

Interview with: Michael Lamborn
Interviewed by: Tim Faye
Transcriber: Natalie Nelson
[Interview 1: 11-4-04]

Faye: It is 9:53 and we are conducting an interview with Mike Lamborn of Lamborn Wine Company.

1-00:00:05

Lamborn: Good Morning.

1-00:00:06

Faye: Good Morning, Mike. How are you doing?

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Lamborn: I'm great how are you guys today?

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Faye: Good

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Lamborn: Now, Natalie can't talk but she looks like she's fine. Yeah, okay, she's nodding, okay.

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Faye: Okay, let's get started here with a little background. 1-00:00:19

Lamborn: Okay

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Faye: Where were you born?

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Lamborn: You'll be amazed. I was born in Berkeley, California, 1946, September 9, 7:05 am. I made that part up. I don't really know what time it was. 1-00:00:39

Faye: Now, where did you grow up?

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Lamborn: I grew up basically in Oakland. I was born at Alta Bates. But we lived on Chabot Road in Oakland which was the Rockridge district until I was thirteen and then we moved to Eucalyptus Road which was half in Berkeley and half in Oakland so at that point I could have gone to Berkeley High but because I had gone all through the Oakland schools already and my friends were Oakland school guys and girls I stayed in the Oakland system.

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Faye: So what high school did you go to then?

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Lamborn: High school?

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Faye: Yeah

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Lamborn: I went to Oakland Technical High on Broadway. The Bulldogs.

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Faye: Did religion ever have a role in your life growing up in Oakland?

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Lamborn: Religion, that's a good question and the answer is going to be funny. No not really, but my parents thought that I should have religion although my parents didn't have religion. Is that the typical parenting thing? So on Sunday they sent me down to the United Presbyterian Church on College Avenue for Sunday school. And I went with other young friends whose parents felt the same way and we sometimes went and we sometimes didn't go. But we usually showed up near the end for candy. There was always candy for the kids who went to Sunday school. So it was not a true religious experience. And then secondly we lived right across the street from Saint Albert's Seminary, a Catholic Seminary, and most of our neighbors were Catholics and my mother who didn't really have a real grip on religion thought that Catholicism was bad because every Catholic family in our neighborhood had far more children then she could fathom was practical. So we didn't have a lot of religious influence at home, although my parents were great people, I don't mean to {paint?} them. They were very thoughtful, kind, caring people so they weren't formally religious. 1-00:03:20

Faye: Just going back to education. What did you do after you graduated from Oakland Tech?

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Lamborn: Oh boy. Well that's not very impressive. I was not a student ever in my life. Well I shouldn't say ever but all of my earlier formable years I was a goof-off, I wasn't a student. And as a result of being a goof-off I didn't get a real good basic foundation in reading, writing and arithmetic. So graduating from Oakland Tech was not a difficult task because the student body was such that the standards weren't all that high. So I went to Merit Collage, junior college after Tech. And I think Merit is now Laney College but I didn't really have much more of a focus there then I did at Tech, so consequently my grades were rather borderline. I graduated in 1964 from Tech, so the Vietnam War, if you could call it a war, was a big deal in 1965 when I was at Laney and I was very high on the draft list. And so because I'd grown up in Oakland and Berkeley and spent years on the Bay, I was a sailing instructor at the aquatic park in Berkeley and did a lot of things down on the water, I though what a logical thing for me to do would be to join the Coast Guard. I could rescue beautiful young women in San Francisco bay who were stranded or something

like that. So I did. I enlisted in the Coast Guard. I wasn't sensible enough to withdrawal from Merit College I just disappeared so I had 14 units of "F" as I later discovered. But I joined the Coast Guard I enlisted for four years went to basic training in Alameda. I spent my first 13 months much to my surprise on an isolated duty station in the Aleutians in Alaska. I thought I was going to go to Tahoe or Monterey or San Francisco, but it never happens that way. So anyways, after I came back from Alaska, Terry and I were married and I had three years or a little less than three years to still go so I went back to school at night and we then lived in an apartment in Concord. I went to school at night at Diablo Valley Junior Collage and got an Associate Arts degree, and then upon discharge from the Coast Guard went to San Francisco State Collage and got my Bachelors degree. Pretty impressive, huh?

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Faye:

Just going back to the Coast Guard, was that experience beneficial in any aspect of your life going on to the wine industry?

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Lamborn:

I don't know, I mean I think it was beneficial in general. I was immature and not focused as a 19 year old and if the service doesn't do anything it certainly teaches you how to grow up. And so yeah I think it was good, it wasn't the most fun thing I ever did, but looking back it was a good experience.

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Faye:

In what way?

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Lamborn:

Just helped me to be on my own, be away from home, to be responsible for my own decisions. The military doesn't treat you like your parents do, they don't have that same love and caring for you so if you don't make the right decisions or act the right way they treat you appropriately. So it teaches you to be a little more mature.

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Faye:

What are your hobbies outside the wine industry?

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Lamborn:

Oh, hobbies. I don't really have time for a lot of hobbies. I like to fish, we like hiking, backpacking, camping, traveling. Don't have time to do most of those things but someday I will.

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Faye:

If you could just tell me your wife's name and any children that you may have and their names and ages.

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Lamborn:

My wife goes by Terry spells it like a boy, T-E-R-R-Y.

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Faye:

You don't have to say her age, just your children's ages.

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Lamborn:

Oh I'm not giving you her age. Her formal name is Therese, T-H-E-R-E-S-E, which is French. We have two sons: Matt, who is 32 years old next month, December 8th. Matt is a landscape architect, land planner in Benicia. His wife Lori was an Orinda girl. He went all through school with her didn't know that she was ever going to be the one but interestingly enough she was. They have a little daughter Mary, who is 10 months old. They live in Martinez and they are in the process of moving to Yountville. So they are going to be in the Valley. Matt, because of his agricultural kind of professional vent will be doing the vineyard eventually, which is great. Anyways so then Brian, our youngest son is 30, will be 30 in May. Brian is married also to an Orinda girl, Sarah. Sarah in the next week and a half is expecting their first child whose name will be Hana, H-A-N-A, named after the little town in Hawaii in Maui. They live in Davis, Sarah is a second year, she is taking a leave of absence, but she is a Vet student at Davis. And Brian does all our sales and marketing and distribution. 1-00:10:12

Faye:

When did you first get interested in the wine industry?

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Lamborn:

1970 was probably the beginning, and it was really as a result of my father's interest which kind of came upon him suddenly as well. I can recall as a young married man Terry and I, when we consumed wine- wine was pretty much imported from Portugal, Lancers was the product, and looking back it was really a kind of a harmless little wine, but that was our first entry into the wine consumption arena.

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Faye:

Okay, can you talk about Robert Lamborn and what influence he had on your life and your family's life? 1-00:11:13

Lamborn:

Oh, my dad?

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Faye:

Yes.

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Lamborn:

Yeah, my grandfather was also Robert. My dad was wonderful. He was one of those dads who was pals with all my friends. You know it's interesting you think of all the dads that, you know, fathers of friends and few of them probably fall into the category where you really feel an affection towards them, but my dad was always a buddy to everybody. And he loved young people. He was great at interacting with young people, and he was that way right up until his death this past April. He had friends that ranged from very young to very old and he was able to develop a rapport with all of them, it was great. My dad was a loving father. I can remember once years and years ago he said to me, "I don't care if you love me, but I want you to respect me." And so he was a taskmaster, he had goals. I can remember once when I had had

about 6 moving violations in the automobile he took my license away and cancelled my insurance for a year. That was in my junior and senior year in high school which made me- Terry and I were dating at the time and most of my buddies would look in their rear view mirror and see Terry and me in the back seat. We were double daters. But he was a great dad. When I was growing up we fished a lot and sailed a lot we spent a lot of time together he was a huge influence.

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Faye:

In the Lamborn Family Wine biography it says that he worked as a Special Agent in San Francisco. Can you tell me exactly who he worked for and what he did?

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Lamborn:

No, and it's not because I won't tell you it's just because I don't know a lot. My dad was a licensed private investigator and he specialized in terrorism. Those days terrorism wasn't like it is today; it was a group for example like the Symbionese Liberation Army, the ones that were responsible for kidnapping Patty Hearst. The Black Panthers in Berkeley. So he was an expert in those kinds of organizations and groups and he did work with the Federal Bureau Investigation. I'm not sure if he worked with the Central Intelligence Agency, I suspect perhaps he did. But these are things that I don't really have a lot of information about, but he was very active in those areas for years.

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Faye:

How did he get interested in the wine industry?

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Lamborn:

My mother and father had been married 25 years and in 1969 they divorced. And a friend of my father's an old Berkeley guy by the name of Dave {Burg?}, and he was a Cal guy incidentally. Dave {Burg?} had a once acre parcel up in Angwin, how Dave got to Angwin I'm not certain, but Dave called my dad up and basically said, "Bob I know you don't have a life anymore so why don't you come up on Saturday and visit me." And my dad probably agreed with him so he drove to Angwin and visited Dave on this little one acre parcel. I'll try to shorten this up a little bit: Dave sold him the once acre parcel and Dave took that money and went up the road up Summit Lake Drive where we are, and bought 5 acres. Dad used to spend weekends there, he would drive up there, and cut the grass, trim the trees, much to the chagrin of the locals he actually dug up native things, native plants and transplanted them because he didn't like where mother nature put them, and so in about 8 or 9 months he had this little one acre looking like golden gate park, and then there was not much more to do. So Dave said, "Well, Bob why don't you come up and look at my five acres." And so dad did, Dave sold him the 5, dad sold the one, Dave went up the road further and bought 25 acres. So to shorten this a little bit more, eventually Dave sold my dad the 25 acres and Dave went up the road and bought 40 at the end of the road. So on this 25-acre parcel there had been grapes planted back in the 1860's by Italian immigrants

and they had not been tended since prohibition in the 1920's. So they were mostly dead but not entirely dead. My dad in his typical fashion pruned them and he watered them and he fertilized them and many of them came back to life. And so that sort of started this whole great idea. I mean this wasn't a master plan, this sort of happened as we went along, or as he went along. And that would have probably have been 1972. In 1973 he called me one day all excited and said, "Oh Mike, there's this great piece of property across the road. You and Terry are going to buy it!" and I said, "Oh great dad that's wonderful." So we got off the phone and I turned to Terry and said, "Honey, were going to buy a piece of property in Angwin." Well we had a one year old and very little money and she kind of went, "Well, what?!?" Anyways, long story, we did finally buy it and so that's kind of how that side of the road evolved, so my dad was on the west side of Summit Lake Drive, and we were on the east side of Summit Lake Drive but within walking distance of one another.

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Faye:

The Lamborn Family Wine Company is a self- described family business. What makes it that way and how is that atmosphere for you?

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Lamborn:

Well to give you a little background on that, when we had our first vintage was 1992, I'm sorry, 1982, 1982. And when we were trying to decide how we were going to label our wine one of the ideas was Lamborn Family Vineyards. And we went to friends and associates far and wide to say, "What do you think of that idea? Is that a good idea?" Most people said, "Family sounds like you're making it in a garage, doesn't sound like a good business name." Before we thought about it we thought, "Heck with it were going to do it anyway." So we went ahead with that name. And at the time it was basically my father and I. And of course now a days 2004, I don't know how many family wineries there are but there's a lot of them. So obviously it's caught on. But you know, we literally do operate it as a family, we grow the grapes, we for example have a wine maker, who's not a member of the family, but in every other respect all the players really have been always and continue to be family members. So it truly is, unlike some of the, many of the other wineries that say Dodo Family Winery or Dodo Family Vineyards, and there may be a family member involved but it's a corporation, so we really are a cottage craft family owned and operated business.

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Faye:

What specifically do you do at Lamborn Family Wine Company? 1-00:20:28

Lamborn:

Pretty near everything, including taking out the garbage. Well I guess, lets see. My week is basically split between the vineyard and the office. So, you know, today for example, doing invoicing, doing government reports. When you're in the alcohol business reports to the government both at the state and the federal level are numerous and you have to do them monthly. So I do the

administration, for example we're working now on label and package design for the Cabernet that we're going to be bottling next year. It doesn't seem like a big deal, but it's a big deal. It's not really a big deal from the importance of what you end up with but just the process of getting there is hard. We're bottling our 2003 Zinfandel in January and so were doing back labels for that. The front labels don't change but the back label every year changes so you have to write labels. So shipping and billing and collections, reports, website. Brian, our son, does most of the website stuff. You are continually updating that and working with that so there's the admin side and there's the vineyard side. Now this time of year the vineyard is not as demanding by a long shot, cause it is from let's say February when you prune to until October or so, September, October when you pick. But even still there's activities in the vineyard, there's tree trimming and grass cutting and there is erosion control and fertilizations and trellis repair, stuff that you don't get to during the growing season cause you're too busy doing other stuff. So that keeps us busy this time of year and during the growing season it's high intensity, I mean you've got irrigation on a regular basis, and it's not the kind of thing you can say, "I'll do it next week." When you've got to do it, you've got to do it. So irrigation, mowing of the grasses, weed control. In the spring all the vines develop little suckers, little shoots that come off the lower part of the trunk so you have to walk up and down each row, they come off easy but its just a bending process. You're suckering positioning shoots, your spraying sulfur for mildew. Basically, Brian does all sales and marketing, distribution so I don't have to do that. And eventually he's going to do all this stuff and I'm just going to watch. Not really, but anyways. So Brian will eventually run the business and Matt will run the vineyard and I will be an assistant to both of them. 1-00:24:07

Faye: What kind of varieties of wines does Lamborn Family Wine Company offer?
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Lamborn: Our first vintage, 1982 was Zinfandel. And the next vintage for us to release the 2002 vintage of Zinfandel will be our 20th year of Zinfandel. So that's been our flagship wine. And in 2001 Terry and I planted four acres of Cabernet Sauvignon and in 2003 we picked our first grapes, which that's the package I was just showing you, so we'll bottle that cabernet in 2005 in July and well be selling that wine in 2006. So our two grape varieties will be, or I should be are Zinfandel and Cabernet. 1-00:25:04

Faye: How many cases of wine do you guys produces every year on the average?

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Lamborn: It varies, Tim, because of Mother Nature. It's amazing how much influence Mother Nature has on the whole package. We average in the Zinfandel we average 1,000 cases, some years its 700 cause we've had to drop a lot of fruit for various reasons. In other years it could be 1,200, so about 1,000 cases on average. Our first vintage of Cabernet will be 250 cases our second vintage

will be 560 cases and next years vintage 2005 theoretically should be like 625 to 650. So if we have 1,300 cases of Zin, if we had a big Zin year, and we had 650 cases of Cab we would be just hovering around the 2,000 case mark.

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Faye: There's a lot of variety it seems like going on with Mother Nature and all the different variables. How do you cope with that?

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Lamborn: Church, every Sunday. You just do what you got to do. You can't control it and you can't lose sleep over it. You know for example our current vintage of Zinfandel the 2001 vintage is almost 1,200 cases. Good size vintage and a very good quality wine. 2002 was a much more difficult growing year. We reduced the fruit load in the vineyard substantially before harvest. We were talking July, and we decided in July we weren't going to have a very warm year so we took like 60 percent of the fruit off. And we ended up with great quality, but we ended up with 606 cases. Half essentially. In 2003, again kind of a challenging year, little more fruit, 700 and some odd cases. 2004 we're up. We're going to have about 900 cases in 2004. So it makes it hard, it makes it hard from a cash flow standpoint, your bills go on your costs go up, in this particular market I don't think wine price increase is a prudent thing, so we haven't raised our prices and don't intend to. So you go to the bank in years when things are tight. The Cabernet will be for us a pivotal issue. Cabernet just is a much- fiscally, it's a much more productive product. The Zinfandel retails for \$30 the cabernet will retail for probably \$80, and the cost of production is not that much more. It's a little bit more, but the margins of profit on Cabernet are significantly better. So that hopefully will be for us a pivotal time in terms of the business side of it. 1-00:28:38

Faye: I have no idea how you do that. That's got to be unbelievable.

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Lamborn: It's hard

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Faye: Yeah

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Lamborn: Its hard, you want to make a reasonable profit and you want to have money in the bank so you can replace the truck when its old or the tracker or replace vines that have died or just typical stuff, so there are wine producers who are selling their wines for \$150, \$200 a bottle, I think that's ridiculous. They can get it obviously, so it's not unfair from that standpoint. The margin of profit is so amazing that why gouge like that, we think that its better to be a reasonably priced high quality, good value product, and when we have the Cabernet we'll be fine, we'll be fine. The ups and downs won't affect us like they affect us now. 1-00:29:35

Faye: How many people work at Lamborn Family Wine Company and what are their different jobs and tasks just in a given period?

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Lamborn: Well of course there's myself and there's Terry and there's Brian and Matt, because he's gainfully employed full time, comes to harvest so he participates. He's participating more and more on the vineyard and when he gets moved into Yountville that will increase. Heidi Barret, the wine maker. We have two gentlemen who give us substantial assistance every year. Mario Bazan who is a labor contractor and initially came to us as that, to provide us labor, but he has provided so much more than that, he is a wonderful, wonderful resource and so he gives me incredible guidance and direction as well as labor. So Mario is involved with us during the growing season primarily and then another gentleman by the name of Ben Henry, and Ben is a Viticulture Consultant and Ben's expertise is basically vine nutrition and vine disease. It's amazing how important that can be and I should include in that pests and bugs. For example he visits a vineyard every couple of weeks during the growing season and if he finds pests, like some of these pests are very hard to detect it really takes an expert eye to find them. So Ben provides us that kind of guidance and advice far beyond my realm of expertise. Ben and Mario and then Mario's crew of course when pruning, harvest. Terry and I try to do as much of the daily, weekly, monthly tasks ourselves as we can, but when we get behind or pruning and harvesting tasks have to be done by a crew. So well have, depending, I don't know how many people were at harvest the day you were there, Natalie, but it was like 12 or 14. So you know that's sporadic.

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Faye: It is often said that the quality of wine depends on the quality of grapes grown. What makes the grapes from the Howell Mountain atmosphere so special?

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Lamborn: Well I think it's a variety of things. Each and every year the influence of those different aspects changes but the soil plays an important part for grape growing, well drained soils so that the grape roots aren't wet all the time is an advantage. Being up on the mountain with a lot of volcanic rock in the soil, the soils drain incredibly well. Profile soils, we actually do soil analysis, so you determine the amount of nutrient in the soils you determine the density of the soils, all these aspects play a part, and so soil quality. Howell Mountain interestingly enough is an extinct volcano and everything on the north side of town which is the cauldron, where we are on the north side is all loam, red volcanic, akin loam. On the south side of Angwin, Howell Mountain the soils are what they call tufa, which is the ash component of the volcanic eruption. So interestingly enough the mountain has two very distinct soil profiles. So soil plays a part, water plays a part. Perhaps one of the most influential characteristics of Howell Mountain is the weather. Because we're at 2,000- actually our case 2,200 feet of elevation, our daytime temperatures in the growing season are about on average 10 degrees cooler than the valley and the nighttime temperatures are about 15 degrees warmer than the valley. So in a

24-hour period the high and the low range of our temperatures are much smaller than they are in the valley. I believe the vines respond well to that. We also get- and it's hard to calculate this, but we also get considerably more sunlight which most people agree play a big part of grape development, because we're up high we get an earlier sunrise, but also because we're up high we don't get the morning fog. Napa Valley, not every day of course, but many days starts out in the fog, and that fog can last until 9:30 or 10:30 in the morning, so we've already gotten 2 or 3 or 4 hours of sunlight by the time they get their first rays of sun, so that's plays a part as well.

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Faye:

After the grapes are picked how long does it take approximately to get the grapes into the bottle to make the wine?

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Lamborn:

Well it varies by variety. Zinfandel, when you take it to the winery and you crush it and it goes into a tank, it usually will soak for 24 hours without anything being done to it except stabilizing it. And then the next day, the following day it's inoculated with yeast. It can take anywhere from 7 to 14 days to ferment. After it's fermented it's pressed. After it's pressed it goes to the barrel. So zinfandel will be in the barrel for approx 18 months. And then we'll bottle it. We typically bottle in January. And that wine will sit in the bottle before it's released normally until October of that same year. So it's November of 2004 now and we have not yet released the 2002 vintage but we will in fairly short order. Now cabernet takes an additional year. So cabernet is a longer process.

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Faye:

Is there anything that you do specifically in the wine to get a better reaction from the grape after it's been picked? After the grapes has been picked is there anything you do to it, depending on the specific wine, in the process of getting it in the bottle that you guys might do at Lamborn?

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Lamborn:

No, I don't think so, Tim. Again what the wine maker does with each vintage is pretty much determined by that year's fruit, some years are ideal. Like 2004 was an ideal year for us. The fruit was fabulous there were no challenges in either the vineyard or the wine making process. The wine maker will, based on the fruit characteristics, development of that chemistry, and the ripeness and the flavors, she will do different things in the winery to achieve her goals, and every year may be slightly different. She follows pretty much the same format but has to make adjustments, like we do in the vineyard. Every vintage is distinct. We, meaning myself and Terry and Brian and Matt, don't get very involved in the wine making process. We have an incredibly talented wine maker and it would be ridiculous to say the least- I'm interested and we do follow her around sometimes, but for me to say, "Oh I don't think we should do it this way," would be crazy, because I don't have a clue what she's doing.

1-00:39:05

Faye: Speaking of wine makers, who is Heidi Barret?

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Lamborn: Heidi Barret, from my perspective, is probably one of the most renowned wine makers in the world today. She's got many distinctions that give her that reputation. Robert Parker, for example in the wine pundant arena is probably considered the foremost wine guru in the United States and perhaps in Europe as well. Robert Parker has given Heidi Barret four 100-point perfect scores for four different wines, which is unheard of. She's the only wine maker to have received four. So she's developed her reputation based on that. The qualities of the wines she makes they always- I mean they don't always score 100, but they get great reviews and they're great wines. And you know she has worked long and hard to develop that reputation. But she's a special gal.

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Faye: How did you get her to come to Lamborn?

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Lamborn: I don't know. We made a list. In 1996 I had retired from Yellow Fright Systems, which is where I spent my career. I actually retired in 1991 and I had done a couple of things between 1991 and 1995 which I was finished doing in 1995, and in 1996 I decided that I wanted to get into the wine business full time, not just from the growing but also get involved in the wine production and sales again. My father and I and his wife Janet and Terry and I all got together and decided we'd form Lamborn Family Wine Company, LLC. Which we did, and we concluded that we needed a wine maker, we needed a special quality wine maker in order to fulfill our goals. We made a list of all the wine makers that might be categorically the kind of people we wanted and Heidi was at the top of the list. Friends of ours who actually had their wines made by Heidi said, "I don't think she's got time, I think you're wasting your time to talk to her." But we called her and asked her if she'd come visit us in the vineyard, and she did, and we walked around and I asked her if she would consider making our wine and she said, "Sure." I mean it was just almost too simple. So after she picked me up off the ground, we proceeded to make an arrangement and move forward and that would have been in 1997, like probably July or August of 1997 and so the fruit of that vintage 1997 was Heidi's first Lamborn vintage. 1-00:42:43

Faye: What about Heidi is that gives her the ability to make such a fine wine?

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Lamborn: Well that's a great question. Some of the better wine makers as well as some of the better chefs in the world are women. I think women have a certain sensitivity perhaps to stuff that men don't have. Heidi is an artist as well, she paints, she scuba dives, and she's a woman with a lot of different interests. I think that all her different interests like art, for one, plays a big part in her wine making. I think wine making is not all science there is art involved, and

so she uses kind of a combination of modern technology and traditional wine making techniques and so I think she's just found a good approach to grapes and to wine and I'm sure her palate, her ability to detect nuances in wine that are positive and negative and make the corrections plays a big part in that. I don't know, she is magical and I'm not exactly sure how she gets it. 1-00:43:57

Faye: Just going back to the bottling process, at which point is the wine actually poured into the Lamborn bottle? Its 18 months after and then it's just stored, and maybe just tell me how that works.

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Lamborn: Well after the wine is crushed and fermented and pressed, it goes to barrels. And we have a cage as they call it in the winery, that's bonded by the government by the Trade and Tax Bureau; it used to be the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. So this cage is long and narrow, and our barrel are typically stacked 6 or 7 high and they'll have 100 barrels, I think the cage holds about 100 barrels, so that's our bonded area. So after the wines been pressed it goes into the oak barrels. Every vintage gets 20 percent new oak and 80 percent what we call experienced oak, old barrels. And it then sits there in those barrels, and it gets processed during the time its sitting there we have to keep filling the barrels up cause there's evaporation that takes place through the wood, you have to clean the barrels out periodically, rack the wine as they call it. So it does get handled a little bit, but it pretty much just sits in those barrels for either 18 months or 24 months depending on whether its Cab or Zin. And then that period of time also changes based on the wine's development. The wine maker will say- sometimes Heidi has said to me, "Normally this wine would stay in the barrel another 3 months but I think it's got enough time in the barrel. Let's bottle it." Or she may say, "I don't think it's had enough time in the barrel; let's not bottle it for another 2 months." So once the wine is developed to the wine makers satisfaction, then it's filtered before it goes into the bottle and filtration removes any little microbial bugs that could created spoilage in the wine once its been bottled. Some wine makers like to bottle their wines unfiltered cause they think filtration takes stuff out of the wine. Heidi and I have discussed this in great length. And she doesn't believe that. She believes it takes stuff out that needs to come out. So it goes from the barrels into a tank, a holding tank. Actually between the barrels and the tank it gets filtered, goes in the holding tank and then the bottling line fills it up one bottle at a time. 1-00:47:02

Faye: Can you describe what the Lamborn Family Wine label looks like and if there's any significance that you had for marketing purposes or any other reason?

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Lamborn: Well of course, using the family name of the label sort of made it logical that we would use the family crest on the label. So we did pull the crest out of our

family genealogical stuff. I just happen to have a label right here. So we utilize the crest and the lion, which my grandfather described that lion as holding a Scotch bottle but actually it's a tiller of a ship I think, technically. So we just took the family crest and incorporated it with a branch and a couple of clusters of grapes. Kind of simple, kind of basic, same label we've had since our original vintage in 1982.

1-00:48:15

Faye: Who designed the label?

1-00:48:17

Lamborn: My dad did. There was a gal an office adjacent to his who I think was a graphic designer and I think she kind of helped him get good balance but he pretty much put it together. And as you can see from this, this is not a final deal, but were going with it. We're using the crest again with the Cabernet but were going to go with a significantly different looking package so Zinfandel and Cabernet will hopefully have some similarities that will draw the connection to people who recognize the name but they will not be the same looking package.

1-00:49:04

Faye: How much input do you think the label has? Is it more the name recognition or does the label have any play on the person buying it?

1-00:49:14

TURN OVER TAPE

Faye: The time is 10:40. We just flipped the tape and we will continue our interview with Mike Lamborn.

1-00:49:27

Lamborn: So your question, Tim, was how much influence does the label have on sales? In the restaurant I don't know that's its so influential cause people pick their wines off the list or they pick a wine based on the recommendation of the waiter, waitress or wine steward. But in the retail setting, and not much of our wine is in retail, we focus primarily on restaurants, but in the retail market the wine label I think is huge. Statistics say that women buy most of the wine retail, and they also through interview processes have determined and many of those purchases are label driven. People buy wines that they know if they want to have it and they've experienced it before. But if they're buying a wine they've never had before, unless they've read about it, they're probably going to pick it based on its appearance. 1-00:50:30

Faye: Who is the main distributor for Lamborn Family Wine?

1-00:50:37

Lamborn: Lamborn Family Wine Company.

1-00:50:40

Faye: Okay just moving on to marketing a little bit. Brian is in charge if marketing for the Lamborn Family Wine. What gives him that ability to do so?

1-00:50:52

Lamborn: Well I think that you know some people are marketers and sales people and other people aren't. He's got a personality, which makes him a good sales and marketing guy. But also he's got passion. He feels passionately about what we're doing and I think if you believe in your product that's huge. Brian spent a couple of years working for Anheuser- Busch, out of college, selling beer of all things, and if you can sell beer you can sell anything. It was baptism by fire. Because if you spend two years trying to sell beer and he did that in Portland and he did it in Denver, you've kind of pass the test, that's a tough sell. So when he started selling wine, and selling wine is not a push over, it's a very competitive market out there, but after beer I think he felt like he had died and gone to heaven. 1-00:52:07

Faye:

What's your demographic for people you want to sell wine to?

1-00:52:11

Lamborn: Well that's a great question. We always joke about older customers, and our membership, our direct sales, winery members as we call them, are people who stick with us year in and year out. It's a great market you develop a relationship weather it's over the Internet with email or if it's over the phone, they come visit you at the vineyard, there's a personal relationship. And those people are just as good as gold, they buy the wine year in and year out. It doesn't matter the economy is doing, it doesn't matter about anything. And so we kiddingly say when we get a member whose 79 years old, "Oh boy, we don't have a long future with this one." So if we get a guy your age we think, "Tim's going to be buying the wine long after I'm gone! We like this." So certainly our market is people who have the economic wherewithal, we're not really pricey but were not really cheap. And so we try to focus on places, restaurants or tastings where our constituency is people who are capable of affording a \$25 bottle of wine. And there's a huge growing market in the 25-39 year old range. I mean lots of young people are consuming wine, because it's sort of the shi-shi thing to do. But it's also healthy in a proper moderation. So that would really be our focus, people who we can count on being there for the next 10 or 20 years.

1-00:54:27

Faye: What strategies do you use to try and market your wine?

1-00:54:32

Lamborn: Well I think part of our strategy is pricing. I mean we try to price ourselves as a good value. Quality, we use the Howell Mountain appellation which amongst wine consumers is a recognizable benefit. We use Howell Mountain

as part of our marketing strategy and we certainly use Heidi Berret as part of our marketing strategy. And then we take that further to the fact that we just developed a new slogan, Brian's got a new slogan, and it's basically "If you want it done right, do it yourself." And the fact that we spend, Terry and I spend, I figured the other day we spend about 2300 hours every year in the vineyard. In the vineyard working, and not sitting on the porch watching, so I think the fact that we're involved and we're involved intimately with all aspects is part of our strategy as well. 1-00:55:39

Faye: Move on to just some media aspects of the wine industry. Has Lamborn Family Wine Company ever entered a wine tasting competition?

1-00:55:49

Lamborn: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

1-00:55:51

Faye: Which ones?

1-00:55:53

Lamborn: Well actually we've entered pretty much all of them and there are hundreds of them each year. All the big cities, Dallas and Atlanta and New York, they have these events, wine and food events and early on we pretty much submitted wine to as many competitions as we could. And we got a little bit of positive feedback with a silver medal here or a gold metal here which caused us to want to be involved in more tastings, but we eventually evolved out of doing that. We don't submit wine to tastings anymore, or to competitions anymore because the field has gotten huge. In a way you can only compete to lose, its kind of a weird philosophy, you know that if you have a good quality product you need the recognition from the market place, not from the competition. But if you send your wine to a competition, and maybe the judge likes a different style of wine better and that gives you a poor rating then that it can hurt you. So we participate in tastings. Were doing, next week the Family Wine Makers of California has a tasting at Fort Mason in San Francisco, well be there Sunday and Monday pouring wine to consumers and to trade people. Next Thursday the 11th we're doing a tasting for the San Ramon Chamber of Commerce. Now there's an example of a market. San Ramon, Danville, Walnut Creek, there's a focal point for our kind of product, young, affluent people. So we'll go and pour wine there. Friday night Brain's pouring wine at Blackhawk Country Club. Again, that kind of focus is where we try to be. So we don't involve ourselves in competitions. Now every year, or almost every year Robert Parker, the guru I mentioned earlier will meet with Heidi and taste her wines. And so we typically every year get reviewed by Robert Parker, and Robert Parker, there are certain wines and styles he likes and there certain wines and styles he doesn't like. His scores reflect that. He likes Heidi Barret, he likes Heidi's wine styles, he has always given us really good reviews. And he can do more good then all the competitions combined.

1-00:58:45

Faye: Should buyers trust wine competitions?

1-00:58:48

Lamborn: Boy, I don't know. I think so, I mean I think that everybody's tastes are different, but I don't think the tastings and the competitions are rigged, I mean there may be a little politics involved but I don't think it's the dominant factor. So if a wine gets a gold medal at a competition it probably is a pretty darn good wine. I would say that that's a probably fairly reliable yardstick.

1-00:59:24

Faye: Do you think that a magazine like the *Wine Spectator* does the wine industry justice?

1-00:59:29

Lamborn: No I don't, actually. I mean you have to give wine spectator credit for being the preeminent wine magazine, and they've held that position for a number of years. They have great influence, huge influence. If tomorrow Lamborn Family Vineyards got a profile, a photograph and an article, our phones would ring off the hook. There's no question that there's probably nights when I dream about this. But do I make an effort to court the *Wine Spectator*? I don't. Because we're categorically not- we're not their kind of news. They're selling the beautiful wineries and the pretty people and Europe. A lot of people complain that the *Spectator* is everything they can't afford to do. You got to eat here, you got to travel there. It's beautiful, its great to read about but most people are going, "I can't afford that." So it's a tough call, I criticize the *Spectator* in wine reviews and every month they do hundreds and hundreds and hundreds, their buying guide, hundreds of reviews. And I criticize them for two reasons, number one they don't review all the wines blind, so they know what they're tasting which may or may not influence them, I don't know. And then second thing is that they don't taste by panel, they taste individually. So if the guy who is tasting your wine doesn't like your variety or doesn't like your style, you're going to get a poor score, and I don't know that that's real democratic.

1-01:01:39

Faye: Do you read or acknowledge any other wine critics or magazines?

1-01:01:43

Lamborn: Oh yeah. I read the *Spectator*. You want to know what's going on. You want to know what they're saying and thinking. Robert Parker, absolutely. Steve Tanser is another wine guru who has a newsletter and sends it out, very respected wine guy. Dan Berger, I mean there's a lot of them and I do try to stay up on what wines are being reviewed and what kind of scores they're getting and what styles seem to be trendy. It's kind of important to know.

1-01:02:22

Faye: What grape disease scares you the most?

1-01:02:29

Lamborn:

Well I think that at the moment it is Pierce's Disease which is transmitted by the sharpshooter. And this is a bug, well there are two kinds of Sharpshooters, well there may be more, but there are two kinds that I'm aware of. Blue-green Sharpshooter, which has been in Napa Valley for years, but lives pretty much in the riparian, river ditch areas, and it doesn't have much flying capacity. And so it may affect, and infect the vines in the first couple of rows adjacent to its normal habitat. And Pierce's Disease they're just a carrier, they get it out of their normal habitat, and transmit it to the vine, and basically Pierce's Disease eventually chocks off the water to the vine and the vine dies. A cousin to the Blue-green, there's a Glassy-winged sharpshooter which originally came out of the southwest somewhere and has found its way into California starting in the south and working its way north. Napa County is a quarantine area, and there's a lot of research going on at the State and Federal level to combat Pierce's Disease, to find ways to eradicate it or to do all kinds of different things, but anyways, we don't have it in Napa County but they've found these Sharpshooters in Vacaville, they found them in Sonoma. So I don't know, its frightening and I don't know whether being up at 2,000 foot elevation would for us be an advantage, you know whether the Sharpshooter perhaps wouldn't do well at 2,200 feet. So we might have some advantage there, but it could decimate the valley.

1-01:04:34

Faye:

Is there anything you can personally do to try and prevent it? Any methods you can use to try and prevent it from effecting Lamborn?

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Lamborn:

No, you can't. Not to my knowledge, I mean the Sharpshooter it's dinky, it's dinky, so you can't for example put up screens. There are chemistries you can spray that will kill the bug, but they're harsh. And we really don't want to use harsh chemicals, plus the fact that were on all sides forested, and so if the sharp shooter took up residency in the forest, you could spray the vineyard and a week later they'd be back, or two weeks later they'd be back in the vineyard from the forest. So you know I don't know. I know they use predatory wasps now, they're releasing wasps that lay their eggs in the, I guess you call it the egg sack of the Sharpshooter, and so they actually eat the larva of the sharpshooter while it's still in the egg sack. So there are biological things that people do, a little hard to evaluate the results, but certainly you wouldn't just stand by, you'd do what you had to do otherwise you'd be out of business.

1-01:06:14

Faye:

Has Howell Mountain ever been effected by any diseases that you know, grape diseases?

1-01:06:18

Lamborn:

Not diseases like that. Spring Mountain on the other side of the valley, given the name "Spring" has a lot of water, and the Blue-green Sharpshooter

because they're a riparian bug, have caused problems up there. On Howell Mountain, just the normal things there's a pruning disease fungus called Eutypa, that gets into a pruning wound that can create die back in the vine. We have Eutypa up on the mountain. We get mites, if you don't control mites it can damage the vineyards. We have the bears, and we have the birds, and we have the turkeys, but those are things you can kind of deal with.

1-01:07:12

Faye: American was built upon the Puritan work ethic, which has typically gone against the movement of alcohol. From 1919 to 1933, alcohol was banned from the United States and destroyed the wine industry that existed during that time period. Are you concerned that anything like that might happen again in the United States?

1-01:07:31

Lamborn: We'll you always are concerned. The neo-prohibitionist movement in America is significant and I think a lot of it emanates from the Bible Belt, and those are old, deeply held beliefs about the product and how it affects human beings. And I can oddly enough sort of understand. I mean if you're honest about alcohol, we talk about wine is good for you in moderate amounts. The medical industry has acknowledged that wine is very beneficial. Two glasses a day might be what they'd recommend. But in reality the three of us can agree that we know, intimately know, of lots of people both grown up people and young people who abuse alcohol. Whether its wine or whether its beer or whether its spirits, whatever it is. For example, both of my boys were in fraternities. I know, I wasn't in a fraternity, but I know what goes on in fraternities and I am, I have to say that I am strongly opposed to the social behavior of fraternities and to a lesser degree I think sororities. But college men, in particular, are kind of loony. And I think alcohol plays far too large a role in their social life and you know the kind of things that happen. There's drunk driving there's hit and runs, there's broken windows and broken legs. So alcohol can be a seriously dangerous product. And I think that alcohol manufactures like us need to be very supportive of organizations like "Mothers Against Drunk Drivers". I mean I think, they get a little political at times, any organization does, but they were founded on a very, very good premise, and I think that drunk drivers are a danger to all of us. So anyway, there are lots of reasons for the neo-prohibitionists to object to alcohol, a lot of very legitimate reasons. There needs to be a national balance. America has gotten further and further away, I think, personal thing here, from responsibility, personal responsibility. You, Tim, if you go out and get drunk and drive into a building and hurt somebody, is it my fault that I made the wine that you got drunk on? I don't think so. But our nation, trial lawyers, and our nation are more inclined to blame the guy that built the car you drove, the guy that made the wine you drank. No one says "Tim" or "Mike, it's your

fault for being a jerk,” so there needs to be more responsibility placed on the individuals who abuse, whether its drugs or alcohol.

1-01:11:09

Faye:

Do you think that the legal age of drinking, 21, is a factor for that, and maybe if it was lowered it would teach people to drink more responsibly? What is your opinion on that?

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Lamborn:

Boy, I don't know. I don't think young people are responsible by their very nature. I think that it's an oxymoron, you can't be young and responsible I just don't think it happens. In Europe young people drink but it's a cultural thing, their parents drink wine with dinner they were probably given wine with dinner at a very young age. Europeans look at wine as a food, American's look at wine as a beverage. And I think that's a huge distinction, so no I don't think that lowering the drinking age would help. I'm not so sure I don't think the drinking age shouldn't be higher. It's just like drivers licenses. When I was 16 or when my boys were 16, you couldn't sell any of us on the idea that the license age should be 18. But both of my boys now, now that they're in their 30's, say 16 is way too young. And so it's funny so how as you get older. So no I think that the age should be higher.

1-01:12:37

Faye:

After Prohibition, the 21st Amendment left the sales of alcohol to up the individual states. And on December 7, 2004 the Supreme Court is going to hear the first issue on this, what is your opinion on that and what do you think they might find?

1-01:12:54

Lamborn:

Well this is a complicated issue. The argument from our perspective is that the states who don't allow their residents to order and receive alcohol, those states are they're- I've lost my thought here, but their violating the U.S. Constitution's Commerce Laws. There's not supposed to be any state embargo on commerce. But again it's a huge issue. The Supreme Court's going to hear one very small part of this whole argument, and I suspect that they will, they will rule in favor of those of us who are part of the movement to abolish this moratorium that certain states have created. It's nuts. I mean if you lived in Florida, or North Carolina, or New York or Massachusetts and you wanted to order a bottle of wine from me, I suspect you would be mad that I couldn't, as a California winery I couldn't send it you. I'm an adult, I pay taxes, I'm a resident, why can't I order a bottle of wine? I believe that this whole thing is the wholesalers and distributors of America, it's a turf war, they're trying to protect their turf. And they're using minors consuming alcohol and lack of tax collection as the two sort of smoke screens for preventing consumers from ordering direct. And you know quite frankly, we have got members, winery member in almost every state in the union. And we abide by the law to the letter, I won't ship to a state that doesn't allow it. Let me tell you for sure, that people who live in those states, they get the wines

they want, whether I ship to their brother-in-law in San Diego, and their brother-in-law ships to them or, however there's a zillion different ways.

1-01:15:34

Faye: So Lamborn has been affected by these laws?

1-01:15:37

Lamborn: No it's a nuisance. It's a nuisance. I mean I had a guy call me from New Hampshire the other day. New Hampshire has finally said, "Okay, okay, okay, we'll let consumers order direct." But what they've done is they've said, "Okay you producers, Lamborn Family, you need to buy a \$260 annual permit, and then you have to collect the taxes and you have to send us report every month, whether you sell wine or not, and you have to remit the taxes for those sales that you do make." Well, I've only had one call in my entire career from New Hampshire, and I wasn't going to sell this guy a case of wine because I would have had to have bought a \$200 plus permit which I was probably only going to use once and then I would be saddling myself with monthly reports, which I don't have time to do, so I told the guy I couldn't ship to him, and he was kind of bent, but New Hampshire's opened up and yet they haven't made it really, really good for little people.

1-01:16:40

Faye: What are some of the short-term goals for Lamborn?

1-01:16:45

Lamborn: Profitability. Actually there are a couple things Tim. Our short-term goals consist of transitioning myself and Terry out of management and transitioning the boys into management. Turning over the reigns so to speak, so that's one short-term goal. That, meaning the next three years. The other goal of course it getting the cabernet packaged and released. And as I said earlier, the cabernet will take us from a hand to mouth, financial hand to mouth operation, and should actually provide us with a little profit at the end of every year.

1-01:17:41

Faye: Where would you like to see Lamborn Company in the next 20 years?

1-01:17:47

Lamborn: You know I would be happy to see it kind of where it is today. There's that old business theory that you either grow and expand or die, and I don't know enough about real business to know whether that's literally true. Matt and Brian may decide to at some point take Lamborn to another level. They could buy fruit and produce a Napa Valley Petite Shiraz or Merlot or Chardonnay, they could expand the business model based on their need for economic need or whatever. But my kind of feeling now is that if we can do 1,000 cases of Zinfandel and 650-700 cases of Cabernet and we can do it well, and we can do it well year after year, that would be cool. And if the cabernet is a huge success we may even convert a little bit of our Zinfandel vineyard into Cabernet as well so we can expand the Cabernet program.

- 1-01:19:05
Faye: How important does the family aspect of Lamborn go into the quality of the wine?
- 1-01:19:14
Lamborn: Well I think that you don't have to be a family to be totally committed to quality at any cost. I mean we kind of do that, it's sort of like when you put your name on the label you sort of live and die with what's in there. But you don't have to, you know my name could be Jones and I could be doing Lamborn Family Vineyard and I could be just as committed to the quality in the bottle, but I think that when it's your grapes and your wine and your label and you business and your reputation, it is a little bit different. I mean for example like I said with the 2002 vintage, we dropped 60-65% of the fruit on the ground. If you were doing it purely for the business reasons you wouldn't have done that, economics, you wouldn't have done that. But it was our family decision that that was- we didn't have much of a choice we thought that was an important thing to do.
- 1-01:20:24
Faye: What has been your biggest challenge in the wine industry?
- 1-01:20:29
Lamborn: Mine personally or ours as a company?
- 1-01:20:33
Faye: Personally.
- 1-01:20:33
Lamborn: Biggest challenge. That's a good question and I'm not sure I have a good answer.
- 1-01:20:45
Faye: Any challenges in general?
- 1-01:20:47
Lamborn: Well there is, there are challenges every day, of course. Weather, without a doubt, weather would be probably the thing I have the least control over and provides me with the most sleepless nights of all the aspects of the business but you know developing reputation it's a slow process. It's a very slow process so that's been challenging. Getting market exposure, getting your wine in the restaurants you want and getting the recognition you'd like to get to develop the momentum to keep you going.
- 1-01:21:33
Faye: Well, I want to thank you for your time; you've been a great interview.
- 1-01:21:38
Lamborn: Oh thank you.

1-01:21:40

Faye:

Thank you for contributing to our project and I wish you and Lamborn Wine Company the best of luck in the future.

1-01:21:45

Lamborn:

Well thank you I hope I see your name on the customer list.