



EXPERT INTERVIEW: SCOTT ELDER

Behind the Winemaker

When did you first become interested in wine?

Other than a couple binge episodes with Riunite on ice (which wasn't necessarily nice), I never tasted wine until in graduate school at Cornell where I did a lot of driving and tasting around the Finger Lakes. That whetted my appetite, and then I had the chance to go to France for a postdoctoral position where I was taken under the wing by a wine merchant who showed me the beauty of French wine. From that point it took me 12 years to figure out a way to plant a vineyard and make wine.

What brought you into the wine business?

Nothing brought me, it was already inside me.

If you didn't become a winemaker, what would you be? A viticulturist and winemaker IS what I wanted to be.

Do you have a favorite varietal or region?

My favorite is when I can taste the land and the people behind the wine.

If you don't order wine at a restaurant or bar, which beverage do you choose?

One of the classic cocktails (Sidecar, Old Fashioned, Martini, etc.) and I like them strong. Most restaurants have their specialty cocktail menu, but I find they have too much "specialty" and not enough "cocktail".

What's your least favorite drink?

Fruit juice.

What's your best wine-drinking memory?

I think my best wine memories are those to come. Right now I think about what memories I will have in 5 or 10 or 20 years when drinking, say, our 2008 vintage. When you read the back label, I think those are the things I'll recollect and smile about.

What are your thoughts on recent trends within the industry?

Industry consolidation, access to national/global markets, and the 100 point scale have led to wines of performance rather than wines of composition, as Matt Kramer has so eloquently described. We, Stephanie and I, knew this and discussed it many, many times.

What is the first thing someone learning about wine should know?

There's a time and a place for all wines.

Do you think any rules should be adhered to when pairing?

I don't like red wine with fish.

What are some of the benefits of drinking wine? There are very few products, probably none, that have the chance to show us something about a place and a person(s) and a time like wine can offer. Wine is context.

EXPERT PROFILE



Scott Elder

Scott Elder is the big dreamer of the husband-wife team (often to [Stephanie LaMonica's](#) chagrin) and has spent nearly 20 years exploring the beauty and intricacies of wine. His

palate and perspective, shaped with the guidance of a noted French wine merchant, continue to influence the decisions he makes in growing their grapes and making [The Grande Dalles'](#) wines.

Scott was raised on a Kansas farm, going on to receive his PhD in chemistry at Cornell University, in Ithaca, NY. He really didn't experience wine until he was at Cornell, and it wasn't until he moved to France for a postdoctoral position that he discovered his love for wine and the special relationship between land, grape and winemaker. It was while in France that Scott was taken under the wing by the local French wine store owner, who taught Scott the nuances and intricacies of what makes a wine of place.

After returning from France, Scott had another postdoctoral position at UC Berkeley, where he again found himself at finger's distance from California's wine industry and he continued his education. Finally landing a "real job" as a scientist at the US National Energy Lab in Washington State, Scott lived on Red Mountain and had easy access to the growing wine scene and its top producers.

It took Scott another 16 years to realize that it was now or never if he was going to get out and make his wine. Only a few days after deciding this, Scott moved to Ireland on a two-year work assignment, and it was there in the long, dark, lonely winter that he began to read the vineyard books that Stephanie, his then future wife, had given him. The internet is a beautiful thing because he was able to find out nearly everything he wanted on soil, climate, topography, and land ownership while living 5,000 miles away from Oregon. Stephanie, with Georgina the cat, were soon able to move to Ireland and Scott was very happy. The vineyard and wine planning continued and then one Saturday afternoon, Scott walked into their little Irish kitchen and

Do you have any favorite wine gadgets?

I am not much of a gadget person, and prefer the plain old corkscrew where you have to put the bottle between your knees to pull the cork. I love the sound of the pop.

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exclaimed to Stephanie, "There's no way we can afford to plant a vineyard and make wine, it's gotta be one or the other." Scott was never interested in doing one or the other because he believed they are inseparable, and then Stephanie had the truly fateful reply (which she now denies), "Well, let's get the vineyard planted and then we'll figure out how to do the wine."