, in 1693 Reverend James Blair founded the College of William & Mary on this attractive and healthy site, then called Middle Plantation. So, when the government needed to find a temporary home when the Jamestown House of Burgesses burnt down, for the second time, it moved into the fine buildings of the college. The burgesses seemed to like it there and soon built a new capital just to the east of the college, and named it Williamsburg in honour of King William III.

Since the 1930s one part of town has been designated as *Colonial Williamsburg* and is a living museum celebrating life in the colonial and revolutionary period. The roads have been laid out just as they were in about 1770, original buildings have been restored, others, including the impressive Governor’s Palace, have been recreated and in some cases old buildings have been relocated to stand in for buildings that have been lost over the centuries.

I must say that I was sceptical at first, but it was so well done and so interesting that I soon got into the fun of it. It was genuinely like stepping back in time – you could easily film a Jane Austin or Thackeray novel in the wide main road, Duke of Gloucester Street.



The Governor's Palace viewed from Palace Green, Colonial Williamsburg. Photo by Mick Rock

I really enjoyed seeing the reconstructed House of Burgesses, the local 'House of Commons', where in 1765 luminaries of the coming revolution had defied the British by adjourning to nearby Charlton's Coffeehouse as a protest against the Stamp Act. This breakaway group eventually became the Virginia House of Delegates, the successor to the House of Burgesses. Many members of Robert E. Lee's family sat in the House, as did George Washington and Thomas Jefferson from 1769.

The street has many shops and stalls along it, some giving a glimpse of how a silversmith's or milliner's would have been in those days, while some sell books, gifts and souvenirs – all surprisingly classy. They had a good line in wooden toys and sweets and chocolate made according to traditional recipes and techniques of the time. I have to

admit that I simply could not resist the opportunity to buy a tricorne hat!

A real highlight was lunch, which we enjoyed in the King's Arms Inn, which was founded in 1772 very near the legislature and would have been a hotbed of political debate right through the revolutionary period. This is reflected in the inn's name which went from the loyalist King's Arms to simply Mrs Vobe's, after its owner, during the war and to the patriotic Eagle Tavern once victory was secure.

As often happens in Colonial Williamsburg we were greeted by a character, someone dressed the part and living the part of someone who lived and worked in the town. I had already chatted to the milliner and someone at the coffee house, so took being asked how I was by a strangely Irish-sounding Mr Abraham in my stride. He was from the

Carolinas and had come north to evade General Clinton's British troops and was seeking work. He had a great line in patter too and asked everyone where they were from. When a young couple replied "Florida", he said, "Ah, Spaniards from the swamp, is it?"

Goodness knows what he would have said if it had been Utah.

The menu, or Bill of Fare, at the inn was very well done with as much as possible being the sort of thing patrons ate then, or reminiscent of it, anyway. The speciality starter, which most of us tried, was 'peanut soupe' which was very moreish, rich and tasty and was served with 'sippets' which is the English word for crouton. Main courses included some very good pies, or 'pyes', as well as the classic fried chicken and mashed sweet potatoes. Although the inn has a list that includes a few local wines, the majority hail from California and, despite the extensive Sherry, Madeira and Port list, I felt that the setting and the meal was better matched with one of the many traditional beers and so I tried the refreshingly zesty Golden Wheat Ale.

After that we went back outside and were treated to some street theatre of marching colonial militia and speeches about the dreadful behaviour of the British. Far from being offended, every one of us seemed ready to throw over British allegiance and to fight for the original ideals of the fledgling republic.

All in all I think Colonial Williamsburg is a lovely place to visit, very enjoyable to stroll around. It is full of splendid sites and things to see, the buildings are astonishing and it is very educational about life back then as well as the American Revolution and the context in which it happened.

The Last Supper: Quentin Sadler concludes the trip report

However, we had one last treat in store. That evening we returned to town for a farewell dinner at the Trellis Restaurant. Run by chef patron David Everett, this has been the leading eatery in the area for around 30 years and has always sought to source its food as locally as possible. Therefore Chesapeake Bay oysters were on the menu, as

CWW in Virginia

was local smoked bluefish and the many pork dishes were, interestingly to a Brit, from Smithfield which is just to the south across the James River and has long been famous for the quality of its meat. That fame and the name cannot be a coincidence, surely?

The setting was elegantly modern, which is rare in Williamsburg, and the food was lovely, with cheese and charcuterie platters being passed round the table before a succession of intriguing tapas dishes that included sweetbreads, foie gras from the Hudson Valley, fried green tomatoes and crawfish fritters, all beautifully served.

The main courses were really interesting too, with a spicy Thai-influenced *bouillabaisse* on offer, along with *papardelle* with a selection of wild mushrooms, trout from Idaho – a state I normally associate only with potato – and some superb-looking steak strips served with popovers – small Yorkshire puddings to you and me – and my choice, seared pork tenderloin and braised pork belly with root vegetable hash and a root beer jus.

As for the wine, we were generously treated to a range of whites and reds from the Williamsburg Winery and King Family Vineyards from Monticello, but with so many varied dishes and flavours it was hard to achieve a perfect pairing. Strangely, the restaurant's wine list focused less on the local than the menu did, with a range that concentrated on California but included listings from a great many states including New York, Oregon and Washington as well as Virginia. This gave us an opportunity to try an excellent Blanc de Noirs sparkling wine from Gruet in New Mexico, interestingly another branch of the family continues to make Champagne in the Aube.

For our dessert we returned to tapas-style serving with a selection of dishes being passed around for us to try. This was a good theory, but some people it seems are pudding hoarders – you know who you are – so some desserts circulated more efficiently than others. They were all delicious, but the cherry tart and the peach pie stand out in my memory, as does, for sheer indulgence, the Death by Chocolate – although I prefer the Holmesian sub-title from the menu, 'A Study in Chocolate'.



We all had a terrific time and it was an excellent and fitting finale to our wonderful trip around the vineyards of Virginia.



Fife and drum band in Colonial Williamsburg, and the local form of transport. Photos by Steven Morris.

20th century *vinifera* pioneers

This slim volume is, the author says, “a tour of what is current in Virginia as well as what has transpired in the past”, and the author is focused on wines made from European *vinifera* grapes. The first commercial *vinifera* wine made in Virginia appeared on the shelves only as recently as 1978. The entire production of seven bottles was immediately bought back by the winery owner (who had sold them to the retailer in the first place) in order to claim the honour – and recognition by the state governor.

So before 1978 there were only the failed attempts by Thomas Jefferson to grow *vinifera* vines on his Monticello estate. But Rowe has a scoop. Years before Jefferson even started Charles Carter not only made wine from *vinifera*, but he also sent it to England to be awarded a gold medal by the Royal Society for Arts in London. A descendent now makes wine in Virginia, calling his Philip Carter Winery ‘The First Family of American Wine’.

The book swiftly passes over the intervening years when pre-prohibition Virginia Dare made from native Scuppernon grapes was hugely popular, to profile pioneers of those first *vinifera* vineyards of the late 1970s and 1980s.

Subsequent chapters focus on figures and wineries in Virginia’s fast-expanding wine industry. From a couple of wineries at the end of the 1970s there are more than 170 today. The author talks to many of the people involved, from the large Barboursville and Williamsburg wineries with many acres of vineyards to couples building premises and buying in grapes while planting small vineyards.

Few American wineries could manage without Mexican workers but I do not recall more than a fleeting mention of them in other wine books. Rowe, who speaks Spanish,

devotes a chapter to interviews with both legal and other migrant workers, telling often sad tales of their life and struggles to work while abiding by increasingly complex immigration requirements.

I have some reservations about the book. Misspellings of grape varieties (Niagra, Pinot Tage) shouldn’t have got through. A good editor would have reduced repetitions: the first page of chapter titled ‘The Afrikaner at Keswick Vineyards’ tells us that the winemaker comes from South Africa, his parents are South Africans, he grew up there, he worked in South Africa vineyards, he has a South African accent and that he is an African expatriate. I got it first time. There are sentences in which the meaning is not clear and verbatim transcripts from winemakers which would have been easier reading if they’d been summarised.

Inexcusable is the lack of an index, something so simple to provide in this digital age. The book mentions very many individuals, wineries and grapes but without an index it is impossible to find them in the book. The table of contents is of little help; I wanted to read about Barboursville before visiting it and found no mention. Turns out it’s in a chapter titled ‘The Italians’.

This is a valuable book about a fast upcoming quality wine region and I recommend it to anyone with an interest in Virginia wine and for those who want to know about the main players and challenges in making wine in the state. But, without an index, only four out of five stars.

Foreword: Richard Leahy, colour photographs: Jonathan Timmes, 126 pages plus 16 pages of colour photographs
Published by: The History Press (September 2009)
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How’s this for the offer of the month, received in an email to Circle hon secretary Lindsay Oram from Julie Prialux:

‘I am selling the private number plate registration W1NES on behalf of my father, who has recently retired. The plate is currently on a registered, taxed vehicle and the price we are looking for is offers in the region of £45,000.

‘If you know anyone in the industry who might be interested, please contact me for more information on 01843 863661 or email j.prialux@yahoo.co.uk.’

It must be made clear that the vehicle in question is not the editor’s classic VW...