



DISCUSSING CLIMATE CHANGE & SUSTAINABILITY IN NAPA VALLEY WITH DAN PETROSKI

CRU PODCAST, NPR, OCTOBER 22, 2019



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Cru Podcast

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Dan Petroski is the winemaker of Larkmead Vineyards and the founder & winemaker of Massican. Recently, Dan spoke on a panel regarding climate change and sustainability in relation to the global wine industry. Leaving me with more questions, we sat down to chat about the effects of climate change on Napa Valley specifically, with a focus on the benchmarking and data gathering that Larkmead has been doing to assess things like growing degree days in detail, and how Napa Valley is evolving into Zone 5 climatic conditions. We also discuss the affects of alternative packing and how that crosses over in the marketing & customer perception. Then we dig into how Dan is preparing for the potential major effects of climate change with a 21 year plan for testing other grape varietals that might possibly be more viable in the long-term.

For those who do not know Dan, I encourage you to go back and list to my original interview with him where we discussed being the winemaker of Larkmead Vineyards in Calistoga, California and the founder & winemaker of Massican, Dan's all white wine label making beautiful expressions of Italian based white wines like a Pinot Grigio & Greco blend called Gemina.

WESTERVELT: The idea is to find out which grapes do better in drought conditions or in an era of colder cold snaps and warmer heatwaves. Larkmead was founded in 1895, and Petroski is not looking to replace its famed cabernet. But he'll test for resilience and flavor - tryouts, you might call it, for which grapes will become supporting actors in the finished wines of a near-future warmer Napa. The test plots, he says, are part of a broader long-term strategy to try to mitigate climate change.

PETROSKI: How we think about irrigation or nonirrigating, or how we think about keeping the temperature down not only in the fruit zone, but on the canopies with installing misting systems and shade cloth. So we're going to be using this as an opportunity to test not only new technologies, but also to test the finished product.



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WESTERVELT: In the absence of federal leadership on climate change, a growing number of wineries in Napa and Sonoma, like Larkmead, are trying to reduce their carbon footprints - organic farming, solar panels, composting instead of burning discarded vines. And most wineries in this region are now certified sustainable in the management of their energy, water and soil.

PETROSKI: But I'm not sure that's enough. We're dealing with a larger global issue of planet stability.

JULIA JACKSON: Part of a carbon project...

WESTERVELT: In neighboring Sonoma, sisters Katie and Julia Jackson aren't sure it's enough, either.

J JACKSON: And we need to stop talking about the problem; we need to actually start implementing and scaling the solutions now.

WESTERVELT: Julia and Katie are part owners of one of the world's biggest wine producers, Jackson Family Wines. They help run 42 wineries around the world, from California to South Africa. Jackson recently teamed up with another global wine giant, Spain's Torres Family Wines, to create International Wineries for Climate Action. Sitting at a picnic table overlooking the vines at their La Crema Winery, Katie Jackson says the new group's goal is nothing short of radically decarbonizing the world's wine industry.

KATIE JACKSON: It's an organization that's asking members to reduce their carbon footprint 50% by 2030 and by 80% by 2045. We need concrete, significant action immediately and also for the mid and long term.

WESTERVELT: To join, wineries pledge to meet those ambitious goals and show they currently get at least 20% of their energy from onsite renewables like solar and wind. And they have to agree to conduct a thorough carbon emissions inventory, audited by a third party every year, looking at all aspects of production through delivery. Jackson Wines has been measuring its carbon footprint for 11 years. One of several changes they made after an energy audit - they switched to lighter glass bottles, cutting their emissions footprint 3% and saving on shipping and production costs.

K JACKSON: Those are cute.

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: Oh, yeah. Sure.

WESTERVELT: So far, the new global wine climate group only has six members. Change comes slow in wine land.



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Tradition, not transformation, is often the ethos. It's an industry driven by personality and passion - individualists who are fierce competitors, sometimes averse to working together. Katie Jackson says that mindset has to evolve.

K JACKSON: We believe that our intelligence together is going to be more powerful and more impactful than any one winery trying to figure this out and go it alone.

WESTERVELT: There's another challenge - many small wineries can't afford to invest in climate resilience, such as an annual emissions inventory. They're struggling to get the harvest in and survive and may be spending any extra cash on new generators to adapt to the new normal of rolling power blackouts due to the heightened risk of catastrophic wildfires driven in part by climate change.

Eric Westervelt, NPR News, in California's Napa Valley.