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**0:00:00 Levi Dalton:** I'll Drink To That! , where we get behind the scenes of the beverage business. I'm Levi Dalton.

**0:00:05 Erin Scala:** I'm Erin Scala.

**0:00:06 LD:** And here's our show today.

**0:00:08 LD:** Hey, you, wholesale buyer type person, you listen to the show. You know who is making good wine, but how do you keep track of where to buy it? Well, SevenFifty has you covered. Powerful, easy to use browsing tools with all kinds of ways to drill down to what you need. Lots of vendor information including company background, contact info, and even a link to a vendor's Facebook page if they have it. The power to make out a tasting list of wines you've enjoyed. You can keep those online for as long as you need them. You can refer to them for years, even. And a constantly updated list of tastings in your area. You wanna know what tastings are happening tomorrow and which are happening in two months from now, where are they happening? SevenFifty has you covered. Have you checked out SevenFifty lately? You should. It is the wholesale buyer's best friend. Go to [SevenFifty.com](http://SevenFifty.com) for more information and to get signed up.

**0:01:04 LD:** Antonio Galloni of Vinous Media back on the show. Hello, Sir, how are you?

**0:01:07 Antonio Galloni:** Levi, thanks for having me. Thrilled to be here with you today.

**0:01:09 LD:** Nice to see you.

**0:01:10 AG:** Yeah, it's great to be back.

**0:01:11 LD:** So, there've been some changes since the last time you were on the show. What's new with Vinous Media and what's new with you?

**0:01:16 AG:** I just think about some of the experiences that we've had this year, that are things that I could have never imagined a few years back. We've been to Google twice this year, and we have this interactive map project that we're working on. So, one of the ideas with Vinous is that I don't want people to be just solely focused on points. I think it's a result of... This incredible obsession with points, a lot of it is driven by people getting so much content delivered to them at once, that the only possible way that you can possibly deal with this, in between picking up your kids, or making dinner, or dropping off the dry cleaning is just to say, "Just tell me what the 10 best wines are, or the 20 best wines are." Because if a publication puts out 3000 or 4000 reviews at once, that's the only way our brains can really process this stuff is just to filter it somehow and that's the logical way.

**0:02:08 AG:** That's one of the reasons that Vinous publishes everyday, because I want people to actually read the stuff that we write. Along with... The score's important, but it's not the only thing.

So, one of the reasons we adopted a continual publishing model is because we see that there's much greater efficiency putting out smaller articles that people actually read. So, we were talking about Sandlands before. That was a winery that we featured in an article last year that we did on undiscovered or new producers that were in their first or second year of commercial production. And there were maybe a dozen producers in there. And that article was read... Was one of the most popular articles that we've ever read. And they weren't massively expensive or necessarily rare wines per say or from historic vineyards, but it was new. New states that nobody had really heard of, not too many many people had heard of.

**0:02:54 AG:** But it was also delivered in a modern, contemporary format that people can actually read in between whatever else they've got going on in their lives. So, there's a lot of things on Vinous that have nothing to do with points, nothing to do with scores, and nothing to do with ratings. And interactive maps is one of those tools, where we've started off with Piedmont, but we'll do it in other parts of the world. And it's our multimedia approach that brings together the maps with our database, with video, with photography. So, in June... Well, in February, we developed our first map, a Barolo map. In March, I showed it to Google. They flipped out over it in a good way, and in June they invited us to come to the office to show it their engineers and kick the tires and tell them all the things that we didn't like. Well, first of all, spending a day there is a life-changing experience. You don't wanna leave 'cause you're just surrounded by all these young people and all this energy and all this buzz, you can really feel it. They prepare 30,000 meals a day there for their employees. Every restaurant has a different theme and...

**0:03:54 LD:** What's the wine list?

**0:03:55 AG:** The wine list, I don't know. I think that maybe we can get hired to do the Google wine list. But they've got teaching kitchens in there, and they have... If you wanna know how many calories are in your plate, it's all available and it's just crazy. There's probably algorithms behind everything. But the place is an inspiring place. There's a reason why this is a great company. We got to spend... We've been there a couple of times, but we got to spend a day there in June just with the maps, and it was amazing, because people were asking us questions and after about five minutes you really understand that what they want is for you to tell them something that they haven't heard from somebody else.

**0:04:30 AG:** If you merely tell them the bugs that they already know exist, they don't value you too much. They really want you to tell them something that they haven't heard before. And boy, if you can't get turned on by that, inspired by that, you have no heartbeat, you're dead. So, going to Google, talking about our maps, writing an article for their enterprise site on how we're using maps, that was a huge highlight. We did a partnership with CellarTracker over the summer. I've known Eric LeVine for maybe 10 years, and we finally got to do something together, so that was fun. And then, more recently, about a month and a half ago, we announced our acquisition of IWC, Steve Tanzer's publication.

**0:05:08 LD:** That seemed to catch a lot of attention.

**0:05:10 AG:** Yeah, it was great. I think great for everybody. So, that's kind of in a nutshell, our 2014. We've now got... We've doubled our readership now through this acquisition. We have

customers in about 60 countries around the world. It's a global platform as we had envisaged. And again, when I think about 2014, it's really our first full year of operating. So, we're pretty jazzed, pretty tired, looking forward to a day off or two.

**0:05:34 LD:** One of things I thought gave you a leg up when you started your own business was that you were able to take your own reviews with you. And people who searched for your old notes could find them on your new program on Vinous Media. And I feel with the Tanzer acquisition, that brings a depth of tasting notes that you wouldn't expect from a year and a half old operation, where now people can search back to the tasting notes from the '80s.

**0:05:58 AG:** Yeah, it's amazing because Steve... The IWC... We started in 1985, so almost 30 years. The oldest independent American wine publication when we bought it. We've put everything together with the goal of 1 plus 1 equals 10. And, yeah, there's all of Steve's tasting notes going back all the way, as far back as his own site had. So, his and Ian D'Agata's, Joel Payne, Josh Reynolds, David Schupack, when he was writing, as well for Steve. So, now we have global coverage of the world, and... Yeah, it's exciting. The whole idea with Vinous, from the very beginning was that I didn't want to build something that was too much associated with me. I'd kind of seen the path where that leads. You have to be very careful when you create something that is indelibly linked with one person. If you don't set up the mechanism for succession in a way that somebody else can pick that up. It's kind of like fashion, there are definitely cases where a person's name can become a brand: Bloomberg, Armani, there's a lot of examples.

**0:07:04 AG:** But you have to have really sharp management and a long-term view to creating that. And if you don't, then you have, potentially, an issue where you just wonder to what extent are things linked to a single person? And I just didn't wanna have that problem in the future. I try to make 20 and 30 year decisions, and they're certainly not all gonna be right. But I'm pretty sure that starting something that's linked with one person, I've seen where that goes, and I just didn't wanna repeat something I had already seen; I kind of know what the future's like and that doesn't happen too often in life. So, the whole idea with Vinous is we wanna build a platform, we want it to be a place for the best and the brightest. And it took us a while, obviously, to do that; you can't build Rome in a day.

**0:07:50 AG:** But, by bringing on Steve and his team, now we have a group of very experienced people in wine, very highly respected, great tasters, great people, which is, to me, just as important, if not even more important. The human values are really important to me. So, now we have a team, and yes, now we can cover the world. Whether it's Argentina or South Africa or more coverage of Burgundy or Bordeaux or the Rhone, for example, Spain, obviously, to a degree that we couldn't do it when it was just me putting out the content. So, yeah, we're really excited, and that was the whole idea. So, the database does have all the historic IWC stuff, plus, of course, my stuff. And now we're gonna be very thoughtful and strategic about where are the areas that we want to be really strong. So, one of the things that I have always done is a lot of verticals and retrospective tastings.

**0:08:38 AG:** I think that Vinous has the, if you'll forgive me, but I think Vinous has the best database for, especially older Italian wines. Monfortino sold their... Every vintage of Solaja, every vintage of Masseto, every vintage of a lot of benchmark wines. And you can go and get a pretty great education for yourself in a pretty short amount of time if you wanna know those wines, even

some of the wines from the south: Rosso del Conte, Maestro Bernardino, Taurasis, those are all very heavily represented. And that, to me, is really important, because one of the things that people always ask about wines like that is, "When should I drink it? Should I drink it now or should I drink it in five years, 10 years, et cetera?" So, I think that the historical archive is very important.

**0:09:20 AG:** And so, we're now gonna seek to build that in places where maybe we don't have it as much, so that... I started to do this with Napa Valley, complete vertical of Dalla Valle Maya, of Opus One, which is one of our most popular articles of Don Howell Mountain. There's a lot of Mayacama's Cabernet notes, and we will continue to build that up. Because I think it's really important to have the historical fabric of a wine, so that then you can write something intelligent about the newest release, and people can go and read about vintages that might have similar characteristics or whatever.

**0:09:50 LD:** When did you first meet Stephen Tanzer?

**0:09:53 AG:** I don't know, maybe about 10 years ago. I've been his subscriber, his customer for a long time. And I wanted to meet him, so we went to dinner, we went to a dinner at Alto. We had... I remember because... I have a pretty good memory for wines, and he brought a '96 Serafin Charmes-Chambertin. And I've always loved Serafin, just really beautiful wines that are really transparent; that vintage, that wine, it was just fantastic that night. I bought '71 Conterno and we had a great old time at Alto. [chuckle] So, that was probably close to 10 years ago, but I don't remember the exact year.

**0:10:26 LD:** What's he like as a person?

**0:10:29 AG:** Well, Steve is a jewel of a guy. You won't meet a more genuine, down-to-earth, and yet incredibly experienced person in wine. I remember when I first started going to Burgundy, just for fun, just to taste, to buy wine years ago, I don't remember exactly how many, but people... If you asked, people, winemakers, and people in the know would always say, "Steve Tanzer had the best palate for Burgundy." He's just incredibly precise and detail-oriented. I know that when I would read some of the articles that he wrote about regions that I cover as well, and I knew exactly what tastings he had done and how many wines with how many people. And I would just be amazed at how accurate he was, knowing that sometimes he liked to do tastings that were bigger than mine, with more wines, we're talking about Nebbiolo, in particular, high acid often, high tannin wines, young, and he was just spot on.

**0:11:19 AG:** So, it's really quite remarkable. So, I've always just admired his tasting ability, his writing ability, and a level of integrity on a personal level that is very, very high, and that, to me, is really important. So, he's just a great partner, great person to work with, great person to learn from, and we're just really both excited to be working together.

**0:11:37 LD:** What do you think the strengths of that team are: Ian D'Agata, Joel Payne, Josh Reynolds, what do they bring to the table?

**0:11:44 AG:** When I and are team, when we were looking at who would we wanna hire, what are

the areas that we wanna focus on, what are our readers asking about? And sort of looked... We talked about Steve, obviously, very precise and detail-oriented. Also is somebody who's run his own business for several decades, so that's always helpful because writers are kind of artists and sometimes, timeliness and meeting deadlines are not always our strengths as a group, so having somebody who obviously has kind of called the shots for many, many years is a huge asset. With Josh, I've known him maybe even longer than Steve. He's one of those guys who's been in the business since the '80s. He's done retail, he worked for Neal Rosenthal for about 12 years, worked for Steve for about 10 years, and he probably knows more about the areas he doesn't cover than a lot of people who spent all their time with those wines. One of those encyclopedic people, great passion, enthusiasm. And I just think the world of Josh. I think his strengths are... For us, will be Spain and the Rhone valley, in particular, but I think more than anything he's one of those people that I don't... I think he's an under the radar critic. A lot of people just don't know how talented and exceptionally gifted he is, what a great taster he is. So part of my job is to make sure that people know.

**0:13:04 LD:** Do you feel like you have given those writers more outreach now?

**0:13:06 AG:** Well, there's no question that all of these... All of our writers are gonna have more outreach because we publish in a continual fashion. We publish... Right now it's the holidays, but on a normal week, we have something new on the website everyday. So if you're reading Vinous, you really need to check it pretty much everyday because there's something new. And that means that before those guys were publishing once every two months on Steve's old site, with the occasional intra-issue feature but now they can publish pretty much whenever they want. They can publish weekly. And that's just more times that people are going to see your name. If you're publishing once every two months and for whatever reason somebody doesn't see your article, they might not see your name for another couple of months and wonder, "Hey, I wonder if that guy is... What are they doing? Are they still around?" So, yeah, Vinous gives all writers a much bigger platform for the simple reason that we're publishing all the time. And not always big, thousand wine articles, sometimes just an article on a restaurant, or a collectable wine, or a value wine. And all those guys will contribute to those columns as well.

**0:14:02 AG:** Ian and I have spent the last few months looking at his book on the native varieties of Italy, which is just... I look at this book and I can't even begin to think about how does one even collect, assemble, digest and then put into some package this information, it's just vast. It's a great book for anybody who wants to really learn more about the origins of the Italian grape varieties. Whether it's Nebbiolo or Fiano di Avellino or whatever it is, it's a really a reference point. And he's a guy with great enthusiasm. You can't talk to Ian for more than about two minutes and not be laughing about something. And I think that at the end of the day, we can't take ourselves too seriously. There's a certain element of fun-ness I think that has to exist. It can't be all dry reviews. And Ian has the joie de vivre, Italian style, dolce vita, I guess but he's from Rome. And his ancestry is Roman and Canadian. He's just got a great sunny disposition and just a real joy. And obviously people know him mostly for his knowledge in Italian wine which is pretty amazing. He's pretty much the only person I would want to work with on Italian wines, I think, in the world.

**0:15:16 AG:** But as I wrote, when I told our readers what was happening, I said, "This is the guy I think the world of." But it's not just Italian wines for Ian, he's been going to Alsace for something

like 30 years. I ran to him in Bordeaux in the spring, even though I'll be doing Bordeaux for Vinous, we may publish an occasional vertical or some other article from Ian on Bordeaux. He's one of those guys with a great, really broad view of wine. I think that's very important. I think there's a danger in being too specialized because you don't understand the whole world and so that's Ian. And then, Joel Payne is an expert on Germany, Austria, the Loire and he'll probably be taking more responsibility with us shortly. His first articles have been really well received. Just one article, just on Chenin Blanc. Another article just on Loire Valley Cab Franc. You can't really... Where are you gonna read about this stuff? There's just not many sources to go and get that level of coverage on these wines. And so we're really excited to have Joel. He's done some verticals for us and that's something that all the critics are gonna do. So that's... I think it's a really solid team.

**0:16:21 AG:** There's still a few other people that we wanna hire but this is a good first step and obviously, integrating people is always a challenge. So it's... Not so much that it's a challenge, it's just... It takes time. At Vinous, we're used to doing things very fast. Everything is extremely digital. We can publish things immediately, we can correct things on the website immediately, I can run everything on Vinous, I can run it on my phone. Whether it's our payment processing, editorial, whatever, it is a totally mobile business. And I think that's a level of technology that is gonna take a while for some people to really get a hold of. But if I publish a review and there's something wrong and you sent me a note, I can correct it immediately, anywhere I am. So we've really invested in... Made big strides to really want to have a technological-advanced website out there and though that takes a little bit of time to get used to, what happens is that the learning curve though is very steep and I can just see that. For example, the amount of time that I need in my office after a trip has been cut down significantly each of the last four or five years, as we've done more with technology. So I think that the gains, the efficiency gains are really life-changing but you gotta kinda go up the curve first and that takes a while, it's okay.

**0:17:40 LD:** How do you think it's coming across the customers, people who are reading and subscribing? What's the reception? What's worked and what hasn't worked with Vinous Media?

**0:17:48 AG:** We've addressed some of the things that probably weren't working so great. One of them being... Obviously, when there's only one person writing, number one, your regional diversity is obviously limited; the frequency with which you can put out in depth articles is somewhat limited, so that was... We've addressed that by hiring a bunch of people. I think our website is very good in some ways, but I think particularly in search, we're still working through some issues. And the IWC acquisition has actually created a lot of complexity. We've got things like producer names where there's seven different ways that a winery is listed, and that's because we have... You mentioned this before, but we have my database from Piedmont Report, which goes back to '04. Then about six and a half years of stuff that was originally published in The Wine Advocate, and then all the stuff that I've written for Vinous. That's fairly clean, but even there occasionally, something pops up, a wine name is wrong, or listed more than once. But now with Steve's, which was created basically by a third party, so with less you could say immediate oversight, and so there's more room for little slight imperfections and as you know in data, that stuff just kills you.

**0:18:59 AG:** So, we've got these issues now where we've got, I don't know, a winery that might be listed five different ways. You see this you just, [chuckle] "I can't believe it." So, this is kind of what we're working through right now, is to clean up the database, I'd say that's our biggest Achilles

heel right now, is getting the data clean. That's just so fundamental for all the things that we wanna do in the future, I'd say that that's one thing. We have done a lot to make the site faster, we've done a lot to make the site more visually appealing. The great thing about Vinous is, it's a 100% subscriber supported, there's no advertising of any kind, no sponsorships of any kind and that just means that we have a very tight relationship with our readers. If somebody says, "You guys ought to do this or you should consider that." If it's a good idea, we'll put it into place, we don't have ask anybody to do anything and our customers mean the world to us. So, we're very keen, we pay a lot of attention to what our customers think and we try to, anywhere that we can, we try to implement fixes to make the user experience as good as possible.

**0:19:59 AG:** Ultimately, it's I think one of the rare cases in a project like this, where the end user can really play a role in shaping the future, by telling us, "Do this, do that." Or, "This doesn't work, we like this." And we approach our work... It was a great lesson to go to Google, it was so humbling, because if anybody could afford could take the attitude of being arrogant, or difficult, or "Who are you?" That would certainly be a company that would be more than entitled to have some of that, and instead what we found was the exact opposite. That is the definition of greatness, is humility. They were so open, so receptive, could not have been more engaging, could not have been more interested. And that was a good lesson for us, in terms of how we approach our customer and I'd like to see if we can replicate that level of total openness, of just trying to see what's out there, of receptiveness, of incorporating feedback. So, it's a learning process, the site is a year and a half old, maybe 19 months now, there's still a lot more to go I think. The next 19 months, 18 months are gonna be much more exciting than the last.

**0:21:04 LD:** So, when you put the two together, IWC and Vinous, did you find that the score ranges kinda matched up, did you have consistency that way?

**0:21:11 AG:** Well, one of the things that was interesting with Steve is that think, by and large, things line up as much as they can line up, considering that everybody's human and different, so there's gonna be areas where... In most cases you're gonna see that the scores are not that far apart, but in some cases they are. And that's fine, I think that's just sort of the nature of life, you're wearing a blue shirt, I'm wearing a checkered shirt, nobody views something exactly the same.

**0:21:41 LD:** I'm sorry, I do have checkered shirts, so I could have...

**0:21:42 AG:** No, no, I know.

**0:21:43 LD:** If you'd asked, I would've changed.

**0:21:44 AG:** But we're not looking for cookie cutter people, nor am I looking for somebody who has necessarily my same preferences, nor am I changing anything that anybody else writes to make it match with mine. 'Cause at the end of the day, people have to... They have to be accountable for their own work. So, I'll tell you, when I worked for Bob Parker, he never once changed a single score of mine, or asked me to change a single score of mine. Or asked me why this... My favorite producer getting... Why is my favorite producer getting lower scores? Or why is this producer that I don't like getting big scores? Never once, to his great credit, never once said... Never once tried to



mold me, so therefore I must assume that's true of everybody else. Never once tried to say, "This is our way of thinking, so you've gotta fit into this." Now obviously, that can also backfire, if you haven't picked people properly... The right people, so you have to find the balance there, but one of the things that attracted me to Steve and his team is that I think that we're mostly on the same... We have mostly a very similar philosophy of wine, and therefore I think that the ranges mostly match up. Steve has a, most people know, he's got a reputation for being very conservative, and there's a lot of value to that. My own personal view is...

**0:23:05 LD:** You mean in terms of scores?

**0:23:06 AG:** In terms of scores, yeah.

**0:23:07 LD:** Not in terms of political persuasion?

**0:23:08 AG:** No. [chuckle] I don't know. And my view is, look, we've got a 100 point scale and when you run across a great vintage, some wines are probably gonna be in that very high stratosphere, of which I would say is sort of 97, 98 and up. And I think that there's this perception maybe out there that critics like to give these high scores, but I can tell you that every time I see one of the wines that I've given a really high score to, I get really nervous.

**0:23:37 LD:** How so? What does that feel like?

**0:23:39 AG:** Because I know that people have bought a wine based on some very high score, a very positive review that I've given a wine, and I would be devastated if people were disappointed, I would feel like I had really let them down. It's easy to give 92, or 93, or 88, maybe for a Chianti, or a Pelaverga we were talking about before wines where, it doesn't really matter whether... It's not gonna make or break anybody's year. But when you get into the 97 and up range, 98, 99, 100, people make decisions on those wines. Those are never inexpensive wines. People's expectations are high. It's like going to a three-star Michelin restaurant. You can almost only be disappointed. If you have a great meal, all you say is, "Yeah, so what? That's what I paid for. Per se, it has to be great, that's the whole... EMP has to be great. That's what we're paying for." The risk and reward is so skewed towards actually being disappointed. So if I give a... One of the first wines that got a 100 point score for me was '04 Monfortino, let's say. Every time I see that wine, I get a little nervous because it's like holy S-H-I-T, I hope this wine is great. I've had it enough times now that I'm not really too concerned anymore. But I can tell you the first couple of times I'd see that wine pop up, I'm like, "Oh my God, I hope that this shows great".

**0:24:55 AG:** So, it's not at all simple or easy to be enthusiastic about a wine, because at the end of the day, my reputation and everybody else's reputation who does this job is really linked towards that credibility that comes with being more right. It's not black and white, but being more right more often than not. And so giving out high scores, I think takes a lot of conviction, because chances are... Look we're all human, you're gonna fall flat on your face at some point and probably at many points in life. That's just the way it is right?

**0:25:30 AG:** So yeah, any time I see a wine that I've given a high score to I always... It's like stage

fright. You just sort of like these little butterflies, like, "God I hope it's great". And thankfully, more often than not, it is. But it's not so easy to take that position, to say, "This is an extraordinary wine or a vintage", to say "This is a really great vintage." 2010 Barolo, now everybody's crazy about these wines, but I've been telling our readers for a couple of years that this was a great vintage.

**0:25:55 AG:** And anybody can start to be a critic. That's what I did 10 years ago. I just started going to these places, tasting, writing. And it's not hard to start, but it's pretty hard to take a position of conviction. You think about all the people who for example, all of the critics or people who have access to these wines who maybe live in Europe or Switzerland or France who can go to Piedmont, get in their car, they could go there. They could be in these cellars, tasting every weekend. Whereas guys like me or Steve or anybody based here, you've gotta make a trip. You've gotta pay for your airfare, hotel, rental car. You've gotta get your appointments scheduled two months in advance. It's a big commitment. And so to come out and say, "Well, you know, I think that this is a great vintage," well a lot of people could have done that. But actually, very few people did. So the idea of giving high scores to wines when I think that they're merited, that's not as easy as people think. Because if you're wrong, you're gonna pay the price.

**0:26:53 LD:** Have there been times where you were really excited about a wine, maybe in barrel, and then later you went back and tried it and it wasn't what you expected and you had to revise what your thoughts were originally?

**0:27:04 AG:** Yeah, that happens occasionally. You never really know why that could be. I think that making wine is really hard. You get one vintage a year, obviously. You can't really erase mistakes. You're not really drawing in pencil. And I think great winemakers have... Because I was always taught that great winemakers had a great palate to know when to do what. And that's not so easy. And I think it's probably much... Like a chef will tell you, you buy a piece of fish, the minute that fish is butchered, you've determined 95% of your end result. You can't improve that. If you buy a pristine piece of salmon, you can't make it taste better than it already is. You can only enhance what's already there but you can't turn three-day old fish into a Le Bernardin dish. It's just not gonna happen.

**0:27:54 AG:** So with wine, I think of it very similarly. It's very easy to take something away. And it's very hard to keep something great, if that's what you've picked. So a lot of times, what happens, maybe the wines aren't racked properly, meaning they're not moved when they need oxygen, or they're maybe bottled too late and they oxidise a little bit. So I have had that happen where you taste wines that are not as impressive in the barrel as they were in the bottle. But that's why I think it's really important to do both sets of tastings. So, that takes an enormous amount of work especially the region where it takes the most amount of work is Burgundy because the production of these wines is very small. It's not easy to taste bottled wines in Burgundy. Producers will open them up very rarely. So it takes a lot of work, a lot of scheduling, a lot of organization, a lot of logistics. That's why I always believe very much, as much as possible, to taste bottled wines again in barrel. And the only place where that... Steve is really taking over Burgundy for Vinous for the most part. But the only place where that is just logistically, virtually impossible on a comprehensive basis is in Burgundy. Anywhere else, if you can taste wines that you've had in barrel and bottle, so that gives you the chance to do the comparison. But yeah, that happens occasionally.

**0:29:15 LD:** You spoke about it being difficult to give a wine a high score. Is it sometimes difficult to give a wine a low score?

**0:29:19 AG:** Absolutely. It's the same deal. At the end of the day, most wines especially... With the exception of big, mass-produced wines, which are not necessarily gonna be in the sweet spot for readers of a publication like Vinous, or the other publications in the same kind of realm, they're often made by people and families. They're not made by corporations. And you know what it's like to go to Burgundy or Piedmont or many other parts of the world where you might be tasting in what is basically somebody's home or their kitchen or their garage. And sure, sometimes even your favorite producer's gonna have an off vintage. It happened to... For example, Bruno Giacosa, 2008s, 2009s, are very disappointing vintages next... Relative to what's happened there since 1961. That's like five decades, right? '60s, '70s, '80s, '90s, 2000s. So, yeah, there's a perfect example. That's one of the producers that I own the most of. I still have 1960s Barolos and Barbarescos in my cellar of Giacosa.

**0:30:21 AG:** So, I know these wines really well, I've tasted them forever, but they had a really... They're, I think, coming out of it slowly, but they had a really rough patch there in '08 and '09. The wines were really disappointing and I wrote what I thought. Same thing with Mauro Mascarello's 2009s. I thought Kelham Vignet had a problem with '09s from the barrel to the bottle. I thought that the wines had been bottled perhaps a bit too late. The fruit was dried out. They were very different from when they were in barrel, and I had given these wines really good scores in the barrel. Really good scores. And in the bottle, the wines were really... Unfortunately, I thought they were kind of a disaster.

**0:31:00 AG:** There's some times when you taste wine where you just, you pray, you hope, you would love to be wrong. You would love that this is not the reality, but you can only write what you think on that one day, and I thought these wines were a little... They were oxidised, and they were... And the fruit had dried out, and you're dealing with a person who's had a very hard life. She lost her husband young, she's a single mother raising two kids in France, massive fighting with the relatives over vineyards. This is very difficult. Making wine is hard even without all that, and yet this was in Wine Advocate days, but the principle was the same. It was basically the reader needs to know that these wines in the bottle are not what they were in the barrel, and it was heartbreaking to publish those reviews, but I had to...

**0:31:45 AG:** And that's an example where I used... I just listened... I used as a barometer, as a compass, I really thought, "What is in the best interest of the reader?" What's in the best interest of the reader is that I publish what I really think about these wines, and that's a very hard decision 'cause we're all human and it was not an easy thing to do, and I don't know if it's the right decision or not. But I did do what I thought was in the best interest of our customer.

**0:32:14 AG:** I wanna to be able to sleep at night, so the only way that that's gonna happen is if I write what I think. That's what people are paying for. I won't always be right, but it will definitely be what I think. But then that happens because... Just because you made a great wine last year, doesn't mean you can make a great wine next year. I think one of the things that's interesting is that because wine making is so tied to nature that you can see incredibly fast changes actually even though you only get to make one vintage a year, that is true. By the same token, it's amazing

actually, but it's actually true, that you can see very significant changes in a very short period of time. We're publishing Napa Valley reviews this week, and you look at Hourglass and Blueline, which were made by Bob Foley. Now they're made by Tony Biagi who, of course, made wines at Plumpjack for many years. The wines could not be more different. And you can have a conversation about you like them, you don't like them, that's all totally cool, but in just a span of a year, everything is completely changed.

**0:33:17 AG:** Maria Teresa Mascarello, her dad's wines were funky, inconsistent. She gets rid of the old barrels, brings in new barrels, is doing better sorting. She's got people working there who can help her in things because, ultimately, nobody does anything by themselves in this world. You have to have people who can help you in things that aren't necessarily your strengths, and in a few years her wines are now among the very best in Piedmont, but they are for sure better than the wines her father was making. No question about it. A few small little tweaks and changes. So now you've got two very different worlds. Napa Valley high-end Cabernet versus Artisan Piedmont, even though Blueline and Hourglass are still small by Napa Valley standards for sure, but you're talking about rich sumptuous Napa Valley wines versus Artisan transparent Barolos, and those are two cases where a change had profound influence in a very short period of time.

**0:34:14 AG:** So, those are two cases where the changes have been positive, but you can also have changes where the... Can have cases where the changes are negative in a very short period of time. I have never made wine, which is one of my great regrets, but one racking, one filtration that's too heavy, one whatever, treatments that are too close to the harvest, there's just so many chances to get it wrong, it's actually a miracle that the world has so many great wines when you think about all the things that you could do wrong. So, I don't think it's easy at all, but I do think, and I've seen it, that you can see major changes in the positive in a very short period of time. So, it goes both ways.

**0:34:57 LD:** Have there been repercussions to giving low scores? Have there been times where they didn't let you taste there anymore?

**0:35:03 AG:** Yeah, that's happened. It just comes with the territory. This job is a privilege, and I view it as such, and it's kind of unfortunate sometimes that people care so much, but it's just gonna happen. You'll get nasty emails.

[chuckle]

**0:35:25 AG:** I've gotten my share of those, for sure. There are people who don't wanna let you taste their wines, which is, I think, a bit short-sighted, but it's unfortunate. There's definitely places where I can't go back and taste. We're talking before about Bruno Giacosa. That's another one. They were just livid after I wrote what I wrote about their reserve of their '08 red label, and I can't go back there and taste. That's okay. I'll just go buy the wines. We do what's in our subscribers' best interest, always. So, if that's gonna happen, it's gonna happen. I didn't pull any punches there. I wrote what I thought. The reviews weren't terrible, they just weren't at the level of what they're used to. So be it. It's part of life. It's happened to me in California, too, where I can't go taste certain wines.

**0:36:10 LD:** What is a day in the life of a wine critic? What's that really like and what have you learned over the years of what works, what doesn't work for you?

**0:36:16 AG:** Depends a lot on the region and the vintage. So, which is to say that I try to take my time and not be too rushed. You learn how much time you need in each... So, a lot of what this comes down to this job is about organization. It's the idea of that piece of salmon... Well, like your trip, the success of your trip is actually determined before you leave. It's determined by how well you've set up your schedule, and I have a great team of people who help with that.

**0:36:47 LD:** Including your wife.

**0:36:48 AG:** Including my wife who does that and much more. She really, basically, runs the business. But a lot of it has to do with organization. How much time do I need at each place? Do they know exactly which wines I wanna taste, so people aren't fumbling around? And are they prepared? And sometimes you can save a lot of time by having a power outlet for your computer or a table if you wanna sit down. So, there's just things that you learn over time, and these are not my divine ideas, they are things that I've been taught by other people. So, somebody said to me, "Well look, you should ask to have a table and an outlet for your computer." And Becky Wasserman told me this in Burgundy. She said, "Look, this is what you should do."

**0:37:27 AG:** Because obviously, some people prefer notebooks and are a little bit more old fashioned, but she knows how I like to work. She said, "Look, what you need to do is you need to tell everybody to have a table, an outlet, and a chair ready for you when you show up." And she said, "Even if only half of the people do it, you're gonna come out so far ahead." We did that and guess what happened? Almost every single person did that. Oh, and have the barrel samples blended and prepared in advance. Almost everybody did that. Not everybody, but almost everybody did that. So much so that... It was funny because it was a couple of years ago. I was in Burgundy and one night I went to dinner with Jancis Robinson, and she said, "I was just at Dugat-Py this morning and they had this table and this outlet."

[laughter]

**0:38:11 AG:** I'm like, "Yeah, that's because I told them. I asked them to please do that, because of Becky Wasserman." And it's sort of funny that... So, she got the benefit of that as well. Makes a big difference. But I also think sometimes, tasting in cellars can be confusing. Not confusing, it's the wrong word. But there's too many smells and other things going on there. So another great example of something that happened was one of the first times I went to Bruno Clair in Marsannay. I asked if the wines could be prepared in advance, because they make 18 different reds. It's a lot of wines. And they weren't very happy at first, 'cause nobody had ever asked them to do this, I guess. So, we go into their room. It's me and Bruno and Philippe Brun, this long-time winemaker, and we're tasting the wines, and he's gruff at first. He says, "Nobody's has ever asked us to do this before." Kind of like, "Who the hell are you? You're the new kid on the block." This is when I worked for Parker.

**0:39:04 AG:** So, you've got these people who've been going there for many, many years before you. Clive Coates, and Alan, and Steve Tanzer, and John Gilman, and all these people have been there probably many more times than me. And I could tell, he's like, "Who the hell are you? We've done this, but we're not really happy." So, we're tasting the wines and about a third of the way into

the tasting, he's like, "You know, it's really interesting to taste wines outside of the cellar." Okay, I'm like, "Maybe I'll be allowed to come back." And then, about two-thirds in, he says to Philippe, he says, "You know what, we should taste wines like this more often." So, it's interesting, but that's another example of... I guess, the question was about what makes a successful trip or what do you learn, but a lot of it is really about how to manage your time and how to taste most efficiently, and there's no question that if you can taste the wine outside of a cellar, which is tough to do in Burgundy, really, sometimes almost impossible; but when you can do a lot of times, you find things and wines that are not always so apparent.

**0:40:07 AG:** So, what's the life of a critic? It's about managing your time. If I know that I'm tasting a very tannic vintage, like 2003 was in Barolo and Piedmont, because the heat had a stopped the phenolic ripeness in a lot of these wines. And so, I was imagining that I was gonna taste really massively tannic wines, I will make a little bit of a lighter schedule. And then, there are places where you can taste all day. Burgundy is a great example, the wines are not that alcoholic. Obviously, they're all about lightness and grace. You never get poured a lot of wine either. I think Burgundy is just the best place. I noticed once I started going there, you become much more sensitive. It think that Burgundy is the best place in the world to train a palate. Because you're gonna go to Bruno Clair, and you're gonna taste 18 Pinot Noirs, and they're all Pinot Noir, and they're all pretty much made the same way.

**0:40:57 AG:** And the only thing that changes, only, right, like everything. But what changes is really where the wine is from, and that is a great, great, great exercise for developing your understanding of nuance and finesse, shades of grey. It's all shades of grey. There's no blacks and whites here. It's all shades. It's all tonalities. It's like looking at a Mark Rothko painting and just seeing where the colour very slightly changes. And from top to bottom, it's totally different. It's all about the transitions. What's the difference: Marsannay, Chèvre? Really understanding that the nuances of the village or the Premier Crus. So, in Burgundy, though, I find it very easy to taste, because you're not getting a lot of wine. They're also on this schedule, 'cause generally... Especially, for the red wines are mostly tasted in November. These producers have a whole slew of people coming, who've come before or coming after. So, producers themselves are on a fairly tight, you can tell, schedule. So, you're in a groove of having to taste a fairly high number of wines fairly quickly, with very few variables, 'cause if you're tasting reds from Côte de Nuit, it's all Pinot.

**0:42:05 S5:** So you're gonna go from cellar to cellar. So I find that very easy to taste in Burgundy, actually. Because the wines don't really tire you. Napa Valley is tough, wines are big, powerful. I try to limit centralized tastings and do mostly visits, which obviously spaces out the wines, 'cause there's a lot of conversation and context. So it's a question of kind of understanding what you're going to taste and how you're organized. I also like to start early and go late, but I like to take a nice break in the middle of the day. So that's not so easy to do in the States because culturally, it's tough. But in places like Piedmont or Burgundy, it's easier. But I found that that to me is the ideal day. Start 8:00 or 8:30, work 'til 12:30 or so, have a real lunch, not a sandwich, not a hard-boiled egg in the car, which is my usual routine in Burgundy, [chuckle] I hate to say, it's not glamorous. And then taste 'til 6:00 or 7:00 at night, maybe a little bit later sometimes.

**0:43:00 AG:** So you kind of, if you do it that way, you can kinda get two days out of one, 'cause you take a nice chunk off in the middle. And unless there's some spectacular life-changing wine to

taste, basically, I have lunch by myself and I don't drink at lunch or dinner. There's always a couple of exceptions to that, but it's for the most part, that's what I try to do. And if I drink at night, it's really just a taste, it's never anything major 'cause I wanna be really fresh the next day. So those are the things you learn.

**0:43:26 LD:** How does your palate change over the course of the day?

**0:43:29 AG:** Well I like tasting the best at the end of the day. It's really funny, another Sonoma winery, I was scheduling my first appointment there and I wanted to go at 5 or 6 o'clock at night, which is kind of like my favorite time to taste because one, you're really in a groove, I find that I'm at my most sensitive and perceptive at the end of the day, because I think tasting is a lot like sports. What you really like is that last mile of your run, you get tired in the middle, you don't get tired at the end. So at the end of the day, I usually feel very alert, very focused and I've got the memory of all the wines I've tasted up until that point. So I like tasting around, let's say six or so, five or six, and later... Not, obviously, 'til like midnight or anything that. [chuckle] But that sort of the last appointment of the day, is a very calm period also, because you're not thinking about where you have to go next. So I there's, I think, an aperture of the mind that's totally different. So to me this is a great time to taste.

**0:44:31 AG:** So anyway, I emailed this winemaker and I said, "I'd like to come at 5 o'clock." And he said, "Do you have no respect for our winery? We will not be your last stop of the day!" Wow, okay. Because there's plenty of places that ask me to be the last stop, usually a lot of places, especially in Italy, they kind of prefer that because then the winemaker themselves is not thinking about who's coming next. Dinner is very late so they're not thinking about dinner, it's just kind of this very nice peaceful time between, call it, 5:00 and 8:00, where there's no more appointments but no meal or any other commitments of any kind. So a lot of times I save big tastings or very important wines that are structured and tannic that I wanna spend some time with, a lot of times, I'll do those tastings at the very end of the day. But here, it was a completely different reaction. [laughter] So you sort of learn a little bit kind of what other people's perceptions are. But I like tasting towards the end of the day, I find it a great time, very relaxing time.

**0:45:30 AG:** So I think that maybe that's what happens, sometimes it's a little bit hard in the morning and so I like to take my time in the morning as well just to get sort of habituated. But you also get into a kind of a routine of doing things and so it usually takes a wine or two and then you're sort of off to the races.

**0:45:46 LD:** You spoke a little bit about the situation on the ground in Burgundy, but how is the situation on the ground in the Piedmont? That's the region you've been going for many years, what's it like today versus yesterday and the day before?

**0:45:55 AG:** Well, it's radically changed. I started going there in 1997, first time. And this was the era of the Gambero Rosso, of the Tre Bicchieri, of the super, jammy, concentrated oak-y wines that were all the rage. You couldn't give away a lot of the wines that are super popular now. And I did this private event on these wines in the fall, two or three months ago. And somebody asked me, "What is it about this region that made you fall in love with it?" And the main reason is that you could go to these wineries, you would meet directly with the winemaker and they would open

whatever you wanted to taste and spend hours of time with you. And so what a tremendous education. So you're tasting with Luciano Sandrone, you're tasting with Bartolo Mascarello, you're tasting with Domenico Clerico, you're tasting with Elio Altare. My God, what a privilege! On top of that, you have this wine, Barolo and Barbaresco is one year less, but you've got this wine that has aged for a couple of years in bottle and a year in the barrel, which means that you might be able to taste three or four different vintages of each wine.

**0:47:12 AG:** So you go to Scavino or Brovia, or any of these producers who make multiple single vineyard wines, and once they know that you're a serious taster, you might taste three or four vintages of these wines, and now you do that once a year or twice a year, that is an amazing education that you can't get in any other part of the world. So when I go to Piedmont in November, for example, which I've been going there at that time of the year for forever, but to give you an example, in November, I might taste... So this is, let's say for example, this would be November 2014, I would've tasted the 2011s that were bottled in the summer, sold next year, 2015. 2010, which is the vintage that is currently being sold, I start with bottled wines, then I'd taste all the 12s, all the 13s and possibly some 14s as well, if the wines aren't weird. This was a very late harvest so not the best year to do that, but it gives you an idea of four or five vintages, every time you go, of every wine of four or five vineyards. You cannot get that education in Burgundy. You cannot get that education in Napa Valley. You can't get that education anywhere, except for possibly, very specific wines that spend a lot of time in the cellar. It could be Vega Sicilia, Monfortino, whatever, but there's just not... This is not the way that wines are really made anymore. Montalcino would be another place if they didn't tinker with the wines so much.

**0:48:33 AG:** So now you're visiting a region where you're tasting a lot of wines and a lot of vintages on a rolling basis and your palate just grows because you have this ability to access wine because the wines are available. They're in the barrel. They're not bottled, and nobody's really losing anything by pouring you something that's in a tank or a barrel. Roberto Voerzio would go and taste six or seven crus of La Morra, four vintages. That's a hell of an education. If you can't understand the difference between Cerequio, La Sera, Brunate, Rocche dell'Annunziata in that tasting, you should be doing something else. It's just an unbelievable experience.

**0:49:10 AG:** So that's why I fell in love with Piedmont. I fell in love with Piedmont because you had access to the actual people who were making the wine and the ability to have an incredible educational tastings, place after place, after place after place. You go to Conterno Giacomo with Roberto Conterno, you can taste every barrel in the cellar if you want. That's an amazing experience. So that's why I fell in love with those wines.

**0:49:32 AG:** It's interesting though because back then, you could buy as much Rinaldi as you wanted. You could buy as much Bartolo Mascarellos you wanted. The first vintage is a Monfortino that I bought, they were available at retail for years.

**0:49:45 AG:** The idea that a wine is sold... The prices for Italian wineries that come out in January, not necessarily January 1st per se, but in January a company will... A winery will put out its price list. And the idea that a wine is made and then sold within that calendar year that's a very recent phenomenon in modern times. This is not the way that it used to be. It used to be that vintages would take two or three years to sell through. And therefore, you might walk into winery XYZ and



see several vintages of wines. And when I started to go back in the late '90s, the wines that were all the rage were the blends, Monpras, and things like that.

**0:50:26 AG:** You talk to these people and they'll tell you, "We use to have Monpra in our location, and Barolo, we couldn't sell." [laughter] To even say this, it's not even 20 years later, it seems almost unbelievable. You might sit across the table from me and say, "This guy is crazy", but that's really the way that it was. It was totally different. So what's changed? Well back then obviously, there was an infatuation with much more international style of wine, of grapes. And then the Italian press, I think did a really bad job in the sense that they only promoted one style of wine. This is one of the very first things I wanted to do with Piedmont Report.

**0:51:00 AG:** I've never taken the view as a critic people should care what I think, per se. It's more a question of, I wanna show you the lay of the land and then I want people to figure out what they like, give people the tools to make their own decisions. What I like is only important to me. Why should you care? You shouldn't. But you might have an interest in saying, "Well, this is kind of a good representation of the landscape. Let me taste here, and there and see what I like."

**0:51:24 AG:** So Piedmont Report was conceived to give people the entire breadth, just like we'll have our Festival of Barolo coming up in a couple of months. It's the same deal. I want people to taste everything from Burlotto to La Spinetta. Then you decide what you like. I could care less. It's not my job to tell you what to drink. I don't wanna tell you what you should like or not like, but what we wanna do is show the breadth. So Piedmont Report was born with the idea of showing people the breadth.

**0:51:50 AG:** When we started this 10 years ago, the only sort of traditional Barolo or Barbaresco that was very well reviewed in the states was really Bruno Giacosa, and that's because he's represented by Winebow. And Winebow had great access to Parker and the rest of the US media. And then you would get an occasional good review here or there. But these wines were really not at all followed. And you could buy, even 10 years ago, you could go to Rinaldi and buy multiple vintages, Mascarellos had wine lying around forever. Monprivato was an unknown wine in the States aside from New York, Chicago and California which is not America. And it was just amazing.

**0:52:28 AG:** So what's changed is that the more traditional wines have become obviously, much more popular. But more than that, there's really been a convergence of style in a big way because if you go look at Cascina Francia today, I can guarantee you that that vineyard is not being farmed the way Roberto Conterno's father farmed it. There's a lot of dropped fruit. The yields are really low. This is a modern vineyard. [laughter] It's a modern vineyard. You can say whatever you want. The only thing that's traditional about this wine is that it's got... It spends a lot of time in barrels, has long fermentation and it's very basically, minimally handled, but this is not a traditional wine in the sense of the oxidated wines that my dad liked to drink 30 years ago.

**0:53:11 AG:** So the massive convergence of style, the traditionalists have backed off, they've cleaned up the cellar and made more effort to have hygiene, and switched out old barrels, bought better destemming equipment. I think this is one of the big issues with Nebbiolos that Nebbiolo has a very fragile jack that doesn't always separate from the skin. And if you don't have full phenolic

ripeness, you end up with jacks in your tanks.

**0:53:35 AG:** So you can assume that in an era where... Let's take about, look at what the '70s... '60s and '70s, where you had cooler vintages, lower levels of ripeness, probably not the best equipment. Even if you destemmed, you're probably getting some percentage of stems, or jacks or stuff in your tank, and that was in the wine. Today, people are more attentive. So, wines are cleaner. They're more polished, and then of course, the weather has changed dramatically. It's much drier, warmer, most of the time. So the weather has played a big role in how these wines have changed, but the wines of today are very different from the wines of 30 years ago. There's nothing you can do about that. But basically, since I've been going there, there's a big stylistic shift, a big stylistic conversion, which I think is generally good because the idea of modernist versus traditionalist was something that I never really found particularly exciting, where you see the big jump in quality which is great. What worries me is that Barolo might become the next Piedmont. Producers might become inaccessible. It's harder to go now. Producers travel more.

**0:54:37 LD:** Might become the next Burgundy?

**0:54:38 AG:** Yeah.

**0:54:38 LD:** Barolo might become the next Burgundy?

**0:54:40 AG:** It is already, I think, but I don't mean just in terms of the wine. I mean, in terms of the lack of access. It was very easy, when I started going there, but now, when I try to make my appointments, people are travelling more. You got to start a little bit earlier. People have more commitments. This year, I saw more British and French tourists in Piedmont than I have ever seen ever before, in restaurants, in town, walking around, in shops. I think that that's obviously very good in some ways 'cause there's economic prosperity, but it's also changing the landscape quite significantly. And now you have foreign groups looking for places to invest. A hectare of top quality Barolo vineyard is gonna cost about 1.2 million Euros more or less, give or take. In Burgundy, the price for Grand Cru vineyards might be 15 times that. So the parcels of course is very different, but 10 to 15 times is normal.

**0:55:37 AG:** So people are looking... There are serious foreign groups, American, Asian, European, at Italy, of course, looking to make investments in Italy, including the biggest luxury brand and mass market wine groups than you can think of. You name five of them, you're gonna get three right away that are looking right now to buy vineyards in Piedmont, and that will change forever, the economics of vineyard land in Piedmont. The local wine making family can still afford to buy even top tier vineyards in Piedmont. You might have to get a loan or securitize versus other assets that you have, but it's still possible. But in five years, it won't be possible. It will become like Burgundy where all vineyards are slowly gonna be owned by investors, and that totally changes the place. So as somebody who's been buying these wines and drinking these wines, it just seems inevitable to me. I just hope it doesn't happen necessarily right away, but it just seems sadly like it's just gonna happen. And once that train starts, I don't think it can really go back.

**0:56:42 LD:** And do you think the interest that we see now in the market for Barolo is based on the

great 2010 vintage, a run of good vintages in general, good pricing in an era of price escalation in other regions? What's causing so much interest in Barolo today?

**0:56:57 AG:** I think it's kind of a perfect storm. This is what I told my readers early this year because I knew this was gonna happen. It was so clear to me that this was gonna happen, Levi. This is the... Why you can't have your blinders on, and only can think about one or two regions, why you have to understand what's happening in the world. What was very obvious to me was... Look, this should be obvious to anybody this is not rocket science. What do we know as a fact? We know as a fact that Bordeaux hasn't had an exciting vintage since 2010, which itself has not sold because the prices were too high because after 2009 sucked out so much money from the market, that people just didn't have enough to really spend. So you still have 2010 unsold, which is a great vintage, maybe better than '09 for Bordeaux. Those wines are unsold, then you have 11, 12, and 13, which are all some various level of average or slightly better but certainly not going to... Or slightly worse, but certainly not vintages that are going to inspire people to go out and buy wines, which for people who didn't know it before are not particularly exclusive. There's nothing exclusive about a first growth Bordeaux.

**0:58:04 AG:** The wines are fantastic. They're reference points, I think they'll come back. They're a great book or a great piece of art, a great symphony. There's always a place for those wines, but they are produced in big quantities. There's 20,000 cases of each first growth Bordeaux made each year more or less. So when people decided, these wines are expensive, but they're not particularly exclusive. That was a big problem because there's only 500 bottles of Christophe Roumier Musigny. And if you want that, that's really exclusive. That's expensive and exclusive. So that's Bordeaux, so you've got unsold 2010, and then three vintages in the pipeline that are not particularly gonna set the world on fire. Then there's no Burgundy. Burgundy hasn't had a regular harvest since 2009 of production, so there's no wine. When I went this summer to Taste 2012, producers were so apologetic about not having any wine to show. Those vintages are down anywhere from 30% or so in '10, and '11, 30 or 40%, but some places in Cote de Beaune, as you all know, 2012, 2013, and maybe even '14, it's too soon to know exactly, but you're looking at minus 70, minus 80, minus 90. So there's no volume, and if you're only getting a six-pack of Grand Cru Burgundy to sell, you're not gonna be able to pay the lights if you're in the business of selling wine.

**0:59:20 AG:** So it was very clear to me that two of the other big traditional Old World regions, one had no wine to sell, and the other one had no exciting vintages to sell. So it just seems very obvious that the market is going to flock to Piedmont. And 2010 Barolo, which is a better vintage than 2010 Barbaresco, one of the things I've tried to always highlight, but it's hard, these are two different regions. Yes, they're few kilometres away, but the vintages do not track. It just seemed to be so obvious that there was gonna be an explosion in these wines because what else are gonna people sell if you're in the business of selling? What else is sexy right now? What else can you get people excited about? There's no doubt on my mind that if 2010 Barolo had come... As good as the wines are, and I believe that they are great, if they had come out at a time when there was a similarly high quality vintage in Bordeaux or Burgundy or also let's not forget Napa Valley because even though those buyers may not be the same buyers, Napa Valley 2011, which is an unfairly maligned vintage in my view is still not a hyped vintage by any stretch of imagination.

**1:00:18 AG:** So, there's no excitement in the world of wine right now. If the '10 Barolos had come

out at a time where there was '09 Bordeaux or '09 Burgundy, it would be a totally different ball game. But you have one region with very high quality wines and a lot of dollars, Euros, whatever you want, chasing a limited supply, and this is what has created I think this interest in this wine. Not that the wines don't merit it on their own, but it's accentuated by the lack of stuff for the trade to sell in this moment right now.

**1:00:46 AG:** So, that's why I told my readers that they need to get on it right away if they wanted to buy these wines because it was really clear that these were the industry dynamics and you can't change that, it's so obvious. So, I think that's the main reason. And then now people are tasting the wines and they're phenomenal, of course. But I think a lot of it has to do with the macro environments, the macro environments surrounding wine. I've never seen so much interest in Barolo. But I also know that I've had big merchants in London tell me that they're out... That their Bordeaux business is down 70 or 80%. What are they gonna do? They're gonna sell something.

**1:01:16 LD:** Is the image of Barolo helping with that somehow or is there something about what Barolo is that helps it through the channel besides the numbers part of it?

**1:01:24 AG:** Well, I think there's an image thing. But I'm not sure that necessarily... It's one of the most beautiful things about Barolo, but I'm not sure people necessarily understand it 'cause it's not been so well documented. But Barolo is a wine that has both... Has its origins in nobility. So it's an aristocratic wine from the beginning. So, we're talking like late 1800s. It's an aristocratic wine in its birth. You have three noble families that are involved. No heirs really and so then there's a period of kind of void. And then the modern day version of Barolo, as we understand it sort of today is more closely linked to what you might think of Burgundys or vineyards that are owned multiple families, artisan wines, small scale production, very much hand-made, hand-crafted kind of wines.

**1:02:12 AG:** So, Piedmont is this region that can bring together that it can appeal to you for... On a number of different levels. You can fall in love with the aristocratic origins, places like Fontanafredda or the Castello di Barolo or the Castello di Grinzane. And then you can fall in love with the producer who's got their vegetable garden outside their vineyards like Elio Altare, which is like... That is as artisan as Contadino, as a vigneron as it can get. So, Piedmont has both. But I think what's really changed Levi is that the wines are much easier to drink young than before. It was always like, "Oh, you've got to wait 20 or 30 years." Yeah, those are the wines my dad bought. They were undrinkable. They were hard as nails. Today, you've got cleaner cellars, better destemming, higher levels of phenolic ripeness 'cause there's less snow and the seasons are generally drier and warmer, generally. There's obviously been a few exceptions in there, '13 and '14, but for the most part, the... And wine-making has improved, weather forecasting has improved.

**1:03:15 AG:** 2005 is a vintage where they know that there was a big weather storm coming and that it was gonna last many, many days like seven, eight days, and there was a decision to make: Pick early and make sure that you've saved the crop or wait it out. That is a harvest saved by weather forecasting. The parents of today's winemakers had no radar or weather forecasting to even make such a decision. They would've just harvested when they always harvested. It would've been harvested under the rain. That is an example of a vintage that exists today because people have weather forecasting technology. Think about it. A generation ago, that would've been one of those rotted vintages that you forget about.

**1:03:55 AG:** So, the quality of wines has gone up and now people taste the wines and like, "Holy smoke, these wines are tremendous." You can taste... We did a 2008 Barolo dinner at Bar Boulud a couple of months back and I was talking about this with Mike Madrigal the other night how incredibly beautiful the wines were. Are they gonna be better in 10 years or 20 years? God, I hope so. Yes, I think that they will. But is it a crime to open 12 or 14 '08 Barolos and taste them? Absolutely not. The wines are delicious today. So, I think that that's what's changing. What's changing is that more people are tasting the wines young and then you make a decision. "I like them. I don't like them," that's fine, whatever. But the wines are much more easy to understand young, people can make decisions, people are discovering how beautiful the wines are. They're nowhere near as monstrously tannic as they were a generation ago.

**1:04:40 AG:** And so, people are starting to buy a little bit more. I had one reader say to me, "I've never bought Barolo, but this year, I wanted to check out this vintage, so I bought a mixed case of '10 Barolo." Well guess what, there's 13 million bottles of Barolo made each year, of which, maybe half a million are going to be wines that really interest you. Just think about sort of half a million, maybe a million, tops. But I think it's close to half a million. The average domain... The production at a high-end domain of Barolo might be 25, 30, 40,000 bottles, even unless you get the Scavino or Vira level... The production is pretty small, actually. So, even if you said it's a million of bottles that interest us out of 13 or so, if thousands of consumers around the world say, "I want to buy... I've never bought this wine, but now I wanna buy a case." Well, it doesn't take very much of that kind of behavior, which is actually fairly tame behavior. It's not saying, "I'm gonna buy 10 cases of something." And then... And multiplying that. If thousands of people around the world say... Who've never participated in this market for this wine say, "I'm gonna buy a case to check it out." That can have a profound impact on the supply and the availability for everybody else. So, these are the things that I think are really driving it. Wines are just better, younger, more easy to understand.

**1:06:00 LD:** But has the palate of the American consumer changed at all? Because I feel like, say, the 2007 vintage, if that had come out in 1997 or in 1990, which are vintages that I think are somewhat similar, it seems like that vintage would have been a lot more popular with the consumer. In reality, it came out in 2007, and it seems like it did okay, but not great with the American consumer.

**1:06:23 AG:** Well, I think people are going to re-discover '07. I think it's a great vintage. For sure, it's not a classic vintage, there's no question about it. It's a very precocious, warm year. The wines are really rich, voluptuous, maybe uncharacteristically so. But would I love to have some more '85 Monfortino? Or '85 Giacosa Red Labels, or '85 Elio Altare or whatever? Yeah. Those are vintages that I think get their due much later. It's a paradox, you would think, right? As long as the wines don't fall apart, of course, that's... We're gonna knock on wood here. I don't think that's gonna happen. The mind always thinks, "Well, ripe, flashy, vintage, these wines should drink well young, but they may not age, and they're kind of sweet, and not sweet like in an RS way, like you might find in Napa Valley Cabernet, but they're definitely richer. There's more glycerine than you're used to seeing in Nebbiolo, and that can throw some people off. But when the wines are 15 or 20 years old, they're gonna be absolutely glorious, and I regret not buying more of that vintage.

**1:07:21 AG:** It's not a vintage for... It's a vintage that drinks young, 'cause the tannin is sweet. So, if

you're in a restaurant or whatever, you'd for sure drink a seven before a six. Six is hard as nails. It is not a classic vintage, there's no question about it. Yeah, maybe it is like '90. But so what, those are glorious wines, too. I always think more by the estate, more than the vintage anyway, but I think '97 is not... I mean '07 is not the vintage for the real hardcore Nebbiolo drinker. I think that the classic vintages happen to all be even. '04, which I just did a huge retrospective tasting of that's an unbelievable vintage. That's just... Yeah, and talking about a vintage of giving high scores to.

**1:08:02 AG:** I remember tasting those wines when they were just coming out. I was working at Deutsche Bank at the time, squeezing in my tasting during Thanksgiving week. I loved this vintage. I thought the wines were tremendous. I always published Piedmont in The Wine Advocate in February, sometimes April, 'cause I wanted my article to be in the hard copy for those wines. And I thought the world needs to know this vintage is great now. And I remember, I pulled my... I was around Marco Parusso's place, it was like six or seven o'clock at night. It was dark. I stopped. So, that's kind of on the border between Castiglione Falletto...

**1:08:36 LD:** Castiglione and Monforte...

**1:08:38 AG:** Yeah, between Castiglione Falletto and Monforte, you can see Aldo Conterno. But I remember exactly where I stopped. I called Parker on the phone, I said, "I need you to save me 12 pages," whatever it was, "In the print edition. We're gonna put Barolo in the December issue." And that was the earliest year that The Advocate published Piedmont's scores, because I was just blown away by these wines. They were so pure and delicate, but powerful. And I tasted the wines at age 10, and they're all really pretty exceptional. So, I was really happy with that tasting. That's a perfect example of being a little bit nervous about revisiting a vintage, 10 years later. But so, four, six, eight, 10, those are the vintages for people who like more powerful, more... Even though four is very sexy and refined, I've always like that vintage for its finesse.

**1:09:23 AG:** Six is very... Four is kind of like eight, those are very late harvest vintages. Very sweet, more feminine, delicate. Six and 10 are power house, massively tannic vintages. You don't wanna touch those for a long time. And then, seven is not really a vintage for maybe the more classic leaning palate, but I think in 20 years, people will be very happy with those wines.

**1:09:45 LD:** And two is a good example of classically rainy.

**1:09:48 AG:** Two is a freak vintage that got destroyed by hail. I think it was on September 1st. When I went to Piedmont... I was living in Italy at the time. When I went there, the first time after that, I just could not believe what I was seeing. We're just talking about just devastation of vineyards and vines are... People think, okay, January 1 is a new year. Vineyards have a historic memory, they store information, like people. The year doesn't reset for us on January 1, it's just seamless. Vines are the same way. So, the effect of hail, 2002, it's not just in 2002, but had potential issues for the future now. Looks like nothing too bad happened. Yet, '03 was a freak vintage afterwards. But '02, yeah, very rainy, but hail was really the big issue, 'cause that just eliminated the need for... The ability for people to make wines. People made wines in '91, they made wines in '92, they made wines in '94. In '04, there was no fruit, in '02, there was no fruit. I remember going to Roberto Voerzio's place and seeing the tanks empty in like October. It's just crazy. Empty with the doors open.

**1:10:55 AG:** And usually, you expect to have the smell of the Nebbiolo fermenting, which is a godly, heavenly smell, as you know. And you expect sound, and you expect to see bustle and people moving stuff. And there's dead silence, really pretty depressing. In '02, there was a few people who made wine. Monfortino, of course, the Massolino brothers made all of their single vineyard wines. And I think it's an average vintage, where people made wine, but you have one epic wine. But I think it's very interesting that the Soldera '02 is also extraordinary. And Miani's '02s, I think are beautiful. And I think that there are places where, it just makes you think about what does it really take to make great wine? Risk, you got to take some risk, of course. Why is it that the '02 Soldera is so magnificent? Why is it that the '02 Monfortino is so great? Yeah sure, if you're in La Morra and you had no grapes, okay fine. But that was... Hail was very localized. That was a huge hail storm so, don't get me wrong, I don't mean to minimize it. But I can't believe Cascina Francia is the only vineyard that can make a great wine in all of Piedmont. That just can't possibly be. There's gotta be something more than that. And that more is I think what separates. They inspire people from the excellent, from the good, from the not so good, from the worse, right?

**1:12:22 LD:** Let's talk about Tuscany for a minute. You mentioned Soldera. The last time you were here, you talked about Montalcino being divided by the [1:12:28]       , which I thought was a particularly poetic and quite apt historical observation. What's the story with Montalcino today and what happened in 2009?

**1:12:39 AG:** I think that the Italian culture really likes controversy and likes to air the dirty laundry. Thankfully, Montalcino's been kind of quiet for a while, and I think that's very good. People don't need to know about the ins and outs of stuff. You go to Burgundy, you never hear producers speak badly about their neighbour. They might hate them. They might be killing each other to buy the same vineyard, but they're not gonna let somebody from the outside see that. Montalcino, they've got 2010 coming out. January, the wines I've tasted from the barrel have been terrific, so hopefully that's what's gonna come through. I think things are a little bit more calm down there. '09 is a really... Before we talked about giving low scores to wines, well, '09 Montalcino is a perfect example. Certainly, my view was much more critical than I think anybody else's that I've seen.

**1:13:28 LD:** And why do you think that would be?

**1:13:29 AG:** Why?

**1:13:31 LD:** Yeah, why do you think you took a more critical tone than someone else?

**1:13:35 AG:** Well, again, it really is pretty simple. One, I wanna sleep at night. Two, I know people are gonna make decisions based on what I think, and I just don't wanna let people down. I view what I do as... It's a massive responsibility, and it was just obvious that the wines were... They were off. You could just tell the colours were very forward wines that deviated significantly from historical norms at estates. So, when you've tasted a vintage like that, you're collecting lots of data points and triangulating, and you're thinking, "Okay, maybe, I've got 50 wines in front of me." And you're comparing them to each other, but then you're obviously visiting wineries and tasting the

surrounding vintages. How does nine compare to eight, to 10, to 11, to 12? It was so obvious that this vintage was problematic. But it wasn't always problematic. See, I think that the... Well, when I was also there in the summer, I forgot. It's important but in the summer of 2009, I spent... I can't remember how much time we spent in Italy, but we spent at least a week in Tuscany, visiting vineyards and seeing things.

**1:14:43 AG:** And so, you drive through these vineyards, and there was a massive heatwave at the end of August. Second half of August is when you expect, after FERIA de Agosto, that's when the weather is supposed to turn. That's supposed to be kind of the very, very last days of summer. It's when the nights start to get cool, and you start to get a sense that fall is somewhere off in the horizon. The really intense dog days of summer are supposed to be past by then. But in '09, it just continued to be very hot even at night, very... Uncomfortably hot. And I was there. I saw it. I went, saw vineyards. And I think it's a question of probably what happens in nine is that you have yields that are too high, therefore, it's a paradox. But when you have a very hot year, you actually have to drop crop. I think people sometimes think, "Well, if I drop too much crop, I might get fruit that's excessively concentrated."

**1:15:37 AG:** And I think that that's a risk. I'm not a viticulturist. People who know what they're doing, understand what the balance is. But if you too much fruit, and it's hot, at that last phase of ripening, you're not gonna ripen anything, and you're gonna have these green wines. So, I felt like the wines lacked colour. Sangiovese is like Nebbiolo, they are wines that are supposed to have... People confuse colour with opacity and depth. You look at young Nebbiolo, it's purple. It's purple. You know what it's like. It's violet. And young Sangiovese can be dark red to violet, but it should be translucent and that's very different. The tonality of colour, the translucence is very different from the actual saturation of colour. So, young Sangiovese should have a lively colour. It's just not supposed to be black or purple, but it's supposed to have colour, vibrant colour.

**1:16:26 AG:** So, you could see that these wines were already sort of orange-ish and brownish and fading. And I think that Montalcino really suffers by having these rules, where the wines have to spend a minimum amount of time in oak and a minimum amount of time in bottle. When you go to Napa Valley, there's no rule for when wines are supposed to be bottled. There may be some minimum requirement, but it's so minimal that everybody exceeds it anyway. But from what I've been told, there's no real... There's no minimum requirement. And I just think that today, with the improvement in viticulture... It used to be that wines needed a lot of time in oak, 'cause that's when the edges would get smoothed out, and the wines would come together. But if you're harvesting perfect fruit today, I don't know that you really need that. Look at La Lubis, she bottles at like less than a year, which is obviously very early for Burgundy but still.

**1:17:13 AG:** This idea that wines have to spend two or three years in a barrel or more, and they're released five years after, I just think it's the death sentence. '09 Brunello came out last year. The wines were already old. If they had come out two years before, it might have been a different story. And then, I think the Consorzio giving four stars to this vintage is very problematic, because you send a message, an expectation that's very high. First, to your own members saying this is a good vintage, when you should have said, "Look this is an average vintage. Make little, bottle it, sell it as fast as you can and get it into the hands of people so that it gets drunk." 'Cause now what will happen is everybody's gonna want 10, so there's gonna be a total blood bath of '08 and '09. And the



way that you're gonna get your 10 is if you support people's liquidations of '08 and '09, pardon the pun. I think. I don't know. I'm not in the trade, but that's just instinctively.

**1:18:02 LD:** I think that seems highly possible.

**1:18:04 AG:** Yeah, okay. So this is what I imagine is gonna happen. There'll be a lot of good deals, but I think you would've had better price stability if you would have had the mechanism to sell that wine earlier without having to discount and just lower your price but don't slash your price and get it through the system. This is wine that should've been mostly bottled as Rosso or some Brunello maybe. It should've been sold at a friendly price. It should've been put in restaurant wine list, sold, drunk, cleared out, turn the cash over, and get ready to buy 2010. I'm hoping those wines are great. So I think when the Consorzio says it's a four-star vintage, it sends a message to its own members that instills a false sense of security. "Ah, see that vintage wasn't so bad. Consorzio gave it four stars. What are you talking about? No, no, we're gonna bottle all of it." That's what happens.

**1:18:55 AG:** And to me, it was very obvious. Now, some people were a little bit more charitable about the vintage I think, but to me I've just felt that it needed to be said, and I wrote an article that I'm probably harsh in some people's opinion but I got a lot of people who told me that it was spot on, and I don't think it was anything... What I wrote is what everybody knows to be the truth about Montalcino. Just very few people are willing to say, and it's really obvious; on every level, it's just so obvious. Just go there, spend a week there, I guarantee you, you'll come to the exact same conclusions but you gotta go.

**1:19:35 LD:** So let's take it back to Vinous Media a little bit. When you decided to purchase IWC, that idea originated with you or that was Steven's idea? Who called who?

**1:19:46 AG:** No, that was my idea. It's something that we had been talking about for a long time. I think that businesses that have been owned by an entrepreneur like Steve... My parents owned their own businesses and I know what this mindset is like. It's a very emotional mindset as it should be. You've created something, it's your baby, and it just takes a while for everybody to get comfortable. It's just a very natural thing. These are not things that get done over terms or money or anything like that. It's all about relationship and, "Are we gonna have fun and be able to work together?" Those are sort of the... And it just takes a while for both parties to converge and figure out that you're in the same place. No, but that was something that I had started talking to Steve about a couple years ago.

**1:20:37 LD:** Asking you as Antonio, would you have rather gone this route? Or would you rather go on the route where you got a chance to purchase The Wine Advocate from Parker without starting Vinous?

**1:20:47 AG:** Oh, there's just no question. It's absolutely no question because... It's true, I did try to buy The Wine Advocate a couple times and that was when I... The big shift for me at The Wine Advocate was when I went from writing there part time... While I was working in finance to when I joined full time, which happened around the end of 2010 and the beginning of '11, which is when Bob basically told the world I was his heir apparent and blah, blah, blah. The whole understanding

with Bob and his partners at that time was that I would buy this business, I would buy The Wine Advocate either alone or with other people. But that was a promise that was made many times. And for whatever reason, Bob decided to go a different direction, but I just think of the time I spent there was extremely valuable for me. It was a great experience, great stepping stone.

**1:21:39 AG:** I always knew that it was possible that Bob would sell the business to somebody else anyway because I had a very... I'd worked really closely with him over all that time and I knew how he thought, I knew how he had approached other decisions. I was on the management committee there. I had a lot of insight into how people thought and so I always knew that we needed plan B or plan C, whatever. So I was really prepared for whatever happened. It was kinda out of my control. I knew what Bob wanted financially. We had all the money, but at some point, as I said before, it really never comes down to money, there's other stuff. But Bob made a different decision then and that opened up the door for us to do other stuff.

**1:22:20 LD:** And you're happy with that stuff?

**1:22:21 AG:** Absolutely. I left The Wine Advocate, it was like, it would've been February of 2013. Three months later, Vinous was up and running, and in the middle of that, I changed one of our technology people. So I wasn't really happy with the first person we had building the site, so we basically started over. So we got from February to May, we launched Vinous, with one major personnel changed, one of our outsourced contractors on technology that we changed. We did all that in three months, plus had that little bump, that little speed bump. Why is that possible? Well, it's possible because our core team: You've met Marzia, James, Alex; we'd been working together for a number of years and we knew we were gonna do something. I wasn't sure which direction it was gonna go, but I always had plan B and we needed to have various options. And so, when he sold it to the current owners, that was fine. I was like, "Okay, well, now we know what we're doing next."

**1:23:19 LD:** So that being said, you're a man who thinks 20 years out as you said, what's your end game for Vinous? What's that gonna look like when you're older?

**1:23:28 AG:** So what happened after the Advocate is the opportunities for me personally, but for us have just exploded all over the place. I could've never imagined if you'd said to me three years ago, "This is what's gonna happen to you," I would've said, "You're insane," but one door closes and a thousand have opened, and it's just been tremendous. It's been an incredible personal and professional life-changing experience in the most positive of ways. I would like for everybody who's listening to this to know what that feels like. It's just such an incredible thrill. So as we look to the future, 20 years from now, we're... It's true. I've got two young kids. I like to think more as like a 20 to 30-year timeframe, of making long term decisions, but I think right now, without getting too grandiose or anything, we're focused on... We've got a lot of... You've gotta walk before you can run. We're still in the walking phase. The walking phase is a lot of things that are not very sexy. Making sure that Scavino is not listed seven times on our website, but only once.

[laughter]

**1:24:29 AG:** Unfortunately, there's a fair amount of that. Cleaning up stuff. Making sure that

[1:24:34]      comes out properly. It's not glamorous. It's not sexy, but there's a lot of that that has to be done. So, we're really working on that. We wanna get our new team up to speed, and then we'll see where we go from there. We're very fortunate to be in a strong position. It's possible we would make another acquisition. I don't really know. We'll see what's out there, but I'm super excited. We're just having a lot fun. It's a lot of work, especially during the holidays, not a lot of downtime, but it's been tremendously fun. And what else can you ask for?

**1:25:06 LD:** You recently announced a young writer fellowship, and it sounds somewhat like a mentorship program. Have you had strong mentors in your own life, and what is that fellowship gonna look like in the future?

**1:25:16 AG:** Well, that has always been really important to me because, yeah, I've had a lot of great mentors. Mostly, I would say almost all of them in the world of finance, where I worked for many years, where I think there's more of a culture of that. What I mean by mentor is, I mean somebody who really goes out of their way to make sure you're on the right path. And in the world of finance, I had a lot of people like that who really for whatever reason... I have no idea why. But people who went out of their way to make sure I was doing the right things, making the right decisions, thinking about the right things. And I will forever be grateful to those people because they didn't need to do that. And they were massively successful people, and they helped me tremendously because I think this is what happens. There's a real pleasure in knowing that you've shaped a young person, their life, their career, could be their personal life. It could be whatever, but I've had about three of four of those mentors.

**1:26:17 AG:** And so, that's part of it. The other part of it is that it's very hard to make a living writing about wine, and I think that I'd like to change that. I don't know exactly how in every way, but in our own small way we will contribute to doing that by giving people opportunities. And then, I also wanna discover the next great talents, whoever they are, and then nurture them and have them work with us in the future if they want to. I think that... If you think about a great sports team, it's not just the starters. It almost always comes down to the strength of your backups, your bench. How deep is that bench? That's what really separates the championship calibre teams. That's what really... We're gonna hit the NFL playoffs now. It's gonna come down to how good the second and the third-string guy is, or the person who just came off the practice squad. That's what's gonna really separate the great teams from just the really good.

**1:27:12 AG:** And Vinous has to be great. That's one of the things that... I hate mediocrity, and we're gonna do everything we can to really put out something that is the highest quality possible. And the only way that that's gonna happen is we have to have a really deep bench, just like a sports franchise of young talent that can be the future of this company in 15 or 20 years or 10 years or whenever that is. 'Cause I'm not gonna wanna travel this much forever, I'm not gonna want... I'm sure other people are gonna feel the same way. So, we're gonna discover those people today and help them, shape them. I've taken somebody with me to Burgundy, to Piedmont, shown them around a little bit, given them an incredible experience. Certainly, I never really had that. I travelled with Parker a little bit, but it was all the way at the end when it wasn't really that... Yeah, so I tasted with Bob at Harlan Estate and Beringer and a couple of other places, maybe at the Napa Valley Vintners or whatever. And that was a great experience, but I was beyond the stage of being young impressionable and shape-able, I was, sad to say. I was fairly old, but for somebody... So, the

fellowship is for people under 30. So, for somebody of that age to have those experiences, you can imagine how transformational it might potentially be.

**1:28:28 AG:** So, it's about giving back. It's about discovering the next group of people. It's about being surrounded by young people also, 'cause I find that really invigorating. Publishing their work, if we like it, and hopefully, we can launch some careers. And if we've done a good job and if we've created the right environment that I hope we will, I hope that people will want to be part of our team. I can't control that in the future, of course, but it'll be perfectly fine if people go off and do something else. I think of it kind of the way chefs train people. Some of them might stay on. Some of them might go on and open their own places, but there's always a connection. I think that sometimes with wine writers and wine critics, I would like to see more of the camaraderie and friendships that you see with chefs all the time. These guys might hate each other, and they might be massively competitive, but the public would never see that. The public is gonna see Thomas Keller and Daniel Boulud walking down the street in Aspen, arm in arm, having a grand old time.

**1:29:24 LD:** I'm pretty sure in real life, they like each other.

**1:29:25 AG:** Yeah, well, it's an example, but it's just to say...

**1:29:28 LD:** There are examples where that's not true, but those two guys...

**1:29:30 AG:** I'd like to see a little more camaraderie. I'd like to see a little bit more... A feeling more of community. I don't really think of...

**1:29:41 LD:** You're not hanging out with Jancis and Helen Meadows all the time like, "Hey, let's go throw the football around."

**1:29:46 AG:** I've been to Jancis' home for dinner. We've...

**1:29:49 LD:** That's probably a good meal, huh?

**1:29:50 AG:** Yeah, well, Nick's a great chef, and Jancis serves incredible wines, too. And she's a lovely person, but I don't think of her as a competitor. I think that Bob as...

**1:30:00 LD:** Is that generational? Why wouldn't you? Is that generational?

**1:30:04 AG:** I just don't think of the world like that. Or Bob or even Steve, when he wasn't part of our team. I just don't think of other people as competitors. First of all, we're not in a zero-sum kind of business. So as an example, if you buy an Apple phone, you have, by definition, not bought a Samsung or whatever. So the fact that you're buying one thing means that you're not buying something else. But the fact that you may subscribe to Vinous has no bearing on whether you subscribe to the Advocate or to Jancis or to the Spectator. I mean I would hope that people... The total sum of these publications is nothing next to what people spend on wine and I hope that people subscribe to all the publications. For us to grow, we don't need to take somebody else's customer. We just have to put out a great product. If we put out a great product, then hopefully there's enough

people who will buy it. It's very simple. So I don't think of other critics or other publications as competing with us, really, and therefore, my relationship on a personal level with people is not about competition. Even when Josh didn't work with us, I was still hanging out with him.

**1:31:10 LD:** I'm gonna hang out with him.

**1:31:11 AG:** Great guy to hang out with. And so I don't... That's just not the way I'm wired.

**1:31:15 LD:** You said something about a bridge builder?

**1:31:18 AG:** Well, Vinous is created to be a positive force of energy, not a divisive force. I think that things that are divisive are just full of negative vibe. Vinous is meant to be... That's what the "O" is in our logo. It's a connector. Vinous is a force of positive energy. We're idealists. We're dreamers. We're artists. We're creators. We're not destroyers. We're not trying to divide people. I find that... Who's got time for that? It's such a waste of time. I would much rather be engaged in things that are uplifting and that creates something positive for the future like the fellows program and whatever else we might think of next. But for us, I just think positive energy is a much better way to live than to always be looking over your shoulder or looking to see what somebody else wrote about something that you might have a different view of, and who has time for that?

**1:32:16 LD:** What's your relationship with Robert Parker today?

**1:32:19 AG:** I've always had a good relationship with Bob. I was very transparent with him. I told him exactly what I wanted to do and I told him exactly what I was going to do at numerous critical moments. I don't think he was in anyway surprised that I left, and I think it's better for everybody because Bob really needs to be the number one guy at his publication and he probably should be the number... He should be the number one guy. You will have noticed that when I was there Bob had sort of anointed me... He had not sort of, he did anoint me as the heir apparent. But he hasn't anointed anybody else the heir apparent after I left and what that tells you is that he's got to be the king there and some people have that personality, that's his personality and so great, so it's worked out perfectly. I don't have any... My relationship with him has always been really great.

**1:33:09 AG:** At a certain point in my life, he was very encouraging and that was important. I never got to taste with him as much as I would have liked to but I did at the end. But as I said sort of at the end, would've been much more valuable earlier. But it was for a number of years, it was really a wonderful opportunity. As I said before at the beginning of this interview, for all the years that I worked for Bob, he never asked me to change a single score or asked me anything about any rating. But it was not just that. It was much more than that. Bob didn't ask me to do anything, in the sense that he never asked me about an expense report. Never questioned why I did this or that, and he basically for those six years, seven years, I ran my own business within The Wine Advocate, with full autonomy to go wherever I wanted, do whatever I want, write whichever articles I want. Obviously, I knew what our readers were expecting and that was the most important thing. But I had total autonomy to pretty much do whatever I want. That was a perfect working relationship for somebody like me who already had their own publication, who is responsible enough to not get carried away, who knew how to do it, and so it was a great opportunity for that time.

**1:34:19 AG:** When that changed obviously a lot of other things changed too but for that time it was really a great deal of fun and he's really a great guy to hang out with. Most people don't really... I don't think most people really know the real Robert Parker. He's very different from the public persona and when he wants to be he can be very, very... If he's not busy combating people, he can be very down to earth. [chuckle] Very funny. Has a wicked sense of humour and he's a great guy to hang out with and he taught me a lot about a lot of things. I'm always grateful for that time. There's not question. But these last two years, have been... I wouldn't give them up for anything. Anything. So it's been tremendous.

**1:35:01 AG:** Now, we can build something. We don't have any legacy. We don't have any baggage to deal with. If I had bought The Wine Advocate, I would've spent the rest of my life building somebody else's legacy. Now, we have... Because there was a time... Look, I love Bob Parker. There was a time in my life where I would've done anything for him. I mean anything. People thought I was nuts. In the fall of 2012, I organized with Marzia, we organized a benefit for the Navy SEALs to celebrate Bob's 25th anniversary of the '82 Bordeaux Vintage and the Navy SEALs were people that I knew, my friends and my relationships. I shared those with Bob. We organized that tasting in the fall of 2012. At the same time that I knew Bob was selling the business to somebody else and the reason I did that is because once I said we're doing it, we're doing it. It doesn't matter. This other stuff, as upsetting it might have been at the time, it was just not gonna get in the way. We said we're gonna do this event, we're gonna do it.

**1:36:01 AG:** But I had plenty of friends who said, "You are completely out of your mind to be spending all of this time and to be putting in all your relationships, and all of your knowledge with these people." And we had a retired admiral come and speak at that event. It was just the former deputy director of the CIA. These are all people that we brought, me and Marzia brought to that event, our relationships that we shared. But we did that event while Bob was selling the business to somebody else and people thought that we were insane to do it, but I think once you say you're gonna do something, you do it. That is the most important thing, I think. Again, getting back to this idea of human values, if I say to you that we're organizing this event, unless there is some act of nature that is... Like Hurricane Sandy was one of them, for something else, it's gonna happen.

**1:36:50 AG:** So, but these are all learning experiences, this has just been a tremendous journey, so I can't possibly complain because the last two years for us have been just fantastic. And I always think that things happen for a reason, so anytime I've gone through a period in life that's been difficult or challenging, or full of uncertainty, when you look back, you always go, "Aha, there was a reason why." So whenever I'm faced with that, those moments in life that are a little bit difficult, what I always ask is, "What am I supposed to be learning right now? I'm supposed to be learning something. There's a reason why this is happening. What am I supposed to be learning right now?" I wanna make sure that whatever life's sort of curve ball is, that is the question I always ask, "What am I supposed to be learning from this?" It's okay to go through some period but I just wanna make sure that I come out of it with some enrichment of obviously, not monetary, but some lesson that I've learned. So the question for me is, "What am I supposed to be learning right now?"

**1:37:49 LD:** Every time I've spoken with you, I've noticed how central you put the art or the act of tasting wine to your dialogue about learning, and it almost feels like somewhat of a personal

journey. It feels like something that you wanna mentor to other people, so I feel like it's probably a lot more significant than maybe I might assume about a lot other people. We all enjoy to drink wine, we all taste wine, a lot of people taste wine professionally, but for you it seems to be a real keystone. Are there particular moments in your own evolution as a taster that were standout moments for you? Particular moments where someone said to you or did something that were key, and what were they?

**1:38:29 AG:** Yeah, but it's never been about me. What I want to do is help people figure out what they like, to make that light bulb go off. I have a lot of friends who are not wine people, they're finance people, they're my friends from business school, they're whatever, not serious wine people. And when they come over to our house and I open a Cedric Bouchard Champagne or a Dauvissat Chablis or a Littorai Pinot Noir, or a Bartolo Mascarello Barolo, or a Sine Qua Non Syrah, the wines that nobody ever sees because they're not available basically, unless you really are in the know, and what I love is watching that light bulb go off for people. That moment when somebody says, "Wow, I love Chablis." Or "This is an incredible Syrah." What I like is basically seeing... Giving pleasure to other people with wine and seeing that light bulb go off. Pierre Peters Les Chetillons, What is that supposed to be? What is Dom Perignon supposed to be? And what Vinous is all about, is making that light bulb go off for millions of people all over the world.

**1:39:36 AG:** So, yes, there are seminal moments, but they're really not about me as much as they are about understanding, how do we get other people to figure out what they like? I don't care if you wanna drink a \$15 Chianti or a \$1,500 bottle of Screaming Eagle. What Vinous wants to do is give you the information to make a decision that you're going to be happy with, so yes it's about learning but ultimately it's about empowering the end person. So this era of the wine critic as this expert on some pedestal, like it was in the generation of Clive Coats, or Bob or maybe even Jancis', where there's the critic and then there's all of us people below, those are values of another generation that are not the values of today. Today you can get anybody's email if you want, you can email Tim Cook if you want. You can get his cellphone number, you can communicate with anybody that you want to today in a very flat way because that is the value of this society and Vinous is created for it today.

**1:40:32 AG:** And my view is, I wanna talk with our reader and our hopefully our potential readers who are many more than our current, obviously, I want to have that conversation across the table. I've never viewed myself as being on some pedestal, because when I was starting out, I didn't wanna be spoken to that way, so why... I knew something about wine. I grew up in a family where there was wine, I wasn't a total ignoramus, and I started with the assumption, because Vinous is a positive real force of positivity, I started off with the assumption that people are smart, that they have a good palate, and they just wanna learn a little bit more. I do not take the assumption that people are stupid, need to be spoonfed information and can't figure stuff out for themselves.

**1:41:15 AG:** I assume that people, we're all on a journey, people want to just increase their learning. The thing about wine is that it's forever, you're never gonna know everything. We wanna give people the tools to make their own decision and we're gonna speak to people across the table. We're not on some... I'm not on some pedestal. Yeah, sure, I get to taste a lot of wines that other people don't but you know what? As I was told, as I was taught very early on, there's always somebody who knows more about any given wine than you do, and [1:41:44]           , so whatever.

I've got friends who drink DRC Montrachet like it's San Pellegrino, God bless their soul. Or friends who drink Monfortino, like it's coffee, in the sense that they have all the time, they've been buying it since before it became that ex... Very expensive.

**1:42:03 AG:** Our reader is a person who is generous, who has an incredible knowledge. One of my readers earlier this year said, "I've got every vintage of Don Howell Mountain. Can we do a dinner?" There were a few missing but for the most part it was pretty much almost every vintage of Don Howell Mountain. And we got a group of people together and we put it together. This person could probably teach me about these wines, for crying out loud. So sure, maybe if I go to Napa Valley and spend three weeks there, maybe I have a breadth because I tasted everything that people are likely... Pretty much everything the people are likely to be interested in, and there's some value in that. But for any wine, there's always somebody who is gonna know it better than me. There are people who've had more DRC, more Cristal, more Monfortino, more Don, more Harlan Estate, more Colgin, more whatever you want.

**1:42:53 LD:** Gallo Hearty Burgundy.

**1:42:54 AG:** Or Gallo Hearty Burgundy. So I always say... It is really about learning. The thing about Vinous is we've got everything... Like right now if we... Every week we have a wine under \$25. So this week is a Fiano di Avellino, Ciro Picariello, beautiful, 25 bucks, great, handmade artisan wine. And then we have the de Vogue Musigny. So it's kind of all things wine. Everything from... The idea is that wine does not have to be collectible or expensive to be good, to be delicious to have really good values. And so we try to cover the whole spectrum, but for me it's really more about the idea that today's world is very flat and what I'm... What keeps me up at night is thinking about empowering the end person.

**1:43:36 AG:** That is... We have a lot of ideas that are in development now about how to do that. Because we're just an 18-month-old company. This is just the very, very beginning. If people think that Vinous is just because we bought you know the IWC that Vinous is meant to sort of replicate The Wine Advocate or something like that. People have... It's just that though that would be a very incorrect assumption to reach. This... What we wanna build is a transformational life-changing company that uses technology and media to bring scale to people, to bring this information on a scale that has never really been done before. That's why we do so much video. We'll be doing more. That's why we do a lot with technology but ultimately we wanna reach millions of people. Not thousands or tens of thousands. So we're obsessed with trying to figure out the keys that unlock that for people.

**1:44:27 LD:** So it's been a few years of events now. How have you tweaked them? What's worked and what hasn't worked?

**1:44:32 AG:** We have found that our preference now is to do smaller events, between 25 and 40 people. I think it's a more manageable number. That's something that we've learned. I think it allows for more interaction with people. What we're moving towards is a model of doing perhaps more events but smaller and then more diversified. So at the beginning it was really focused on Italian wine mostly because... While we're not gonna do a Burgundy event... I have no... That's really Daniel Johnnes' milieu and nobody does it better. So there's no... I don't have any interest in... Also



in doing something that's been done before either too much.

**1:45:10 AG:** So we started off with Barolo and then you know, Tuscan Wines but now we're gonna start to do Napa Valley in the spring. I'd love to do something with champagne. But to me what I've learned is one, we wanna keep it small where possible. Festival de Barolo is kind of an exception. But that has now kind of a... Its own following and we don't have enough seats for people. So yeah, I can't see that becoming smaller. But there'll be other things that will be more thematic. We're gonna do a 2010 Napa Valley Cabernet tasting. That'll be probably be 40 or 50 people but a lot of really great wines. I'd like to do something with champagne. And I'd also like to do something that's more... I'd like to find ways to work more closely with chefs to create things that are really experiences.

**1:45:54 AG:** Because ultimately, I think that's what an event really is. People now, there's a lot of wealth in the world, so money is no longer really a differentiator. So the question is, well what is? And one of the things that it can be a differentiator if we do it right is a memory, an event. My preference is definitely towards creating experiences. So there's educational dimension is across multiple levels. It's the public. It's sommes who maybe don't have an opportunity to travel as much or taste these wines necessarily all the time. There's lots of different layers to the educational component. The producers themselves that don't often taste their own colleagues wines. So it's educational for them as well. And I want that point to really be hammered home.

**1:46:35 AG:** So that's always a key component in any tasting that we do. There's got to be some value. Otherwise, we're just like anybody else who does dinners and events. And there's nothing wrong with that. It's just not differentiating and it's not our mission. Our mission is, "I want you to taste every vintage of Monfortino back to 1970, from Magnum altogether." That's historic. It's educational. It's culturally enriching as on top of being just a hell of a lot of fun. But that's a theme for us is the educational component.

**1:47:04 LD:** Antonio Galloni of Vinous Media. He'd like to be the electricity that turns on the lights for millions of people. Thank you very much for being here today.

**1:47:11 AG:** It's a pleasure. Happy New Year.

**1:47:12 LD:** Antonio Galloni of Vinous Media.

**1:47:15 LD:** Hey, you, wholesale buyer type person. You listen to this show. You know who is making good wine. But how do you keep track of where to buy it? Well, SevenFifty has you covered. Powerful, easy to use browsing tools with all kinds of ways to drill down to what you need. Lots of vendor information including company background, contact info and even a link to a vendor's Facebook page if they have it. The power to make out tasting lists of wines you've enjoyed. You can keep those online for as long as you need them. You can refer to them for years even. And a constantly updated list of tastings in your area. You want to know what tastings are happening tomorrow and which are happening in two months from now, where are they happening? SevenFifty has you covered. Have you checked out SevenFifty lately? You should. It is a wholesale buyer's best friend. Go to [sevenfifty.com](http://sevenfifty.com) for more information and to get signed up.

**1:48:12 LD:** That was our show. If you're curious about what we're up to in the future, check us out on Facebook, give us a like, and you'll see all our fancy, fancy posts. It's "I'll Drink to That! Talking Wine" with Levi Dalton. It's a Facebook fanpage. Hey, fanpage, yeah. We're on Twitter, @drinktothatpod. And we're also up on Instagram. Some pretty artistic shots sometimes, sometimes not, sometimes we get though, @leviopenswine.

**1:48:41 LD:** And then, I gotta tell you, we also got our own website there. It's [illdrinktothatpod.com](http://illdrinktothatpod.com), where you can stream stuff off of it, or download direct episodes, so you don't have to go through iTunes if you don't want to. I like to give options. We're about options here. So, lots to do, lots to think about. Maybe you want a T-shirt, maybe you'd like a fancy, fancy, well, they're not that fancy. But they're pretty cool, I'll Drink to That t-shirt of your very own, in a variety of different colours, shapes, sizes. Onesies, even. You can get onesies, you can get tanks, you can get biker tanks, you can get tees, you can other stuff. Hoodies, for God's sakes.

**1:49:21 LD:** It's all up there. You can find the information up on our website if you'd like to check it out, and wear what you hear. And then there's also that possibility you could shoot us some real support. Shoot us a little dough. Help keep the microphones rolling. We are here because of dedication, 'cause of love, 'cause of interest. But we're also here because we make the finances work, and we could always use a little help with that. Thanks for your consideration.

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