

Ep 96: New York State: The Finger Lakes Part 3 with Richard Rainey from Forge Cellars



Janina Doyle 00:00:07 Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me, just can not get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So, stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving, wonderful world of wine and wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you!

Hello, to all my wonderful wine lovers and welcome back to the Finger Lakes series. This is part three, and I am bringing you an incredibly enthusiastic and energetic conversation with Richard Rainey, who is from Forge Cellars. You are going to love this conversation. You are certainly gonna feel like you are in the Finger Lakes with Richard describing what it's like entering this wine region, driving around it. You'll also find out that Richard has partnered up with an incredible winemaker from a pretty well known French winery. I say no more. You must wait. We're gonna talk about why making practices using wild yeast. Have you ever wondered what is the difference between natural yeast and packaged yeast, commercial yeast? We're gonna talk all about that and then sustainable farming, that approach, but also being economically viable and different things you can do in the vineyard to make a difference. Cover crops. In fact, did you know, you can use turnips. I was very, very impressed and don't get me started about the ducks. I won't tell you what ducks you've got to wait till later on in the episode. So welcome to Richard's interpretation of the Finger Lakes and his dry dry Riesling.

Janina Doyle 00:02:04 Richard, thank you so much for joining me today. Um, I'm very excited to learn a little bit more about Seneca Lake and all about the Forge cellar wines. Are you ready?

Richard Rainey 00:02:14 Well, I, I suppose so. What, what, why not? I'm here. You're here. Let's do this.

Janina Doyle 00:02:19 We're stuck. We're stuck for the next hour. Might as well talk rather than it being in silence. Okay. So Richard, you do have a background in wine. When did it start and where did it start?

Richard Rainey 00:02:32 Um, boy, that, you know, it's an interesting story. So I grew up in Florida. Um, I find interesting.

Janina Doyle 00:02:41 I love Florida. Not just for Disney.

Richard Rainey 00:02:42 Yeah, I, I got out when I was around 10. Not just for Disney. I'm from that area. Believe it or not.

Janina Doyle 00:02:49 Lucky you.

Richard Rainey 00:02:51 I was born in Lakeland, but kind of grew up around Orlando and actually still have family down there. But so, uh, my great grandparents who were immigrants from Hungary lived on my grand grandparents property and they lived in a little trailer there. And so my great grandparents, uh, my, my great grandmother, um, was a cook back in, in Hungary. So she, she cooked amazing food. So I grew up eating just, just brilliant, you know, Eastern European food. And the joke was that, um, we always had a, a pig, you know, we had land and we had horses and so forth and we would raise a pig each year and, uh, she would come out with her bucket and my grandfather would say, here comes your great grandma. She's going to take everything left over, but the squeal from the pig so she would make blood sauces and...

Janina Doyle 00:03:45 Hang on. Wait, wait, wait, vegans, everybody tune out now, come back in five minutes. Okay. Carry on.

Richard Rainey 00:03:51 Hey, there is always vegetables involved, right?

Janina Doyle 00:03:53 Well, not right now. There isn't anyway, carry on.

Richard Rainey 00:03:56 And uh, so, you know, I grew up eating these really great flavors and then, uh, they would go to the store, my grand great-grandfather and he would buy a couple jugs of different wine and he would mix them together and he would do his own blend.

Janina Doyle 00:04:13 Oh wow.

Richard Rainey 00:04:14 And I remember them having these juice cups, always on the table, drinking wine. And so I, you know, I saw them drinking wine, but being in the south, we didn't really drink wine, but it was definitely, I mean, it's a fond memory to see them mixing the wines and of course their cooking. Then I moved, uh, up north outside of Philadelphia. And, uh, my mother, I was, I had a single mom and, and we led a pretty uneventful life and she was working a lot and, uh, we didn't have much money. And so, uh, for me and I, I loved food and the easiest way to enjoy great food was to work at great restaurants. And so I started working in the restaurants in Philadelphia and the, the big turning moment was I went to work for a hotel called, uh, the Ritz Carlton.

Janina Doyle 00:05:00 Oh, heard of that.

Richard Rainey 00:05:02 Heard of it? And this was like the, this was the turning point for me because I got involved in the wine program there and they did some wine events and I was, I was smitten because the wine business is this amazing intersection of people that sometimes don't don't fit into, uh, a category. They can be incredibly, you know, intelligent and well schooled and, and have, you know, tons of experience in life. But they just sometimes are, they go a bit against the grain. And that was certainly myself and I, I fell in love with agriculture and the history of wine and the people involved in wine and obviously the pleasure of wine. And my next step was to move to the Finger Lakes. I was, I really didn't have the money to go to UC Davis. And I had, um, a winemaker friend said, Hey, you can work anyway, anywhere. So go somewhere and just make wine. So I moved up here and, uh, that was in the mid nineties, in fact. And that's when it all kind of began for me, uh, was I got a job right up the street from where we are now.

Janina Doyle 00:06:07 Oh, really? So, so how was it entering into Finger Lakes? Cause I've seen little videos and oh my god, the beauty it's so green. I think that it is such a, I didn't expect it to be so green

and these Lakes are massive. They're vast. What was your opinion when you set foot in the Finger Lakes for the first time?

Richard Rainey 00:06:29 It was, for me, it was otherworldly, um, coming from, I mean, I always enjoyed the countryside, but here you have the rolling hills. You have these, you know, in the spring right now, in fact on the way to work this morning, all the buds are starting to pop along the side of the road in, in the, and the we're going from, and it can happen quite quickly, right. It can go from this very gray and overcast and snowy environment. And then all of a sudden, like a flip of the switch, we had snow last week and today, uh, it's going to be over 70 degrees Fahrenheit. So I always laugh. I think like mother nature, she's, you know, in her kitchen or wherever, and she bumps into the light switch for the Finger Lakes and flips the switch and we have the spring. There's no like gradual warming up. It's like, it, it shows up and it's here. And I think that's, what's so amazing about the weather here is it just can happen so quickly. And we have these very high highs and very low lows, and it certainly keeps you on your toes, but the countryside was, was beautiful. The hills, the, the geological, uh, features. The lake, you know, the lake is, is, you know, something like 40 miles long, it's 620 feet deep, a mile and a half wide. So it's a massive, massive body of water that has its own completely unique, uh, personality. Uh, when I come to work in the morning, uh, I live about 12 miles away and I crest the hill. There's a, there's a divide between where I live in the lake and I drive through the, the forest to get here. And every day I crest the hill and you never quite know what to expect. On the other side, you can have such a rain, different, you know, temperature, a different perspective with the sun being out, or it can be cloudy. It's, uh, it's its own truly its own microclimate, macroclimate

Janina Doyle 00:08:28 Amazing. And actually we touched on in the previous Finger Lakes episode, uh, that there are 11 fingers, uh, to the Finger Lakes. There are 11 Lakes. They're actually quite, am I right in thinking, they're quite spread out though? How long does it take to get from the furthest, from the furthest west to the furthest east? How long would it take you to get across?

Richard Rainey 00:08:48 Oh, that's, you know, that's interesting. They are, it is very spread out when people come here, that's, you know, what I always recommend is pick a lake and, and I just think Seneca's, Seneca's the easiest because you're smack dab in the middle. And for, for, for, you know, uh, for visiting wineries, Seneca is kind of the center of the universe. And then from there we kind of spread out and we go over to Keuka or we can go over to Cayuga. So you have Keuka, Cayuga and Seneca. They're the three in terms of grape growing that we're the most concerned with because they, they enable us to actually grow grapes on the other Lakes. Uh, it's going to be a bit cold because the Lakes are shallower and they don't have quite the energy, uh, to protect the vines from the, the really tough winters that we have here. So, uh, to answer your question, oh, it would have to be by car a good hour and a half or so to traverse that entire distance. Yeah.

Janina Doyle 00:09:50 But if we were starting in Seneca, if we had to go Southwest to Keuka, how long would that take roughly to get between those two Lakes?

Richard Rainey 00:09:57 Oh, to get over to Keuka probably takes me, if I'm concentrating maybe 45 minutes, 40 minutes.

Janina Doyle 00:10:02 If you're concentrating? And if you're not after the crash and then getting back the car back and running...

Richard Rainey 00:10:06 No, because, you know, you see the Amish little farm markets and, and you know, and there's always flower stands. And then depending on the time of the season, there could be nice peaches. So I have to concentrate and actually not stop the car and go to a farm market.

Janina Doyle 00:10:20 This sounds amazing.

Richard Rainey 00:10:22 So I have to put my blinders on, you know?

Janina Doyle 00:10:24 Okay. So now if you were concentrating the other way, so going east to Cayuga lake, how long would that take you?

Richard Rainey 00:10:33 So, uh, Cayuga uh, west side from where I'm sitting right now would probably take me just about 20 to 25 minutes.

Janina Doyle 00:10:43 Okay. 20, 25 so that's much closer. Yeah. Okay. Everyone, there you go. 45 minutes to Keuka. 25 to Cayuga. Perfect.

Richard Rainey 00:10:51 Well, see, I have to go down. I'm on the east side of Seneca. So I have to go down to the bottom and then kind of shoot up diagonal where I am right now. It's a straight line. So it, it adds a bit of time to get down to the bottom of the lake. And that's, that's what we forget. You know, you get on one side of the lake and you want to go around, there's no ferries, so you've gotta go to the top or to the bottom.

Janina Doyle 00:11:11 Uh, that's a little bit inconvenient, but at least you have the beauty. Now let's get to Forge Cellars. So you have a great relationship with a pretty well-known winemaker, or should I say the family and the winery he's from. So this is wait, shall I try... Louis bar, nah, that was rubbish. Louis Barruol, Barruol, anyway, barrel. Everyone Louis Barrel. He was made to be a winemaker. So Louis Barruol, and you go a long way back. Can you tell us about the winery that he comes from? People may have heard of this winery, and your relationship?

Richard Rainey 00:11:49 You know, I, this is my bit of advice for anybody before I tell you about him. If you're gonna have a partner, try to find a rockstar, it, it helps a lot. Uh, so, uh, my, my, in my old position, um, my, I, I had a, I've had a day job as well as running Forge up until, uh, September of last year. Uh, I was in, in, in my old position, I was what they call a French buyer. So I was working for an importer distributor and I was spending oh, 30, 45 up to 60 days a year in France, visiting producers and buying wine. And Louis was one of them. Uh, and the estate is called Chateau St Cosme. This is located in, uh Gigondas. And so, um, I would go and, and visit the Cellars, taste wines and do the purchasing, uh, myself and another fella, uh, a French guy, in fact, and Louis was one of my guys. And, um, oddly enough, they tried to get me to visit his estate many, many times in the late nineties, uh, 97, 98. And I, I just could never quite get over there. And everybody was telling me about this young dynamic guy and, and I tasted the wines. I said, ah, they're great wines. They're super good. But honestly, I was a bit full of myself and I wouldn't go visit him. And then in the early 2000s, I finally got around to visiting him and we got along famously. Um, he is, um, he's I'm, what am I. 52 now? Uh, and he's a year older than I. Young dynamic, uh fella, still playing rugby, I believe. And, um, is, is a, is a true artist, plays the Cello and, and, and rugby, and is a winemaker and, uh, full of energy. And what's interesting about Louis is this, um, it's as if he has 500 years of history, which is how long his family has been at the estate. It's as if he has 500 years of history wrapped up in his mind, because sometimes you ask him questions and I'm quite convinced it's his great grandfather answering them, because he has such perspective, this broad

perspective about life and about wine growing and history that it's really fascinating to talk with him. And, um, we tasted very well together. We had very similar opinions about wine and, uh, while one thing led to another and we were having lunch in 2009 in Gigondas and, uh, he started asking me about these Lakes, where I lived, and that was the beginning. Uh, we, I explained to him about the, you know, the geology, the Devonian period, creating the, the shale that we have here and the glaciation and the, the sand sand, and the gravel and the, the, the loam and all these varying soils that we have. And, and his eyes kind of lit up, but I paid it no mind. I said, well, if you ever come to the Lakes, I'd be happy to show you round. But, you know, this was when he just had received a whole bunch of press. And he was really doing very, very well. And frankly, I never imagined he would call me and, and ask for a visit. And, uh, so I left it at that. And it was maybe six, eight weeks later, the phone rang and he said, Hey, I'm in, I'm in the US. I want to come see these Lakes. And I'm: sure come on up Louis. And so he came up and we started tasting and talking and driving around and he found it all very, very interesting. But once again, I, I didn't, I didn't put a lot of, you know, weight in that because he was busy with his own estate and doing great things. And honestly, this is a very difficult place to make wine. And so, uh, I kind of just put it aside and he kept coming up and kept calling and kept coming up. And eventually after a lot of tasting and a lot of talking, we were, uh, and I remember it like it was yesterday. I had a friend of mine, uh, Rodolphe de Pins, who owns a, a property in Lirac called, uh, Château Montfaucon. And we were coming from New York city. It was about 11 o'clock at night. We had had a great dinner and, uh, I brought a bunch of wines with me. And, um, we were in a, on a highway in New Jersey going to our hotel and he turned to me and he said, you know, I want to do a project with you in the Finger Lakes. And I always make the joke that after I corrected the car and put it back on the highway, I said, uh, I said, Okay. So I went back to the hotel and I called my wife, and I said, you're not gonna believe this, but Louis, uh, wants to do a project together. And, uh, we finally got around after, uh, another year or so of, of investigating and talking. We finally got around to making our first vintage in 2011.

Janina Doyle 00:16:50 Amazing. Now I know you do do a few reds. You do a bit of Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc. That's correct. Isn't it? Cabernet Franc as well? But you focus entirely, really on Riesling, but not just Riesling. Bone dry Riesling. So why did you decide to do that? And especially as Louis is a Rhône valley winemaker. Well, it's, it's Mediterranean there. I mean, yeah. He's not gonna get much for Grenache growing there. He probably didn't have much choice. Um, but yeah. Why Riesling and bone dry?

Richard Rainey 00:17:24 Um, okay, so why Riesling? Well, it's the vehicle that does the best job here. So we often kind of just, I really, I mean, it's really funny. I, I forget that we work with Riesling sometimes because.... We're so focused on the sites at this point and it's really, it's kind of taken over my thinking, you know, the, the Riesling is a grape is, is amazing vehicle, like to show the land, to show terroir and I'll do my best, not to overuse that word terroir because it is it's overused at times. But, um, we, we loved, we loved this as a vehicle to show this amazing place and that vehicle, which happens to be an amazing grape was, was here. And it did a hell of a good job of relating the, the place, uh, in the glass. It was the logical choice because it was here and it did a fantastic job.

Janina Doyle 00:18:34 And then why bone dry? Why have you not left any residual sugar?

Richard Rainey 00:18:39 Um, well, I guess...

Janina Doyle 00:18:43 I'm waiting for the answer. Huh?

Richard Rainey 00:18:45 That's a loaded question, right? Because, um, we, um....

Janina Doyle 00:18:52 Do you know the answer?

Richard Rainey 00:18:54 Oh, I do. I do. I'm just choosing my words carefully. No, let's just say we, we liked the, we like the wines for the table, so we like dry white wines. Okay. French guy. My, you don't know me, but I'm, I'm a, I'm a lover of, of, of food. And so we loved wines for the table and, and the kind of foods we eat here went very well with dry wines. So from the very beginning, we said, we want wines for the table. And for us, that was, that was dry. But there's also something else, which I think is interesting because when you make dry Riesling, you're kind of all in. You, you don't get in any exits. We have to create wines of texture, of richness, all in the absence of sugar. And that is an interesting proposition. And for us, it was the purity of the site, the purity of the place really shined through. Now the, you know, the, the logical or the most common responses. Well, do you have a problem with residual sugars in wines? Listen, everybody can do whatever they want to do. That's the beauty of wine. Uh, I don't pass judgment. It's like, if you want high levels of residual, have at it. For us, what we've always really found interesting is to be very, very dry, less than four grams, because number one, we like the challenge, but number two, we like the, the, the expression of the sites for us, it really shines through.

Janina Doyle 00:20:24 Yeah. Okay. No, that makes sense. I I'm accepting of that answer. Now, actually in the winery, in the winery, you are very hands off, right? Is this you, what are you trying to make with these wines? Everything's low intervention, right?

Richard Rainey 00:20:39 Yeah, I, I think, I think, um, the easiest way to sum it up is we do everything, to do as little as possible. That means you choose great sites. You pick very well. You handle the grapes with a lot of respect in regards to pressing and settling. You follow the fermentations very, very carefully. You make sure things are clean and healthy. And if you do these things, and if, uh, this is a, I have a list, I'm gonna publish a book one day called Louis-isms. There's a list of Louis-isms. You know, the idea is we always want to be anticipating where the wine is and where it's going. We never want to respond. So Louis says, um, it's a bit like driving a car at a high speed, but looking in the rear view mirror, you're eventually going to crash. So part of the discipline here has always been okay, the wine's here, where does it want to go? And what, you know, what do we need to do to make sure it doesn't go to a place we don't want it to go. And I think it's a, it's a principle that you probably find in most traditional high quality producers all over the world, you know. Um, this, this, this being kind of being at one with the wine and understanding that it's this living and breathing thing and, and understanding what it needs, what it likes, what it doesn't like. So that ultimately you don't have to do anything to correct any, any mistakes.

Janina Doyle 00:22:16 Mm, okay. Yeah, no. And actually you also use wild yeasts. It's all about spontaneous fermentation. So why have you chosen that, compared to commercial yeasts?

Richard Rainey 00:22:29 So commercial yeast certainly has its place. Right. Um, for, for certain projects, it makes a lot of sense. Um, the way we were making wine here, we started in 11, uh, 2011 made about 3 or 400 cases to see if we could do it and see if we could make the wines in, in a way that we enjoyed. And, and we had some pretty good success. And then in 2012 we made maybe about 800 cases. So we started very, very small and, um, and I think it was in 2012, we said, okay. We know we like what wild fermentations bring. So let's start to layer them in. And so we took very, you know, baby steps

because we weren't sure about, you know, fermenting dry with wild yeast. And it took quite a while to really dial in the program. But that being said, um, you know, I, I told you that I was in the cellar all day yesterday, uh, working on the 2021s, and in '21, uh, we did some very, very small commercial yeast experiments. And so we, out of 10 barrels, let's say, we would have nine that were natural and one that were yeast. And why did we do that? I, I, I love Louis for this. It's just to remind us to make sure what we're doing is correct. And so it was a great experiment and, you know, overwhelmingly, we preferred the spontaneous. Overwhelmingly.

Janina Doyle 00:24:03 So whats, whats the difference?

Richard Rainey 00:24:04 The difference is interesting. They're just more dynamic. They're more dynamic like, yeah, the, the, the nose, the, the aromatics, the mouth feel it's, it's just a more dynamic sensation. And, but, at the same time, and, and I'm, I'm always cognizant of, you know, people that pass lots of judgment in this business. And, and sometimes, you know, oh, it's this way, or it's that way, or it's gotta be this. And I always say, listen, you've gotta do what makes you happy because it's your art, it's your expression. So embrace, I, do what you want to do. So for us, uh, yesterday, especially we had all the yeast wine separate and, you know, on some of them, I, I, I said, oh, I understand why somebody would do this. There's a purity of aromatics. Um, that is really fascinating. Like, I, I get it.

Janina Doyle 00:24:58 With commercial? With commercial yeasts?

Richard Rainey 00:24:59 Yeah with commercial yeast. Yeah. And, but it lacked the dynamic side that I really enjoyed, but you could totally see why this would be super applicable if you were trying to have a very consistent expression of your, your wine from year to year.

Janina Doyle 00:25:19 Yeah. I guess from what I've picked up from speaking to winemakers is, yes consistency. You're gonna get that with commercial yeast. So it makes life easier. You definitely will probably get cleaner flavors. So I think you said about the, the fruitiness, you, that's probably gonna come through more, but, you don't have the energy. And I suppose wild yeasts allows for a wilder flavors to potentially come out. Would that be fair to say?

Richard Rainey 00:25:47 I, I, I, I think it's fair to say. I think, um, there, there's just a lot more complexity for sure, for me, you know, uh, using spontaneous, but, uh, it, it has its own host of challenges, you know? I mean, um, you, you've gotta pay a lot of attention and you've gotta do a lot of babysitting and, uh, and you know, it's, I don't know. One of the Rick-isms I will say is, I often in the winery say nothing's for free. Everything, there's a cost for everything. So what you gain on one side, you're gonna pay on another at some point.

Janina Doyle 00:26:24 Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And I suppose with spontaneous fermentation and wild yeast, typically, am I right, they're slower a lot of the time. And of course you could into a, a, a stuck fermentation? They're kind of the, the two differences during fermentation, aren't they?

Richard Rainey 00:26:44 They, uh, you're you're right. You, you have to pay a lot of attention to 'em because, um, in, in winter, when things cool off, they will slow down, uh, often. And so our ferments would often, uh, not finish until the spring and that's, you know, for some people, oh my gosh, you're, you're biting your fingernails. And, and you're pacing because, you know, once the wine's done fermenting, you know, you're kind of safe. And until that happens, you're not. So it's kind of nerve wracking in a lot of ways. I've come to enjoy that rhythm. I've come to enjoy the, the birds, you know,

the birds. Now I'm gonna sound like a biodynamic producer. Um, but when you see the winter coming and everything slows down outside, and the birds quit, you know, carrying on and the yeast do the same, they slow down. And then you have this period around December through January and February and the cellars quiet. And there's a certain beauty to that. And then the first days of spring where the birds, you know, you've heard it right where the birds just go crazy. And everybody's like, yeah, who winters over let's party. Um, it's as if the, the yeast in the cellar go, okay, let's get this done and they finish and that's, I, I love that. I find it, I find that, uh, amazing. Now, of course, you know, you have to pay a lot of attention to, to the barrels and, and watch them. But, uh, boy, that, that last little bit of fermentation is just, is lovely.

Janina Doyle 00:28:27 Because actually with commercial yeast, you can do a fermentation in like, it depends a few weeks, whatever, it depends on if you're doing white or red and here what you're telling me is it's taking months.

Richard Rainey 00:28:37 It can, but then again, you know, there's no rules because we've had the, the exact opposite happen where we've had spontaneous and they go really fast. And then you're like, oh, what the hell? What, what was, wait a minute. So, you know, I don't know what the rule book is. I, I didn't get a copy of the rule book...

Janina Doyle 00:28:56 Because it's like parenting, right?

Richard Rainey 00:28:59 Cause I, I I'm, I, you know, and listen, I'm not an enologist, um, I'm just a guy that is a wine guy. And so I do come at it from this, this kind of very, very simplistic perspective. And, um, but I think somewhere that's also the joy is that yeah. Um, I can step back and, and watch this with, uh, with kind of a brand new set of eyes. And, and I think that's a lot of fun.

Janina Doyle 00:29:26 Absolutely. But I mean, ultimately it's about listen, look, and respect, and I suppose that's what you do out in the vineyards, don't you? Because you do farm sustainably and organically, this is also probably gonna help you with your wild yeast. So what are you doing in the vineyards?

Richard Rainey 00:29:42 Um, uh, for me, I've made a whole bunch of mistakes.

Janina Doyle 00:29:46 Haven't we all.

Richard Rainey 00:29:49 I mean, uh, I've planted and replanted at my, our home farm here is only about 15 acres. And, um, it's, so it's pretty small. It's a research and development, uh, essentially research and development farm, where we've tried many different things. And, um, uh, we've tried using, you know, uh, these biointensive sprays that are, I don't know, bio fungicide that are made from, um, Japanese knot weed or from Bacillus or, you know, these really nice things and spraying, I should say, farming in the Finger Lakes, much like I relate to burgundy. We have a lot of the same pressures. But here the cellar pricing is far lower than Burgundy. So to farm in Burgundy, you know, organically and, and, and or biodynamically, which whichever you prefer or a hybrid model or whatever you want to do there, there's a little bit more wiggle room. Uh, so what we've tried to do here is on, on my farm, um, is try to develop a program that is taking bits and pieces from several different places. So for instance, like say, you know, biodynamic, I use some of the sprays, but more importantly, uh, my compost program. But then we use some organic sprays in the vineyard. Now I'm not opposed to a conventional spray if it's warranted. So what, what we're trying to do is actually develop a, a sustainable approach,

but also one that's economically viable for the region. And I think that is often not, you know, not talked about. So most people, you know, can't afford \$75, \$60 bottles. They want some great bottles between \$20 and \$30 and, um, and so we have to balance all of that. We have to have a crop, we have to have a consistent crop. We have to have a crop that is economically viable, but of course at the same time, just by our nature, we want to keep improving. So what we do is we use the Bellows vineyard as a way to try different things and learn, and then scale them up with our grower partners so that, um, yeah, it's, it's interesting. And so, uh, it's been fun because I make all the mistakes here, and then hopefully we learn from them and, and then, you know, we can, we can, uh, pass 'em along to our friends.

Janina Doyle 00:32:23 So what are you doing? I know that one of the things you're using, you're using cedar trellis posts instead of a pressure treated post. That thought that was quite cool. Never really heard of that.

Richard Rainey 00:32:31 Yeah. It's I, gosh, it was a, well, it's kind of funny that I had this, this choice. The guy said, you know, what kind of post do you want? And I'm like, well, pressure treated, every time I handled them, I'd get splinters. And, and it would always just irritate my, my hands. And I said, send me those cedar posts instead. And somebody said, you know, if you're gonna be organic one day or certified, you have to use cedar posts. So it actually worked out pretty well. The, the only bad thing about 'em is they're so damn brittle. Uh, they love to break and, uh, the pressure treated are, are much more durable. So once again, there's nothing free. So, uh, we, we use the cedar post and it's been working out pretty well for the most part, except I have to replace a lot of them.

Janina Doyle 00:33:15 It keeps you busy. And then of course, throughout all the vines you're using cover crops, aren't you as well?

Richard Rainey 00:33:22 Yeah. So, um, we, we tried different cover crops. Um, we've planted, oh, um, what did I plant last year? Oh, it was, it was called Rays crazy spring mix. And it had, uh, yeah, I love the name. So it's, uh, it was an organic cover crop, but it was, it had some peas and grains, a bit of clover, uh, turnips, which are interesting because yeah, they, they, they drill down deep into the soil and they kind of help open up the soil because I have kind of clay...

Janina Doyle 00:33:55 Give a bit of oxygen. Okay.

Richard Rainey 00:33:56 Yeah, totally, totally. And it's really interesting. You go out into the vineyard and you pull these things up and they can be, you know, 8, 10, 12 inches long. They're amazing. And then, uh, what else was in there? Rapeseed. Rapeseed is, uh, it cleanses the soil. It's a cleaner.

Janina Doyle 00:34:11 Are they yellow? Aren't they? They look really beautiful.

Richard Rainey 00:34:13 Mm-huh. So it's, it's a really pretty cover crop. So we've been playing with the cover crops, um, and you know, like the, you can have these parasitic nematodes, rape seeds, very good for that to help prevent those. Um, and, um, that's been, that's been a lot of fun. We had some animals, I had, uh, Indian runner ducks and, uh, we have a huge... I love runner ducks. They're hysterical. If you've never seen them, Google them and watch them they're pure black.

Janina Doyle 00:34:44 Do they run more than normal ducks?

Richard Rainey 00:34:46 They stand straight up and their little arms are standing out and they run around. They're hysterical. And so we had a flock of these ducks and they just brought such joy in their

prolific layers. So we had amazing eggs. The downside is you have to pay a lot of attention to them because we have, uh, a huge Fox population. And, uh, the Fox, the Fox, they liked them more than us, in fact, because they ate all of them, but we'll bring the ducks back. I think we'll bring the ducks back next year. I'm, I'm confident we'll have the ducks.

Janina Doyle 00:35:21 And I suppose then that also helps with the soils in a way, because I know you're limiting the tractor use. So then you're not getting the compression. You've got the turnips going down, creating more air, and then the animals go around kind of moving the soil a little bit as well, don't they, but in a much more sensitive way. And then also eating away at some other kind of weeds, and doing other stuff, things we don't want.

Richard Rainey 00:35:44 And I think there's another component, which is when you go in the vineyard and you, and you have the animals in the vineyard and you have the people in the vineyard that are watching the animal, everybody's happier and, and you feel it. I mean, you, you can't be in a bad mood when you go into the vineyards and you see these black ducks running around you.

Janina Doyle 00:36:03 I don't feel like I'm in a bad mood now just thinking about it.

Richard Rainey 00:36:07 I, I, so I think there's a lot of stuff, you know, that we, we don't necessarily, it's not quantifiable, but we know it's it's right. And I think that's one of them. And, um, in regards to the tractor use, I mean, I, I have a, uh, producer from Alsace that I had immense respect for, Olivier Humbrecht and, uh...

Janina Doyle 00:36:28 Ah, well, yeah, mm-hmm.

Richard Rainey 00:36:29 Yeah, just one of the great guys. And, um, this is years ago, sitting, talking over dinner and he had just started using some, uh, horses. And we had this discussion about, you know, the, the cost of a tractor over its life and the cost of a horse versus how much it accomplishes. And, and like from an economical perspective, has anybody ever compared the two and, and we had this, you know, long discussion and he said, you know, um, tractors are just too heavy. And he's like, I would love to see tractors that were lighter and that stuck in my head. So, uh, being a, um, the, you know, the fella that I am, I, last year, I, I was mowing my vineyards with a lawn tractor and needless to say, my neighbors thought I was out of my mind. But, but it was a wet year and I could drive my, I literally brought my tractor from my house and with the mower deck and I put it all the way up as high as I could, but it was a wet year. So I could mow the grass. It was growing like stinking mad. You know, we had to mow all the time because it became very tall and, ah, it was just horrible. So I'm out there on my stinking tractor, like a goofball. But I, I really thought a lot about this, this idea of compaction more and more. And so this year I I'm purchasing another tractor that is smaller and its use is gonna be for these kind of things when the vineyard is maybe a bit wet, but we want to get in there and we want to do a light spray, maybe a preventative spray that doesn't need a big spray or a heavy duty. Maybe I can use this lighter implement for, for more, more task in the vineyard instead of using my big tractor. So we'll see if it works.

Janina Doyle 00:38:23 Toy tractors, love it.

Richard Rainey 00:38:25 Toy tractors. Yeah.

Janina Doyle 00:38:26 Toy tractors. Now, where would we be without me tasting some of your delicious wine? So what we're going to do is, I'm assuming you don't have a bottle with you of the, the Classique dry Riesling, or do you?

Richard Rainey 00:38:38 Which, which vintage do you have there?

Janina Doyle 00:38:41 I'm on 2020, the current, the brand new release.

Richard Rainey 00:38:43 Ohhhhhhhh, look at you. You must must know somebody. Do you know somebody?

Janina Doyle 00:38:48 I do. I don't wanna tell you who I know. I do. I know you, um, I worked, I pulled some strings and I do have the current 2020 vintage, which is not here in the UK. Everybody you can find, I think 2017 in the UK at the moment.

Richard Rainey 00:39:04 So maybe the nineteens are, um, the, well, I'm sorry, the twenties leave the states next Thursday for France. And then, uh, they'll be available in Europe, that you'll have the twenties. So every, all, all of the older vintages should be gone and then you'll be onto the twenties in the UK. So...

Janina Doyle 00:39:25 So, you know, everyone just needs to get excited, but you know, I, I happen to have got my hands on it. So this is, you know, this is your Classique. So this is Riesling from lots of different vineyards, isn't it? Rather than a precise selection.

Richard Rainey 00:39:36 Selection. Yeah, exactly. Exactly. So we have, um, I don't know, in 2020 we made, um, in all, 14 different bone dry Rieslings, Um, 13 of those were from individual sites or, uh, as we say, lieu-dit, small sites. Now what is Classique? Classique is at least one barrel from every site. And this is always our most important wine because it's a snapshot of the work we do here within this eight mile stretch that we focus on. Uh, it's a snapshot of the vintage. It's a snapshot of Forge, and this has always been the, the wine that, um, well, not unlike Louis's kind of Côtes du Rhône right? It's the wine that is the most available throughout the, the Europe and the US. But also for us, it's very important because it's the introduction to Forge. So we've, uh, we make it the same as all the other wines. It's exactly the same, uh, the production. There's not a separate production or anything like that. So what you have is essentially just a little bit of a whole bunch of different sites to give you a true expression.

Janina Doyle 00:40:56 Do you know? It is classic Riesling for me, it has such beautiful like lemon and orange zest going on. And it has almost this nice kind of a slight honey note and like even a ginger nut finish. Super, super fresh. You've got some lovely texture. I'm assuming you do a little bit of Lees aging or Bâtonnage with these wines.

Richard Rainey 00:41:20 Sure. Uh, yes, we're all, we're texture junkies.

Janina Doyle 00:41:24 These are very textural

Richard Rainey 00:41:25 We like, we, we love textured whites, textured, reds. Um, I love the ability of Riesling to have the aromatics of, of quince, of apricot, of confiture, of, you know, uh, lemon and, and Mandarin orange, like all these amazing aromas. But then to have the texture that maybe you find in Burgundy where you have this round sexy, enjoyable, in the mid palate for me. And then the finish of mineral and freshness and saltiness. Saltiness is, salinity is a key for us. Um, acid is just acid, but when

you have this salinity, uh, it's really interesting. And so those combinations is what gets well, it's what gets us very excited because it's, it's unique to the, it's unique to the Finger Lakes. It's unique to, to this place. Is to have the ability to have this massive ripening where we pick in mid, uh, mid-October into November. But end up with 12 and a half degrees alcohol. And then on top of it, have this level of extract and richness in the absence of sugar is crazy. It's it's just, it's fantastic.

Janina Doyle 00:42:49 It is. It's so I dunno, I was just gonna use the word vibrant and I'm looking on the back. Actually. I love what you've done on the back of the bottles. There is actually a very simple but easy tasting note. You've put Mandarin orange, Cardomon, Vibrant, and it's certainly that. Very, very alive, very energetic. I get, it's all about citrus and orange notes for me. So yeah, the fact that you've put Mandarin totally comes out and there is, I guess, on the palate, more grapefruit and yet salted grapefruit. Not that I ever put salt on my grapefruit, but I'm I'm, I am getting it. You've nudged me in that direction, but I, I feel it that, and the salinity finishes, but it is, it's also saline slightly but spicy. It's lovely.

Richard Rainey 00:43:32 Yeah. It's um, so you know, the, the mother rock here in the Finger Lakes is, is this shale. And when this shale was, uh, created during the Devonian period, when this region was south of the equator, you also had shallow seas where you had salt deposits, right? Now we still have active salt mines, active, right now underneath Seneca lake, as a salt mine, that is a processing sea salt, essentially, as we speak. And there's one underneath Cayuga Lake and up the road Syracuse, um, was called salt city because all of the salt from the region flowed through Syracuse. And so I don't know if it's me and being overly romantic, but I, but salt is, it's a part of it's part of the place here, you know, and I was with a journalist friend last year and, uh, during covid and he came up to visit and he convinced me to open up all the Rieslings we've ever made. And at the end of the tasting, he said...

Janina Doyle 00:44:40 You didn't mind.

Richard Rainey 00:44:41 I, I, I didn't mind. He said, you know, it's amazing, Cause it's not just acid, you have this, and at the same time we looked at each other and we said, salt. It's it's such an interesting component of the region that gives a freshness that's different than acid.

Janina Doyle 00:44:58 Well, it's, it's beautiful. Now I did look on your website and I believe all of those of you in America, lucky you, this is only \$20. Um, so yay for you. Not so yay for us. Once you get it transported all the way across and all of our taxes, et cetera. But this bottle in the UK is £31.50 for everybody. So, and I know that Noble green wines is selling the 2017 vintage. So go across and, and go and pick up some of that. Cause then the sooner we get through that, we'll be onto the 2020. And you can try this one.

Richard Rainey 00:45:33 You're good. You're good. Well, it's amazing. I get these, uh, great notes, uh, from people in England all the time. Like, Hey, I'm having your 2017. And honestly I'm like, lucky you because uh...

Janina Doyle 00:45:45 Riesling ages beautifully, so.

Richard Rainey 00:45:48 Oh, and this wine that you're having, do me a favor, you opened it today. Drink it over the next four or five days and you're going to see...

Janina Doyle 00:45:57 That's gonna be hard.

Richard Rainey 00:45:59 We should have sent more than, uh, more than three bottles. Um, watch the evolution in day three and day four is when the wine comes alive. Do the experiment. And you're gonna, you're gonna be amazed at how they come alive. It's really, it's quite fascinating.

Janina Doyle 00:46:12 Love it.

Janina Doyle 00:46:17 So the energy continues next week. Make sure you tune in. We're gonna be talking more about their Lieu-dit, also known as climats, which is basically those small areas with very specific characteristics. We're gonna be talking about them being featured in the Wine Spectator as one of the top 100 wines. Touching on some pretty horrendous vintages for Richard. And we will go way more in depth on Seneca lake. Now to finish off, I have a wine quote as always. And one of my dear listeners, Mark Drendel has sent me in a quote. So guys do that for me, that makes my life so much easier. I don't actually have to look for a quote. And this one is from Ernest Hemingway in his book, A farewell to arms. And the main character that we're speaking about wine says:

“Wine is a grand thing. It makes you forget all the bad.”

Well, certainly I think that's valid for this conversation. I think Richard's done an incredible job of us forgetting all the bad. I imagine you are all ready to go out and find one of their dry Rieslings and Mark, thank you for sending me that quote. So everybody have an amazing week. Thank you so much for listening. Make sure you've subscribed. You've liked the podcast, shared the podcast, written me a comment if you can on apple podcast and until next week, cheers to you.