

Interview with: Brian Lamborn
Interviewed by: Victor Carapito
Transcriber: Victor Carapito
Interview 1: 11-05-04

INTRODUCTION

1-00:00:00

Carapito: My name is Victor Carapito. I am here with Brian Lamborn. It is November 5, 2004 at 2:00 pm. Would you like to introduce your self?

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Lamborn: My name is Brian Lamborn. I am a third generation with Lamborn Family Vineyards. I am 29 years old. Technically, I have been working for the family company my entire life, but I have been on the pay roll for five years now.

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Carapito: Great, so let's begin. Can you describe your family history, childhood, experiences that shaped you?

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Lamborn: (Chuckles) That could be two hours right there. I was born and raised in Orinda. When I was a baby, before I could even walk my grandfather, my father and his cousins and brothers- the whole family, my grandfather and father, respectively bought two different vineyards. It was when I was a little kid that they went up there and started tearing down what you saw, that part, and planting vines. Ever since I can remember my brother and I were going up there with our friends, racing around on motorcycles with friends and shooting our bb-guns. That part of my childhood had a big impact on who I am today. I don't know how it couldn't, because Howell Mountain is a beautiful place. It is out there, it's off the beaten path and that is something that we enjoy. Now my hobbies include anything outdoors: backpacking, hiking, fly fishing, you name it. I attribute that to my childhood and spending so much of it outdoors rolling around in dirt. I mean, it was fantastic and I am having a kid of my own now and I see the importance of, you know, kids these days all you hear about is Nintendo and television, and a big part of my childhood was out of doors, and that's a big part of who I am.

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Carapito: Great. When and where were you born?

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Lamborn: I was born May 28, 1975 in Walnut Creek, California at John Muir Hospital.

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Carapito: Where did you grow up?

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Lamborn:

I grew up here, in Orinda, but my second home was Howell Mountain. If I wasn't here I was up there. I was very lucky to have both those experiences, living so close to Berkeley and San Francisco and also being able to get away and going up into the mountains. I kind of consider myself growing up in both of those places.

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Carapito:

Where are your parents from?

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Lamborn:

They are both from the Bay Area. My dad went to Oakland Tech. My mom went for a year to Miramonte, which is the same high school I went to which is kind of strange. Both of their parents, my grandparents, are also from the Bay Area, so the family has been in the area for many generations.

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Carapito:

How was your high school experience?

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Lamborn:

It was great. I loved it. I thought high school flew by and then I went to college. I was thinking college couldn't go by faster than high school and it went by even longer. I was there for an extra year too. I graduated college in '97 so I have been out of college about seven years and that has gone by even quicker than my time in college. I feel like I was just in high school, basically. I had a very good time and at the same time I learned some stuff too which is I guess is important.

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Carapito:

(Laughs) Did you have any mentors growing up?

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Lamborn:

That's a good question. I would say my grandfather, I don't know if you were looking for someone like Neil Armstrong?

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Carapito:

It could be anybody.

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Lamborn:

My dad's dad, Bob Lamborn, he is the guy who started this whole thing. He definitely was and still is a mentor. He is the kind of guy I think everyone should try and model their lives after. He was full of integrity, a kid at heart, had a great sense of humor, intelligent, and amazing values. All things that are important to me now and I got those directly from him and my dad is eerily similar. So, my dad as well.

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Carapito:

Can you recall your first glass of wine? How old were you? Did you like it?

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Lamborn:

(Laughs) I was probably eight. What we used to do at holidays was the whole family would be sitting around drinking wine, and I don't know if it was because my brother and I were complaining that we wanted some or wanted to feel part of the family. My parents would give us a glass with a few sips of wine and all water. It tasted awful. We thought we were cool, we felt accepted and thought we were adults drinking wine. Even through college you don't really drink wine. I would drink from time to time, but I couldn't afford to and I hadn't acquired the taste or really knew what to look for. Right around the time I graduated was when I really started to appreciate wine as something to drink.

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Carapito:

Where did you go to college? What did you study? Do plan to pursue a graduate degree?

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Lamborn:

I went to Oregon State University in Corvallis. I studied sociology and criminology. I had aspirations of going into the FBI, also my grandfather had done and it was probably because of him that I wanted to do that, but ever since I was in high school I wanted to be in the FBI and I didn't let go of that dream until I was a senior in college and I realized that is not what I want to do. I wanted to start a family and the way the FBI moves you around divorce rate is high and I didn't want any part of that. I have considered an advanced degree. I live in Davis. UC Davis has the best enology program in the country and you know, I am stuck there anyway and I figure why not study enology. I don't really think that is the road I want to take. I am really happy doing the sales and learning how to run a winery, which I will eventually do. The winemaking aspect is not really what I am really interested in. I do home winemaking for fun, plus our winemaker right now, there is no way I could ever fill her shoes. Not in a million years.

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Carapito:

Where did you begin working after college?

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Lamborn:

I got a sales and marketing job with Anheuser Bush (phone rings) Let's just ignore that. I moved to Portland, Oregon and I worked there for a while. Then I moved to Denver, Colorado and continued working with Anheuser Bush. I am not really a corporate person, I am one of those people, who if you work hard, I would rather work really hard for myself. I quit and moved to Australia and I was there for a year and something and worked for the wine industry down there. I moved back and I have been here for five years now.

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Carapito:

What did you do exactly in Australia?

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Lamborn:

I worked in a fine wine shop in a place called Rose Bay, which is in the Sydney Harbor and I was able to do some work with some wineries up in the Hunter Valley as well. I made some great contacts. We have explored the possibility of actually importing wine from Australia and being the sole distributor here, but right now we want to focus on our brands and then possibly move on to southern hemisphere wines later.

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Carapito:

When did you begin working for your father at the vineyard?

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Lamborn:

On the payroll? My brother and I have been working for the family vineyard our entire lives. We were pretty much useless when we were this tall (motioning about three feet), but it was always a learning process. My dad would take us into the vineyard and explain to us what he was doing. In middle school, my buddies and I would come up and we would be putting the foil on the bottles in the bottling line, so we have always had a part or hand in the business. It wasn't until 1998 or 1999 that I got paid for doing it. Now I am doing it full time.

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Carapito:

What did your father do before he got into winemaking?

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Lamborn:

He was in the trucking business. He was a salesman for Yellow freight for 17 or 18 years and from what I understand he hated every second of it. Finally he was able to leave and then he had a few of his own side businesses for a while, but it wasn't until recently that he really focused his efforts on Lamborn Family Vineyards and quality and production. Now he and I are lucky enough to have this as our full time jobs. It is a pretty cool job.

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Carapito:

Can you talk about the influence your father has had on your life?

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Lamborn:

In general?

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Carapito:

Yes

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Lamborn:

Both my parents are role models. Everything about them, going back to what I said about my grandfather, the values they instilled in me, importance of

family and friends, hard work, being able to laugh at yourself, enjoy life because it goes by quickly. Both have taught me my ethics morals and values, but they have really emphasized the fact that it's your happiness that is the most important, not what you bring home at the end of the day in the form of a check. It's the old adage of money can't buy happiness.

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Carapito: Was there any pressure for you to join the family business or was it by choice?

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Lamborn: Not what so ever. I could quit today and they would be fine with that. I am fortunate. I think a lot of family businesses the next generation will get pressure to carry on the legacy. This was absolutely my decision and I wanted to do it. I love to do it and I could stop doing it today and they would be okay with that.

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Carapito: Since Lamborn is a family business, do you expect your children to continue the tradition?

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Lamborn: Oh they better. (Laughs) It's the same thing. They can choose to do what they choose to do in life. Not everyone finds the wine industry interesting and if you have to work for your entire life, you might as well do something you enjoy. I would hate to have my kids do it because they thought dad wanted them to, I would want them to do it because they wanted to. I wouldn't pressure them into it at all.

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LAMBORN FAMILY VINEYARDS, THE BEGINNING

Carapito: Where did your father go to college? Did he have any educational background in agriculture, chemistry, biology or enology?

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Lamborn: No, he didn't. In fact, none of my family did. It was sort of a learning curve. It was Randy Dunn of Howell Mountain, one of our neighbors, who basically showed my grandfather and my dad what to do. Once they had a grasp on that then they could sort of learn by trial and error, but they did not have any clue what as to they were doing. In fact, my dad just told me yesterday that my grandfather had considered planting melons on his property. People were making fun of melons saying you couldn't plant melons on Howell Mountain, but he almost did. We would have been melon farmers, which is cool, I like melons.

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Carapito: Did your mother work outside the vineyard?

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Lamborn: Ya, She was a full time mom. She was working before my brother and I were born, but once we were, we were a handful. She spent all of her time and then some, just raising us.

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Carapito: When and how did the opportunity to buy the Howell Mountain Property come up for Bob, what made him want to buy it?

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Lamborn: It was in the early seventies. I may be interpreting the story wrong, but one his friends basically said he should come up and buy the land. My grandfather went up and bought it from him and his friends moved up the road and bought a different place. Then a few years down the line, his friend said 'Bob you really need to buy this place' and so my grandfather bought that place, which is where our old vineyard is now. I don't know how he got interested in it other than this friend saying you should really look into buying land up here and I think my grandfather was really just looking for something else to do, something interesting. That is how we ended up there and he talked my dad into buying land too.

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Carapito: How many acres was the property? How much was used for planting?

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Lamborn: There were about 40 acres total and on my grandfathers old vineyard he planted nine to zin and our property we have five to zin, so just because all the acreage doesn't mean you can plant all of it. A lot of it is too rugged to even plant. It makes for beautiful views but you can not plant there. It would be hard to work because it is on a steep slope, it would all have to be done by hand.

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Carapito: Why does the vineyard only have Zinfandel vines?

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Lamborn: Well it did up until 2001, so if you are driving down the gravel road the Zin vineyard would be on your right and the Cab would be on your left, but that wasn't until 2001. Zin is just really what they decided to plant in the seventies. They did research and thought that it would be the best grape for that growing condition so they planted that there. Cab does really well up there too and it was just a matter of timing. We cleared out that vineyard and planted those grapes. That wine has not been released yet. I am excited to have a second varietal instead of just the one and 2002 will be our twentieth vintage of Zin. That's all we did. So it will be nice to have a different wine to show.

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Carapito: How did Bob arrive at the name Lamborn Family Vineyard?

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Lamborn: Bob and Mike were throwing around names, thinking, "What the heck do we call ourselves?" They both liked the name Lamborn Family Vineyards and asked other people their opinion of the name and the overwhelming opinion thought it sounded like they are making wine out of your garage. 'I don't think you should go with that.' In essence, that is what they were doing. It was the beginning and they didn't know what they were doing and they said "ya know what, let's just call it Lamborn Family Vineyards." We were the first family vineyard label in California, certainly not the first family wine company, but the first to call themselves by a family name. Now there are countless numbers of family vineyards out there, but I don't think they could have picked a better name.

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Carapito: So you certainly started the trend right?

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Lamborn: Ya, ya, now that we are third generation, I think for my grandfather that was probably pretty cool. Something he started, his son was doing it, and his grandson. I will do this my entire life. Like I said, if my kids choose to do it. Third generation of a family company, I am a traditionalist, but I think it seems kind of cool.

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Carapito: Were there any problems that the vineyard encountered during its first years of operation?

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Lamborn: Not that I am aware of. Other than the first couple of vintages were white Zinfandel, but that's what was hot then. Sutter Home had just invented White Zin and it had really caught on. I think they thought, well lets make White Zin this is what is selling right now, but we don't necessarily look back with embarrassment, but I don't really look at White Zin as being a wine right now. As far as problems, none that I know of.

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Carapito: Where there any other hardships associated with getting the winery up and running?

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Lamborn: Again, I couldn't answer that appropriately only because I was young and if there were any problems my dad would just do all of his swearing in a different room. So I am assuming everything ran smoothly. In any business you are going to run into problems. It seems especially in the alcohol or beverage industry, but no hardships that were a major set back. My grandfather lost his house in the Oakland Berkeley Firestorm in 1991 but we

were well established by then and that was hard for him, but didn't impact the company in a major way.

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THE GRAPES

Carapito: What kinds of grapes are currently planted at the vineyard?

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Lamborn: Five to Zin, roughly four to Cab.

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Carapito: Can you tell me about the quadrilateral, split-canopy trellising system used at the vineyards and how they benefit the fruit quality and quantity?

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Lamborn: It was a trellising system that was invented by Dr. Richard Smart of Australia and he had done a lot of research. Basically the system increases sunlight and that's what the grapes need to survive and thrive. So, based on his research my dad was sold enough to say let's re-trellis it. He did and just by increasing sunlight we saw the quantity and quality drastically increase. It works for us. We are believers.

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Carapito: What selections of grapes are planted for the Cabernet Sauvignon that will be released beginning 2006?

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Lamborn: Like clones? I don't know the exact 46A 12B, they have very scientific names. They are French clones that have never been planted on Howell Mountain, so it's kind of an experiment. They have been very successful in Europe and we are hoping to have the same success here in Napa Valley and Heidi Barrett can certainly, well, they couldn't be in better hands.

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Carapito: Lamborn has been known for its premium Zinfandel; the land is optimal for harvesting Zinfandel grapes. Why plant Cabernet Sauvignon grapes?

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Lamborn: We need more money. (Laughs) You know Zinfandel will always be the bread and butter. It's our baby and that's our benchmark because that is what we have done for so long, but Napa Valley is known for Cabernet worldwide and we wanted to be multi dimensional and add something new so we decided Cabernet would be the best. It is what the Valley is known for, the growing conditions are optimal and you can demand a higher price. Cabernet can get more in the market place than any other wine and it just made sense

financially. It was just common sense and seemed like the right thing to do. So far it has been, but we will find out when we release that wine.

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Carapito: Approximately what is the output of grapes per acre at the vineyard? What is the yearly output?

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Lamborn: We are averaging about 4 to 5 tons an acre and in an average year we will cut half of that off. So we are looking at around 2-2 ½ tons per acre. We cut it off. We aren't interested in quantity as much as quality. The premise behind that is that you have the same amount of nutrients and half the amount of grapes, so the ones still hanging will actually be much better. We are getting about 1,000 cases a year from what we have hanging and that is great with us as long as 1,000 cases the quality we want and they have been.

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Carapito: Lamborn also gets its grapes from other vineyards, how are these grapes different than the ones at Lamborn and what do you look for in these grapes in terms of quality?

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Lamborn: We don't do that anymore. We stopped a couple years ago because if you want something done right you have to do it yourself. We found out the hard way and I'm sure this happens with a lot of different growers and to control the quality you have to know what is going on in the vineyard and what Mother Nature's doing. You have to make changes in the vineyard to compliment the weather and what not. So if you are buying grapes from a different grower, you don't know what they have done and you don't know what you are going to get. Because of that we stick now solely, with 100% estate grown. It is all of our grapes.

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THE WINE

Carapito: What is the texture, aroma and tastes of the newer vintages produced?

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Lamborn: Of ours?

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Carapito: Yes.

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Lamborn: It's delicious. It is silky and multilayered. It has a lot of fruit to it, dark fruit flavors including cherry, raspberry, plum and our signature pepper and spice.

That is what our vineyard produces, just pepper and spice notes. Our Zinfandels have been compared to well-aged Cabernets which is a tremendous compliment. When I show it in the market place, a lot of the wine buyers or people tasting the wine will refer to it as an elegant Zin. You don't often hear elegant and Zin in the same sentence. We like to think were not a typical Zin. They define Typical Zins now with over extracted fruits, high alcohol wines. It's definitely not our style or what we go for.

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Carapito:

How are these newer ones different than the early vintages that were produced in the early years of Lamborn?

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Lamborn:

These are more consistent. They are a little higher in alcohol, but ever since Heidi came on board with us at the end of 1996. 1997 was really her first vintage with us, but anyone who buys a bottle of Lamborn Zin whether it is the 1997 or the 2001 is going to find remarkable similarities. That's pretty impressive to have consistency and continuity in vintages where I don't think we had those in previous years.

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Carapito:

What would you say distinguishes the Lamborn Zinfandel from other premium Zinfandels?

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Lamborn:

The work we put into it. I am obviously biased, but I don't think anyone out there puts as much effort into what we do than us. My dad and my mom bust their tails in the vineyard doing whatever they can and it is truly a family business. My parents, myself, my brothers involved and Heidi the winemaker: those few people make the whole thing go around and we are very concerned about each grape that makes it into the bottle. I don't feel that there are enough producers out there- everyone wants a great wine- but I don't think people are as willing to put out the effort that we do. I am confident that we do a lot more than a lot of the wineries out there.

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Carapito:

Each vintage is given a title with the explanation on the back label, summarizing an event or circumstance that encompassed that particular growing season, they all tell a story... where did this idea come from?

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Lamborn:

I talked earlier about my grandfather losing his house in the firestorm. That was the first year that we did it. It was 1991, the year of the storm and the vintage was called the Phoenix vintage-out of the ashes. So we decided every subsequent vintage lets call it something that is encompassing of that growing season. It is a tradition that we are still doing today and always will.

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Carapito: Are there any plans for the next vintage to be in remembrance or dedication to Bob Lamborn?

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Lamborn: Absolutely. In fact, my brother had the honor of writing it. It is one thing to hear about so and so passed away, he was a great guy and you kind of take it with a grain of salt, but Bob Lamborn was the epitome of a great guy and it is hard to do a person like that justice. I am not just saying that because he is my grandfather, he really was a phenomenal individual so my brother tried and did capture that for the label. We are also redoing our website and did a memorial page to him on the website as well. He's a guy, it is hard to put into words, but certainly deserves to be remembered.

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Carapito: Who does the art on the labels?

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Lamborn: No idea. They had some guy, I don't know if it was through the glass company who they were buying the bottle through, but someone came up with it and the artwork is the Lamborn family crest and a couple grape clusters. It is a simple idea, but really tells the story behind us, but I don't know where the original artwork came from.

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Carapito: How will the new Cabernet compare with the current Zinfandel vintages in terms of quality?

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Lamborn: In my opinion, it will be right up there. We put out the same amount of effort in both vineyards and at harvest and crush time we do the same amount of quality control and only the best grapes make it into the bottle. The Cabernet will be as good of quality as the Zinfandel. Whether it is better or not comes down to preference. We had the opportunity to try a barrel sample of it a month and a half ago and it blew me away. I have high expectations.

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Carapito: Your wines have been written about in several pieces. Have any particular wine writers helped you or hurt you along the way?

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Lamborn: (Laughs) That's a good question. Indirectly we have been hurt. There are certain publications that will condemn certain vintage growing seasons and areas. For instance, 1998 was considered a very bad growing season and it was. It had its difficulties, but 1998 was a fantastic vintage for us, but because of certain wine writers and certain publications that write about specific vintages and Napa Valley, us being so small we certainly feel the effects of that. I will call up someone saying we are showing our current vintage Zin. What vintage? 1998. Not interested in trying it. If you have up on the shelf the 1998 vintage Zin and the 1999, more often than not for the people who

know they will grab the 1999 because it was hailed as being the best growing seasons in recent times. No one has really hurt us directly. As far as helping us, you know, people say any press is good press. There is probably some truth to that. I'd rather have it all just be good press. Fortunately no one has written anything bad about us. Alan Goldfarb from the St. Helena Star did a nice article on us and had us as wine of the week in his column and this has all been pretty recent. That has certainly been helpful.

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PRODUCTION

Carapito: In its first years of production, Lamborn released only a few hundred cases per year of its premium Zinfandel. Why limit yearly output of cases at 2,700 in 1992. Was it because of production capacity limitations, low supply of grapes, or just to keep production in low numbers to maintain its boutique image?

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Lambert: We weren't really going for that image back then. We were just sort of making wine and selling it to whoever wanted to buy it. It wasn't until recent years when we refocused our efforts that we wanted to redefine the label. We got a world class winemaker and made some changes in the vineyard. Then we wanted to fit into the more boutique style of wines, but in the early years it was make a few thousand cases and sell it. That's what is really came down to. It was a passion for my father and grandfather that they did as a hobby. They just really enjoyed it. I don't know if it was ever really meant to be a business or but that is sort of how it evolved. In the early years it was sort of just take it in stride and now we are making a go at it. We want to make the best Zin out there and we do. Of course

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Carapito: Why did you decide to switch Oak barrels from American to French? How is the wine distinguished between the two aging processes?

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Lamborn: Well we use only American. We use American Oak made by a French Company called Seguin Moreau. They are out of Napa Valley. I have been told that even though it is American oak it is made in a French style. I can't tell you what that means. I do not know what French style of cooperage is, but it is a winemaking decision and as my dad will say we are just the farmers. We grow the grapes and we do that to the best of our ability. We crush it and once they are crushed it's in the winemakers hands. We have 100% confidence in her abilities. If she were to say you need to switch to 50% French and 50% American then let's do it. It was a decision my grandfather

was going. He used work with French barrels and then moved to some Kentucky. My palette isn't experienced enough to say that this wine would benefit from this style of oak, but someone like Heidi Barrett could make that decision.

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Carapito:

On that note, could you elaborate on Heidi's contribution to the success of Lamborn?

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Lamborn:

She is phenomenal. She is a really cool lady-down to earth despite all of her successes. In my opinion she could have a completely inflated ego, but she doesn't because she is just cool. She is a lot of fun to work with and that makes it just great. My two biggest selling points in the market place is that its Howell Mountain fruit and Howell Mountain has really come into itself as being one of the best appalachians in Napa Valley. It is estate grown, so we do it all ourselves and its made by Heidi Barrett. Most everyone in the wine industry, certainly in the places that I am showing the wine knows who Heidi Barrrrett is. She doesn't need an introduction and that will always grab attention, so from a sales standpoint that is fantastic, but what she does for the wine, I don't know if I can put that into words. Try the wine its great. I don't know how she does it, but she does it well.

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Carapito:

Does Lamborn use natural corks in bottling their wines? What is the importance of the quality of corks?

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Lamborn:

We do. We use corks and as I said before traditionalists, part of that is if I was going to sit down to a meal and have a bottle of wine I don't want to pull out a rubber stopper. I don't want to unscrew it. If a cork increases the odds of a wine being corked, then so be it. I will pay that price. We will hand select a lot of corks. We soak different corks from different lots of trees and soak them over night in wine and we have a control glass and the cork glass. The cork actually does have an effect on the smell and flavor of the wine. We then go around in a circle and smell and taste each and everyone. We pick them that way, but typically the best corks are the less porous. We don't use the most expensive one, we use the second most expensive one. We found there was no difference, but the cork, we will always use corks. I think some people use screw caps because it's a story and they will get written up somewhere.

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THE LAMBORN FAMILY

Carapito: Going back to the family aspect, how many family members are employed?

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Lamborn: Well on the payroll, two, my dad and myself. Really, it's probably more realistically just me, but Heidi is on the payroll, but she is not a family member. My brother does a lot of vineyard management. He is a landscape architect by trade so that is sort of his background and expertise and he gets compensated for his hard work, but not in the form of a paycheck from payroll. Technically, it is just me.

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Carapito: Could you elaborate on the role of each family member on the payroll say you and you're your father?

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Carapito: My dad does everything I don't want to do. So that would be all the administrative work and that is what I get to go into soon, but he deals with all the bureaucratic entities, you know the ATF, Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms. There are countless forms that a winery has to constantly fill out. Forms for other states you are distributed it. My dad does all the paper work. My mom does a little bit of that as well. She does a lot more of the order processing and e-mailing side of it. My dad does a ton of work in the vineyard and my mom helps him out a lot. I do all of the sales and marketing...

(Tape runs out and needs to be turned over)

Carapito: Sorry, was there anything else you wanted to say?

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Lamborn: Sales and Marketing that's what I do.

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Carapito: Are there any family feuds or has it always been smooth sailing?

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Lamborn: I can't stand my brother. (Laughs) No, we all get a long remarkably well. It is like the Brady Brunch except the kids all grown up now. We spend a lot of time together. We like spending time together. It's great. We are blessed to have the job where you love what you do and you also get to do it with the people you love. I don't know of many businesses out there where you can do that, so we are very lucky.

1-00:47:56

Carapito:

Who does the labor intensive work in the vineyards such as pruning, suckering, and hedging? Is contract labor used for some of the work or is it strictly family operated?

1-00:48:03

Lamborn:

Quite a bit of it is done by the family. My mom and my dad do. My mom does a ton of suckering. So they do a lot of work themselves. When it comes down to pruning, whether it is a summer prune or a winter prune, typically we will have help. We have a vineyard manager who has a crew and he will bring in some guys and they will go through and prune the vineyard. Other than that, at harvest, when we need help picking the grapes the majority of the work, even the grunt work, is done by us.

1-00:48:56

Carapito:

Bob sold his half of the vineyard to Mike in 1996. Have there been any major changes in production, output, or demand since then?

1-00:49:07

Lamborn:

Well, he unfortunately didn't sell. He wanted to sell his vineyard to us, but we couldn't afford it. So he sold it to a guy named Terry Pringle, of Pringle Family Vineyards and he bottled under the Outpost label and now Terry Pringle has since sold and it's now a corporate retreat. I am not sure what that means other than that some business guy bought it and uses it to get away and doesn't really care about the land. I am obviously very bitter and he may care a lot about the land. I don't know, but we didn't buy it because we couldn't. So, we bought some fruit from other people because we saw some loss in production and we wanted to supplement that. But again, when you are buying fruit from other people, you can't control the quality. So instead of sacrificing quality we kept our quantity to around a thousand cases a year, but we knew exactly what we were getting.

1-00:50:29

Carapito:

How important was it to have Bob as a consultant during the first couple of years after he sold his shares?

1-00:50:41

Lamborn:

That's a good question. My dad would be able to answer that more accurately than I, because like I said, I am the sales and marketing guy and Papa, as I refer to him, was always around and he was a great support outlet. It was always cool to see him get excited when we would tell him of a new placement you got in a restaurant that was really nice or something. It was great having him around for that and you couldn't keep him out of the vineyard at harvest time. He was always up there screaming in the vineyard and driving tractors too. I know that he offered quite a bit of help, support and advice to my dad as well. I also know that my dad had a great grasp on things. He knew what he was doing. I think if anything, Bob acted as a sounding board.

1-00:51:50

THE INDUSTRY AND MARKET

Carapito: Talking about the industry and market, how does Lamborn market their wine?

1-00:51:57

Lamborn: To fine dining restaurants. We are talking top of the line fine dining restaurants where the average entrée is \$30+ or \$26, where they have great wine lists or any nice retail shop. 95% of my sales are to restaurants and then the other 5% to retail. We really want to be proud and brag about the places where you can find our wine in the nicest restaurants in California. That is what we have been aiming for. In the last four or five years we are definitely there.

1-00:52:53

Carapito: Could you name a few places where your wine has sold the most or is most appreciated?

1-00:52:59

Lamborn: Yes, in San Francisco there is a restaurant called Gary Danko, the Fifth Floor, and Jardinière. In Napa Valley, I apologize, I have a lot of names running through my head, Tre Vigne, Hotel Del Coronado down south and the Wine Cellar and Brasserie. All places with great wine lists and we want to be able to say that we are part of that wine list. I look at our list of clients with pride.

1-00:53:44

Carapito: What major events such as wine fairs does Lamborn take advantage of to promote and sell their wines?

1-00:53:57

Lamborn: Really only a few wine events. In fact, I have got one to go to tonight, but for the most part, every year we do what is called the Family Winemakers of California. We also do the annual ZAP festival, which is the Zinfandel Advocates and Producers, both are at Fort Mason in San Francisco. We do both every year, that's really about it. I do a couple of side things, tonight I will go to Black Hawk Country Club and there is a four hour pouring there for all of their residents. We will do little things like that because it is good exposure for us and it's great for our relationship with our costumers. What comes around goes around. We don't have a lot of wine so we can't afford to do too many things.

1-00:55:06

Carapito: Marketing efforts can be quite a financial investment; does Lamborn take part of an association or a Co-op in order to get more people interested in their wine?

1-00:55:14

Lamborn:

We are members of the St. Helena Chamber of Commerce and the Wine Institute, but we don't pay money from a marketing standpoint to go out and advertise to broaden our client base. In fact, we don't have a marketing budget. It is more like, do we have the money to do this and if we can does it make sense to do it. It doesn't always. We made a virtual business card, a little CD, and the thing was great: a nine minute video on a little business card that we just hand out to people. The first winery in America that we know of, who has done it, but just didn't get the press that we were hoping to. So, that didn't pan out the way we wanted it, but things don't always. Trial and Error.

1-00:56:28

Carapito:

In early 1999, the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms permitted wine labels to carry a nonspecific reference to the health effects of wine consumption, based on studies in recent years that suggest moderate drinking can lower the risk of coronary heart disease in some individuals. Would Lamborn consider putting such reference on its labels as a marketing technique?

1-00:56:53

Lamborn:

Yes. Will we? Probably not. I don't know how many people read that stuff. I know both sides of the argument. There is no proof that it does help lower blood pressure or reduce coronary heart disease, there is evidence that suggests very strongly that it does and from what I have read I believe that it does. Then are there those people who say no way. Let everyone else make their own decision. I want people to drink the wine because they think it is a great product, not because it will make them healthier.

1-00:57:48

Carapito:

You do not have a tasting room on site and are involved in an "alternating proprietorship" with Napa Wine Company; can you please describe what that is? Does that make a difference in your sales verses other boutique wineries that have their own tasting rooms?

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Lamborn:

Probably. In my personal opinion we would do a lot better if we had our own tasting room. With an alternating proprietorship, basically, you are sharing a tasting room with, in our case, 24 other producers. You go in and these are all great wines, but I feel that I can represent our wines better than anybody else who is not in the company could do it. Someone will walk in through the door and someone will try the wine and I don't know if the person behind the counter would show the same enthusiasm for the product that I have and I think it is a big benefit for people who wanted to make the trip all the way up to Howell Mountain to see the vineyard. There is nothing like tasting the wine from the vineyard that it came from. So from the standpoint and we've talked about, hopefully by 2007 we will have a little tasting bar there, but you just don't get the traffic up there like you do on the Valley Floor. Which I should comment, we like it like that. We like being off the beaten path. We

like having a gravel road and a chain link fence and a gate that you have to open yourself. There are a lot of companies that have come into Napa Valley and made it corporate. There are some beautiful buildings, but it's a wine business not a passion for them.

1-01:00:03

Carapito:

How has this alternating proprietorship affected your relationship with other vineyards?

1-01:00:09

Lamborn:

It's nice because you see all the same faces at the Napa Wine Company. There are a lot of great people in the wine industry and you establish a lot of relationships. Napa Valley is really a small community. You can be a little winery like Lamborn Family doing a 1,000 cases and you know, I met Peter Mondavi a year or two ago and there was a connection: vintners. It is kind of cool that a place that is so commercialized like Napa Valley, a place that gets more tourists per year than Disneyland can still feel like a small community.

1-01:01:13

Carapito:

As a small artisan vineyard do you feel threatened by the larger Napa Valley vineyards and wineries?

1-01:01:22

Lamborn:

Not at all. Maybe that is my own ignorance, but ignorance is bliss. I don't feel we have any direct competition even though we do. Maybe it is that I am too confident in the product, but there are almost 300 wineries in Napa Valley County alone, that's the most in California. There are over 1,050 commercial wineries in California, half of those do under 5,000 cases so that is our competition right there. What can you do as a small winery that sets you apart from everyone else? Honestly, it's hard. There is not a lot. For us, I don't think it's difficult because we have a story and there are so many wineries out there that don't. We have a great story and not everyone knows it. We have got the wine maker and we have got the fruit. We sell out every vintage and we will continue to do so. We are adding more with the Cabernet. I am hoping that the Cabernet will actually shed light on the Zin and I am hoping that it will increase sales. Maybe one day I won't have to pound the pavement anymore and people will come to me and order the wine. We are getting to a spot where we have many many of the same repeat customers throughout the vintages who don't necessarily have to taste it. That says a lot that people will buy a wine that they haven't tasted because they are showing trust. They know what they are going to get. I think I got off topic there.

1-01:03:32

DISTRIBUTION

Carapito: I'm sorry, talking about distribution, how does the Lamborn vintage get from the tasting room to consumers, in other words, how does Lamborn distribute their wine?

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Lamborn: We are winery direct. Which means, basically in a three tier distribution system there is the beverage producer, wholesaler and a retailer, we basically cut out the middle man. Winery direct, we are the beverage producer, as well as the distributor and wholesaler. So we are our own distributor. We will do a nice percentage of sales on the internet through direct winery membership, people just log on and order wine from us and then a few cases will go out of state to like Nevada. Las Vegas is a great wine market that can't be ignored. So you want to have market presence in some places like that and otherwise it is a just a matter of picking up the phone, hopping in the car, driving out there and showing people the wine. It is all about communication pretty much.

1-01:04:54

Carapito: What affiliations are associated with Lamborn in the distribution network?

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Lamborn: As far as affiliations do you mean...

1-01:05:04

Carapito: Middlemen or...

1-01:05:11

Lamborn: No. Every day I have an e-mail from someone saying, "Hi, my name is so and so. I specialize in small handcrafted boutique wineries such as yours here, or I'm in Florida would consider having your wine distributed in Florida." If I said yes to anyone in California, than I would lose my job because that is what I do. Then as far as any other sates, we just don't have the wine. The market demands are enough in California that we can keep that the majority in California then we will.

1-01:06:08

Carapito: Are there any problems associated with the transportation of the wine to out-of-state customers?

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Lamborn: Yes, it is only legal to ship wine to thirteen states. Some of them, they aren't illegal. There are permits and way around it. In some states it's a felony, but there are only thirteen that we can legally ship to and its hard because we will get orders all the time from Oklahoma or some state we can't ship to and you have to say sorry, unless you are one of these states we can't ship wine. So we definitely lose sales because of it.

1-01:07:09

Carapito:

Does Lamborn wine make it across the Atlantic and to Europe?

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Lamborn:

I don't know if we are still there, but we have a little bit of wine in Switzerland and a little bit of wine in Japan. That was either the result of a favor or wanting to move on to another vintage. For instance, in 1998, it was a great wine for us but because it was a 1998 we had a harder time selling it than if it were a 1997 or 1999. If someone was willing and interested to take it off our hands then we would be more than willing to try a different market place. But in the long run, even if it did well in a place like Japan it is not a place we would send wine to year after because we need the wine here.

1-01:08:21

Carapito:

How do you go about selecting restaurants should carry the Lamborn wines? Do the restaurants have to meet a certain criteria or standard?

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Lamborn:

Yes. I do a lot of my own research and it's either that or by word of mouth or Zagat's review or websites. I will be on the internet more than I would like to be looking up fine dining restaurants in the next place I am going to go. Also, The Wine Spectator puts out an issue, once a year, of their award winning restaurants in all fifty states and so I will cut out California and make sure that everyone of those restaurants is in my data base. The farther we get a long the more of those people on that list our customers of ours which is great, but there are always going to be new restaurants and names or whatever. That is a great way to fine the great wine restaurants of the state and market it that way.

1-01:09:40

Carapito:

Can you give us an example of a sales pitch you would give to a restaurant or somebody you are trying to get to purchase your wines?

1-01:09:46

Lamborn:

(Laughs) This whole thing has been a sales pitch. Basically, the hardest thing for me is getting the appointment. If I can get the appointment, I am confident that I can sell the wine. It is so hard to get these guys to call you back or to take even your phone calls. Basically, I introduce myself, "Hi, this is Brian Lamborn of Lamborn Family Vineyards. Are you familiar with our label?" Most people aren't. "Well, we average only 1,000 cases a year of estate grown Howell Mountain Zinfandel. It is made by Heidi Barrett of Screaming Eagle Fame." If people don't know who Heidi Barrett is they will know the name Screaming Eagle. It is probably one of the most sought after cult wine in the country. Then with our 2001 vintage it got 90 points from Robert Parker, 90 points from the Wine Enthusiast, and it wholesales for only \$20 a bottle. Because I only have one wine it takes me literally a matter of minutes to be in and out, whereas a lot of these wine distributors will have a bag of eight wines where you will have to sit down a commit a half hour. It can take me three or four minutes to tell them a little about the wine, see if they like it and hopefully leave with an order.

1-01:11:14

PROBLEMS IN THE WINE INDUSTRY

Carapito: Talking about the problems in the wine industry, how and what pesticides are used at the vineyards? How is government regulation or pesticides affecting the wine industry?

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Lamborn: Good question and I don't know the exact names of the chemicals. We are not certified organic, but we are almost as organic as a lot of people that are certified. We use majority of certified products, like for instance, sulfur. We established a colony of lady bugs at the vineyard to eat the mites and the pests so you don't have to spray for those. We cover crops and that controls erosion and dust. We put up owl boxes so owls will come in and kill and eat the rodents themselves so we don't have to put out poison. So we do a lot of things to create sustainable agriculture that is good for the fruit and more importantly good for the environment.

1-01:12:39

Carapito: Many wineries in the valley have been scrutinized by environmentalists and other groups that care for the environment by claiming that wineries disrupt the environment and its ecosystem. Are smaller wineries such as Lamborn targeted by these groups as well or do they tend to target the major wineries?

1-01:12:57

Lamborn: I think the benefit for targeting major wineries is the press. If you attack a small guy like us you aren't really going to get a story. If you go after someone like Mondavi or Beringer, there is a story. I haven't heard of anything in recent years of people being publicly outraged of something that wineries are doing. From personal experience on Howell Mountain, there is a new vineyard going in there off of Howell Mountain road as your go into the town of Angwin. Angwin is a Seventh Day Adventists Community. They do not drink and you pull into Angwin and here is this huge vineyard that screams wine. It is not their culture or religion or belief. There are problems there with local Angwinos not wanting vineyards to be surrounding them although some people think they are beautiful. Some people don't want any part of them. The other issue is the clearing of trees. A lot of people moved to Angwin because of the mountain setting. It is beautiful, great views and a lot of trees and you have to knock down the trees to put in the vineyard. There is an issue with that but nothing major or political.

1-01:14:43

Carapito: How has neo-prohibition, a topic widely discussed these days, affected Lamborn? How can wineries fight against it?

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Lamborn:

Neo-prohibition? I don't know. How do you fight against that? Maybe there are some battles are better fought by other people. With an issue like that you are going to have the bigger guys with the money and the 150 lawyers on staff to really make headway there. Unfortunately, maybe someone like us will just have to ride the wave. You don't want to feel like there is nothing you can do, because there is always something you can do, but to be most effective, that is a battle better fought by some of the bigger guys.

1-01:15:49

Carapito:

Due to the asset-intensive nature of the wine industry, current estate tax laws are a real threat to family owned vineyards and wineries. Have such tax laws imposed a threat for Lamborn?

1-01:16:05

Lamborn:

As far as I am concerned, no, unless my dad is not telling me something. I'd say we are okay.

1-01:16:17

Carapito:

The increase of competition from the global market has led to Napa wine industry to reach its peak in 2000. How has foreign competition affected the sales of the Lamborn Vintage?

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Lamborn:

I would say indirectly. I don't know if we have felt the impact in a major way, but you know, when I lived in Australia there was some phenomenal wines from down there. Amazing wines, and they can compete in quality against some of the best Napa winery, but they can beat them in price. That's tough. As the wine savvy consumer, in economic times like now and in the past when you are looking at the value of the dollar, you are going to spend less on things such as wine. It is an interesting statistic, but during economic hardship people tend to drink more, but they don't go out to restaurants and drink. They go and buy vodka or beer and cheap wine and go back. I don't look at them as direct competitor either, but it is tough, there are some great wines coming in and they are very affordable, but none of them have what we have.

1-01:17:56

Carapito:

Harvard has just come out with a new food pyramid that lists one should have between one and two glasses per day. How do you think this will affect the wine industry? Or more specifically you?

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Lamborn:

I hadn't heard of that. I like that. I don't know that it will impact us, to really be able to tell the effect that a statement like that would have we would have to have tens of thousands of cases to target why people drink or don't drink. We are so small, we sell out every vintage and I think we will continue to do so as long as people still like what they are buying.

1-01:19:00

Carapito:

Mr. Franzia's purchase of Charles Shaw resulted in ten million cases of wine sold within the last two years. Do you think that it affects Lamborn business?

1-01:19:16

Lamborn:

No. It's a different market. Two-Buck Chuck, and I had it just the other night, someone brought over a bottle. If I drink wine, I am the typical American. If I drink wine I will spend \$8-\$12 on a bottle of wine. That is what is selling. We are at that edge. We retail for \$30. Once you go above \$15 sales drastically decrease. When you see wines up in \$80+ range unless you are a cult wine or you do very little production wise it is going to be hard to sell. There is always going to be a market, but it those premium wines in the \$8-\$12 that are on fire. I don't know if Charles Shaw didn't have a label, people would buy Lamborn wine because they couldn't get Charles Shaw. I highly doubt it. It's just a higher market.

1-01:20:32

Carapito:

What is your opinion of Two-Buck-Chuck?

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Lamborn:

It's great. (Laughs) You can put in there that I laughed. For two dollars it's not bad. I wouldn't choose to drink it. Obviously, you get what you pay for. It is really true, you can't put a price on a great wine, well you can, but put Two-Buck Check next to something really nice, and like a really nice cabernet from Napa Valley in the \$60 range you will tell that it is much better. That is for those people that can afford a \$60 bottle of wine. I drink only bottle like that only on a very special occasion. I just don't have the money to go out and spend on super nice wines, but Charles Shaw is fine. I would rather get something else. I would spend \$6 more and get something a little better.

1-01:21:57

Carapito:

What are the current strengths and weaknesses of the wine industry and how does Lamborn adjust itself to stand out from the crowd?

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Lamborn:

Strengths and weaknesses of the wine industry?

1-01:22:13

Carapito:

Yes, what do you think they are?

1-01:22:16

Lamborn:

I can only speak from a local level, globally I don't know enough about Tuscany or Bordeaux to comment on them, but Napa Valley's strength is that it has established itself over a period of years as being the premier wine growing region in America and it is the place for Cabernet. Other places around the world, France is known for its Pinots and what not, but Napa Valley is known for Cabernet. That is a major plus that people come from all over the world. It is a beautiful spot. I think it is one of the most beautiful places in the world, but they make great wine out of there, which is a strength for the Valley. A weakness? For someone as small as we are, it is kind of

nice because in a recession we won't feel it that badly and when wine sales are through the roof we don't necessarily feel it. We just kind of cruise along and do our own thing and it works for us. I can't accurately pinpoint strength or weakness. I just know what we do and it has been working.

1-01:24:03

Carapito: Pierces disease has been appearing in the Napa area, and can be devastating. Has Pierce's disease ever been a problem for you?

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Lamborn: No. We planted on phylloxera resistant fruit stock. Pierces disease and the Glassy winged sharp shooter and all these things, but so far we haven't been threatened by anything.

1-01:24:34

CONCLUSION

Carapito: As a conclusion, what does the future hold for the Lamborn Family Vineyard? What future changes, if any, would you like to see in the wine industry and how will they benefit the Lamborn Family Vineyard?

1-01:24:48

Lamborn: I would like to see a bigger focus on the product from the producer's level. There are so many wines out there and I can't speak for all of them and I don't know what they as far as controlling what goes into the bottle that they make. I would love to see the wine business not be as much of a business as a passion. You go into Napa Valley and you see the sign, "Welcome to Napa Valley, Where wine is bottled poetry," The history of wine is in my opinion extremely romantic, the whole story from thousands of years ago to what it has evolved to today. I think that people lose sight of that. We as a race, take too much for granted any way, but to sit down and appreciate a glass of wine and to know what went into, not just the fruit, but the fruits of people's labor. There would be a focus on more of the smaller guys like us. That would benefit us.

1-01:26:29

Carapito: Thank you Brian, that is it, would you like to say anything else?

1-01:26:36

Lamborn: No I think I have said plenty. (Laughs)

1-01:26:41

Carapito: Thank you!

[End of Interview]