



INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Farmer's Name: David Rackham
Age: 65
Location: East Sutton Vine Garden, Ashford
Size: 10 acres
Type: Vineyard

Interviewed by: Rajindra Puri
Filmed by: Rajindra Puri
Date: 29 July 2015

Raj: I'll start with a simple question, can you just tell me about what you do here, what your farm is about?

David: What we do, we make a bit of wine, we produce something like 30 tons of grapes a year on 10 acres. 95% goes down to Cornwall because they haven't got the climate in Cornwall that will grow good grapes. They can grow grapes but it's very wet down there, it's very oceanic down, the low pressures hit Cornwall first before they hit us and quite often they'll get up here and they're pretty much rained out. So, it's a dry part of the world and what we do, we make probably 4 or 5000 bottles of wine with the balance of the crop - got a little winery here. I'll gladly show you that later if you want. We make sparkling wine, red wine, little bit of red wine, English red isn't particularly good because of the climate but that's changing and I'm sure you will ask about that later on. We make very, very nice white wine from a grape called Bacchus which has been the English wine sort of standard grape and other than that, there's not much more to say. I do it all myself because bluntly, it's difficult to get people that understand, you've got to understand vines to get the best out of them. I don't say I'm the best wine maker in the world but I've got a guy that may well be. That's the way to get around that. And he likes to come here, because it's small, he can experiment a little bit with the grapes. So that's what we do.

Raj: Who do you sell to in Cornwall?

David: To a very big producer called Camel Valley Vineyard. And Camel Valley Vineyard are the, probably the best sparkling wine maker, number 1,2,3 in the world now. Along with 1,2,3. Sam Lindo who's the son of the chap that founded it,



Bob, he is very, very highly regarded as a winemaker now. It's all done with our grapes, but they don't put that on the bottle!

Raj: I suppose they buy from other people

David: Yea, they buy from other sources but ours are generally reckoned to be the best. Our grapes are the best in the country. And this is probably the nicest little site in the country.

Raj: Why do you, how do you...

David: It was a piece of luck that I got it. I didn't know that it was. We came here to try and set up a small vineyard. But it's got a slight easterly slope, sounds strange, everybody says ooh, you must have, thinks you must have a south slope, nothing else. The slope has got nothing to do with the sun or the aspect of the thing, it's about, having the slope is having the frost run off the land in the early spring when the vines are very very very very vulnerable. So we face, we're low, which is warmer, you know as soon as you go above about 150 meters, don't try and grow vines. Somehow they just don't like it there. Different of the continent because you've got this heat thing, but here, down in the bottom here is very very good. Interestingly enough, we found out after we'd bought the place and started on the vineyards that the Romans set up the first vineyard in England about half a mile from here. And they knew a thing or two about grapes!

Raj: Do you know what it's called?

David: Well it was, I can't give you the Roman name but Sutton Valance is just on the hill up here. And if you look in Heines (sp?), a very early book on growing grapes which I've got, couple of other books, it tells you that English, or Britanic wine was considered a great treat by the Romans, better than the Gaulish and Frankish, which of course is France and Germany.

Raj: I suppose it was a different climate back then.

David: I guess it was, yea, there must of been. England had a very very big wine, not industry, but there was a lot of wine making going on in the middle ages, mainly around churches and large castles and most cathedrals have a precinct near them called the vines or vineyard or something, and it comes from that and what had happened was, in the 17th century, we had what was a mini ice age and Thames froze over, they used to have ice fairs in the Thames, and vines can only take -15C, go below that and it will kill them. So probably unless they were very very shielded, vines were mostly killed off. And nobody thought about a vineyard then until just post second world war, when some idiot in Hampshire planted an acre or 2 and...



Raj: They didn't die!

David: No, it's extraordinary!

Raj: I just recently saw olive trees planted in London, on the edges of a street

David: Oh there's olive groves starting again in Kent

Raj: Are there? So, back to the warming. So you said you have 10 hectares, 10 acres sorry

David: Yes, 4 hectares.

Raj: 4 hectares, which isn't very large is it and yet you can produce that many grapes.

David: It's not, it's not, but when we planted we were a big vineyard, we were a big commercial vineyard. Now we're a piss pot, we're nothing. We [Is that because there's other bigger ones?] Yea, you've got Rathvinny which is going to be 400 acres, Chapel down, which is I think going to be like 270, Denbighs is gonna be 300 odd, so we're nothing. I mean they'd all like our grapes to make special batches of wine, because if you've got that many grapes, you buy, almost by rote, you can't do it, you can't make a really top job of growing them. But they do a pretty good job and of course, what is happening is we've definitely got climate change. When we planted in 90... when did we plant? No, we planted in 87, or 88. Our first vintage, we picked the 3rd week in October, now we're generally picking the first of our grapes which is the Reichensteiner, the last week in September or the first week in October, we're definitely a week to 2, sorry 10 days to 2 weeks earlier now. Definitely, no question about it. And I've actually been, not involved in a study, but South Hampton University a doing a, some studies on vines, vineyards and so on in England and they have shown conclusively that the zone for growing the best Pinot Noir has moved, in the last 10 years, probably 100 miles north. So it's quite big this movement and they predict, I think in 32, or 35, 2032 or 5 that the best Pinot Noir will be grown right across this area. Which is great because that's most of what I've got.

Raj: Most of what you have is Pinot Noir

David: Yes, most of it, I've got...

Raj: You've mentioned the German Reich..

David: Yea, I've got a Reichensteiner, Bacchus and Pinot Noir.



Raj: And have you done any, you talked about your wine maker himself being experimental, have you also experimented with grapes, with different vines?

David: With vines yes, not with different varieties, there's no point, what you've got to do

Raj: Kind of have to create your own local variety don't you?

David: Well, what you've got to do is, there's only certain grapes that you can grow, if you want to be commercial, and you have to take your choice on what you're gonna put in. Now lots of vineyards that you go to they'll have 10 different varieties, you know they'll have a half acre here and, but that's rubbish because you can't do anything with, let's say you have a wonderful year one year with a grape called Ortega, lovely grape, very very tasty, but you got enough for 800 bottles, what good is that? So I have a bit of advice, I had a very nice chap, who's now become a vicar, he could tell you much more and so he's gone to the church, he decided that the best we could put in here was Pinot Noir, Bacchus and Reichensteiner. Reichensteiner is a regular heavy cropper, Bacchus is a very intense, very aromatic grape and Pinot Noir of course everybody knows but it doesn't get to that full bodied taste in England that it gets to in the South of France or California but we can still make, the wine, the red wine that we make is almost like a red white. It's sort of, you know white is always fruity and somehow the reds are like that so you've got to have a taste for it and we've got a reasonable following for the red that we make.

Raj: What do you, how do you manage your fields, you said you do it all yourself, you go out and trim the vines, the suckers, all yourself?

David: Everything.

Raj: Wow... So you're fit.

David: It's hard man, it's hard!

Raj: Back breaking work. So you don't have any machines or anything?

David: Oh yeah, I have machines to do certain things but vines, you've got to do most work on them by hand. Once you've got them to where they are now where you can trim them with a machine, I've got a vine trimming machine, then you can keep them trimmed, but you've still got to walk along each row, day after day, tucking in, because what happens is you get short canes with perhaps 2 bunches of grapes on, now if you leave them until they grow to their full potential, they'll be hanging down and then Mr fox or Mr badger or gypos or something come along and eat the things so you're trimming, clipping, trimming, trimming, it's absolutely endless.



Raj: Ok so that's your, that's probably a lot of what your doing. How about the use of chemicals or fertilizers?

David: Yeah, we try very hard not to put chemicals, or, there are certain things you can't escape. There's a thing called Powdery Mildew which is very very bad in grapes and in damp climates like England. You have to spray for it. You can look after that with Sulfur which of course is organic but you can only do it 2 or 3 times in a year so you've got to use something else, so then you're in the hands of whatever chemicals there are. I grow my grapes very different to anybody else, I put a lot of hummus, which you would better know as cow shit, on them and that gives them the nitrogen they need, it improves the soil and every year you see the value of doing that, because that's entirely natural, that's been done for 1000s of years.

Raj: So you think that has some effect on fighting off these fungi and others...

David: Well yeah, as long as the thingy's growing strongly you don't have too much problem but as soon as it gets very dry, we had that very dry spell so things slow down, but vines are very good, they just keep going, they just keep going into the soil. I don't know how deep these are but in France, I know you can go to the Champagne area of France, you go into the caves and 300 feet under the vines you can see the roots coming through the roof. They're extraordinary plant vines, extraordinary, they really are.

Raj: You do wonder how they survive in that very, dry, dry...

David: They just do, they just seem to keep going, keep working away at it and you know, it's extraordinary...

Raj: I looked at some vines in Austria, close to the border with Hungary, where you go into the caves there and it is 13, 14 meters worth of, I mean big, big vines coming down that far. It's all that what they call the Loess, the Central European Plateaux, oh fantastic soil, amazing grapes...

David: Well, we've got terrible soil, absolutely awful! Yea, we're clay, we're on awful weild and clay which just takes so much getting into. I mean the vineyard here, we planted a new one about 7 years ago, 6 years ago, just over the other side there and that vineyard is really only just got it's feet in the ground now and we're just starting to see the potential of it. Clay is very, is very good once something is growing, once something is right into it, but to get into it they have a dreadful job, you know.

Raj: Why do you think it's so good, what, what?



David: Well it's very, what's the word? I'm terrible with words.

Raj: The same sought of clay that they have in Champagne isn't it, in this area?

David: Well they have, I mean, you hear all sorts of things. They grow on, they grow on chalk, as you get into the lower stuff there's clay. They claim this, they claim that, and most of the champagne stuff, to be honest Raj, is hype... When I lecture on this, people very often say to me, well I don't lecture I sort of ramble away a bit. People say to me 'So David, what is the difference between your sparkling wine and champagne?' And I say to them 'Budget' Nothing else - Budget. And ours is probably better because the fruit stays longer on the vine and develops flavour. So a poor bottle of Champagne, which is more akin to battery acid, to be honest, than decent wine. In England, you would never make something like that unless you picked the fruit too early. All the time you take care and you get as much fruit and colour into your grapes as possible then you will make a good wine if you make sparkling wine. And you know how to do it of course.

Raj: So, going back to the start, how has, what was here when you moved in and how did you get started?

David: We bought the house, there's a tudor house just over there, and this was a barn, or a shed that we're now in and out behind the barn and shed was, we came here in October, just after what had been the great storm, in 86 or 87 and it was a swamp with 4 or 5 little ponies stood up to their knees in mud and crap. You'd never seen such a sorry looking place in all your life but Janet, my wife, loved the house and so the die was cast, there was no escape, we had to stick with the buy. So anyway, we bought the place and set about planting the vineyard so the vineyard I think went in therefore in 88, that's right, it actually went in, in 88. We planted just 5 acres, which as I say was considered to be a pretty commercial operation in 88. Wasn't the biggest of the vineyards but it was certainly, a lot of vineyards were around 1, 2 acres, and there still are sort of hobbyist, hobby type vineyards but we wanted to be commercial and we made in 91 or 2, we made some wonderful wines, superb wine that we've still got, that's still good... Yeah! A good white wine, if it's made well, kept in the dark, kept like a bloody mushroom, keep it in a box in a cold corner, will be fine in 10 years. Keep the wine on the cork, so keep it either sideways, but better still is the way we store wine is on the cork, we store each box upside down so the wine is actually sitting on the cork. Anyway we made all this wonderful wine and couldn't sell it because English wine at that time was a joke, we made about 20,000 bottles and just couldn't sell it, so... But now of course things are a different matter. We only make a little bit of wine but Bob, down in Cornwall, I mean he's probably making 1/4 of a million bottles a year and selling every one of them. Nightimber, Denhigh's, Ridge View, they all make a lot of wine and sell it all.



Raj: So, you made that many bottles of wine and you had no one to buy in 91, 92? So what kinds of, thinking about the history now, it's been almost 30 years you've been doing this, what kinds of changes have occurred, you talk about climate change, that's one that you've already mentioned, but in general what kinds of changes?

David: For me, none. I've learnt more about the grapes and how to look after them and what to do with them and what's likely to happen, what's likely to go wrong and so on, but no, it's a learning process that you genuinely go on every year, knowing a little bit more.

Raj: But you said, you've put in another set of vines, did you grub up these the original ones? Still the same, still the same after almost 30 years?

David: The old ones are still there and the new vineyard, we'll go out and have a look.

Raj: The new one is, you said, 6 to 7 years old. Economic changes that have affected what you're doing in the last 30 years?

David: Well, just the fact that suddenly, English wine, if you've got a good product, is, I hope, very desirable. I mean it's always gonna be a little more expensive than foreign wine but it genuinely is better, everything is picked by hand, everything is made by hand, everything is crafted by hand. If you'd have come here on Saturday, you'd have seen me and my German mate bottling up some Rose that's a very, very delicious wine, if you like that sort of wine. Some people like fizz and vizz only, some people like white, some people like red. I wish we could make a decent red, I wish we could make a really strong red, but not yet.

Raj: Right, what about things like the EU, has the EU had any effect, EU regulations on, for some farmers obviously it has a huge impact but for winemakers...

David: For wine, it really is as simple as this with the EU, we have the English Wine Standards board that does everything in the British manner, correctly, they come along and inspect you, they check what you've got, they check all your records, make sure you're ok, that you're not a filthy swine and have made some wine and sold to your neighbor next door for cheap. In France it's different, the wine inspector comes along, he has a wonderful meal at the house, you get him off his trolley on your best wine and he goes away saying 'Oh that's parfait, perfect' Here, everything's gotta be right, so the EU has no real say so, well it does, it has all say so, but the EU rules and regulations are just rules and regulations that we abide...

Raj: They just coincide with what is required anyway under the British regulatory system [David: Yea, Pretty much, yeah] And the subsidies?



David: No, no, no subsidies. I've got a feeling I might be entitled to maybe £30 a year or something but I'd rather not have the bloody inspectors coming round here, looking at my vineyard, asking me silly questions, wasting an hour, like some people do...

Raj: Better off trimming your vines

David: Or digging a bloody hedge out. So no, not a lot of, I mean, they're hated by the English wine industry because of course, here's the ridiculous fact, I make 1000 bottles of wine, I sell it to Jacques in Calais, if you can get there, I sell it to Jacques at cost, Jacques puts £50 on it and sells it back to me, it never leaves the van, and I bring it back into the country and the £1.60 or whatever the duty is on it, I don't pay, how lunatic is that. I think they're duty is 4 or 5 pence and ours is £1.60.

Raj: £1.60. And that's for production, that's not for importing...

David: No, no if you buy on the continent you buy at their, whatever their levels of duty are and then, as you know, if it's on the continent and you're bringing it back in, not to re-sell, technically, but you know lots of families have lots of, they want to have some of your wine, so one family wants 25 bottles and another wants 50 and so on. What I'm saying is I can export my wine to France and it comes back into the country at least £1.60 cheaper than I can even think to sell it for, you know, it's just lunacy. In my view, what they should do, and I'm sure it would raise its own problems, what they should do is for English vineyards, for arguments sake, is make it, not duty free but say European duty similar at the gate, so anybody coming into an English vineyard, it'll never happen. But we are at a great disadvantage.

Raj: Well I assume that one of the big things, big changes as you've mentioned is that the sheer number of growers and winemakers has increased to such an extent now that you might have good size lobby to...

David: I think there's only 400, there's only 416 is it, 430 or something

Raj: yea I thought more than 300 is probably...

David: Yeah I think it's 400 and 430 or something. I'm not a member of any associations cos all people do is talk and don't work or they come and look at what you do and say 'yea that's a good idea'

Raj: You're a patriarch though of the whole thing aren't you?



David: Yea, I've been in, I've run big businesses, not big businesses but I've been involved in business all of my life from the age of 19, 20, self-employed and I've met them all, I've met every type out there, I've even met ones that would actually murder you, so if you've got any of them Ark-ademia then you're in trouble...

David: ...When you hear the people in this business talk [inaudible] industry, the English wine industry is not, it's just not an industry. It's a little niche occupation that is showing real promise and I suspect in 100 years time there will be lots and lots of vineyards along the southern counties of England, I'm sure there will be because conditions are right, unless things turn, you know, unless the old Gulf Stream gives up running and the jet stream comes down low and all those sorts of terrible things but by and large there is no doubt at all in my mind that things are heading for warmer and this sort of business being quite popular, a lot of farmers have come here and said 'you know what I'd like to do that' and in fact there's one up on the hill, Robert Skinner, he put in, he put on, he put in 20 acres, got a big, big farm, mainly fruit, asparagus and niche crops almost a lot of them, he put in 20 acres and that's been really quite successful. Well you know as a farmer of course, you've got to remember that he's not there tending it all the time. He's the wrong guy to have a vineyard you know, vineyards, as I said before, needed to do it well, need constant attention, and they don't, you know, they go along and they mow the hedges or turn them into hedges, bit like mine but, they don't care if they cut a few bunches off on the way you know. But I think that there's gonna be a lot of people like that that are gonna be given the opportunity to get into vines. There's a big one, Chapel Down has got a big one up on Bluebell hill, that's between Maidstone and the Medway towns, they've got about 70 acres up there. That's just a farmer so they pay the farmer, they've agreed a 25 year deal, they planted it, put everything in, and the farmer does the work so the farmer gets a share of the income. So it's getting bigger and bigger and bigger, really quite quickly.

Raj: So what got you into this? Why did you decide to do it? Since you were self-employed

David: I'd built up and ran some pretty successful small businesses in vehicle recovery, travel, garage services, waste disposal and I become, over in the Medway towns a bigish fish in a small pond and so everybody knew our business, everybody knew what I was going to do next, everybody knew what was going to happen to me before, and I was also pretty successful in a racing car you know, competing. So my name was always in the newspaper and so on. And it got to be a chore to be honest with you. Everybody seemed to know everything about me and my family and so on and, as somebody put it to us after we'd done it, we decided we'd look for somewhere here and we saw them at a function up at King's School in Rochester where the boys went to school, and she said 'oh you've fled to the weald then' That's a pretty good description really. You know we, there's lots of stuff that we've done



that's been good, you know sailed the Atlantic and you know, done lots of good things and I really needed something, I mean, when we planted the first lot and couldn't sell the wine, I ended up letting most of the vineyard go, we kept about an acre and a half on for ourselves, and then suddenly somebody that I, Bob from Camel Valley down in Cornwall, called me and said 'have you got any grapes?' and I said 'no Bob, I've let it all go' Oh he said 'That's a pity' He said 'I could really do with some of your grapes.' He said 'They were the best' And I said, 'Yea I know but I couldn't do anything with them' Anyway he said, 'look think about this, if you go back into producing grapes, we'll have a 10 year contract' And so I did. And here I am. [Raj: Wow] So that's it. Got all of the vineyard back, back producing. Took a while actually. Bought a bit of land next door, planted the new vines up and it's all been, I have to say, touch wood, very good.

Raj: Sounds like an ideal situation, get out of the hectic...

David: Nothing's ever ideal but it enables us to live, you know, when we picked our grapes, beginning of November, November the first, we're on a ship heading towards America, we come back for Christmas to prune, I shall be back here 3 or 4 weeks, we then go back in early January to America and we get back and do the first week in May. So that's why I can afford to work like a dog now, you know, cos I can always think, if I'm out there and I can't do another thing, I can always thing well i will do another thing cos I've only got another 2 or 3 months to wait before we're off again, out to Florida, catching fish on the Atlantic Ocean.

Raj: you take a ship over

David: Yea we cruise over. Cos we've got the time, and believe it or not, it's almost as cheap as flying.

Raj: You have no problem leaving them, the vines and all that?

David: No, they're ok from that period on, from the time you pick until the time they start to bud again you've only got one job to do which is to prune and tie down. That's all you gotta do. Hard work

Raj: But not too complicated per say?

David: Yes, there's much more to it than, but it becomes part of what you do, you just understand what you're doing you know.

Raj: I came here in 2000, started working in Canterbury and in 2003 we had that incredible summer of heat and in fact I was in Italy, in southern Italy, in 43 degree heat. Amazing. And the next, 2 years later I had a student from Canada who is



absolutely mad about wine and he wanted to do research on vineyards so he ended up going to Perpignan with his wife. They rented a house for 6 months and he, on a bicycle, traveled all around interviewing farmers like yourself and the idea was to find out what they had done in 2003, how had they dealt with the drought and the heat. And it turned out in 2005, when he was there, there was another huge drought, so he was actually witnessing what farmers were doing. So I'm curious as to what you and other grape growers might have done in those really hot summers.

David: Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Raj: *Nothing. You didn't need to change anything?*

Davis: No, Vines look after themselves. Apparently the biggest heat wave that there has been for many, many years was in '76. Now I hadn't planted then but apparently when planes, like light aircraft, flew over Kent, everything was brown except odd bits of green that were vineyards.

Raj: *cos of the deep tap roots...*

Yeah, so you know, I can only presume, I mean we've never watered or, you know, we didn't do anything really. Just keep the growth down, you don't want the sugar going up into the tips of them, so you keep the growth down. It keeps where the fruit is, everything is going into where the fruit is.

Raj: *Those are generally considered to be very good years aren't they, the high sugar content?*

David: Yes, oh yeah, they would produce very good wine.

Raj: *He did find that they were quite a bit...*

David: 2005 yeah, our sparkling is 2005 and it was a good year...

Raj: *Very dry. Especially out here, I mean Kent area. So he found that, depending on whether you were a small farm, a medium farm or a big farm there were different kinds of strategies. The people in the middle were very difficult because they had a big enough farm, but it was expensive to pay labour and they were doing things like turning the soils underneath the plant and trimming and, if you had a small farm...*

David: When we go out there you will see exactly all that stuff.

Raj: *If you had a small farm and not too much labour like yourself, you could handle that. If you had a really big farm and you had a lot of money and investment and*



machines, you could handle it. It was the people in the middle who were a bit stuck, who suffered the most, cos they just didn't have the capital or the money or the labour to add, to increase the level of management that they were required to get through that period and this is Southern France. But I was kind of interested in whether or not people had particular kinds of knowledge that they had acquired through experience or just through learning from, through the generations about how to deal with drought.

David: Well, no generation or knowledge from me, all my forebears were pirates and rascals of one kind or another, you know.

Raj: So where did you learn? How did you learn about the whole...

David: Just came and made mistakes...

Raj: Right, you didn't go and get a degree, I mean not get a degree, do some kind of course or workshops or anything

David: No, no, I have people that are doing that stuff that come here now.

Raj: Like interns and things

David: Well no they just come and, you know, they're very interested in what I do and how I do it and I'll tell anybody what I do and how I'll do it.

Raj: There is a college now isn't there?

David: Yeah, Plumpton.

Raj: Plumpton, where they're teaching the basic skills, things like that.

David: Yeah but again, it's all up the greasy pole, you know.

Raj: What do you mean?

David: Well, they're all there climbing over each other you know, to become the greatest thing, you know, the greatest ego there is a guy and he keeps putting out emails and, you know, he's, the trouble is, these people, they get a certain amount of cache and people that don't know better look up to them, you know. And some of the ideas that you see at Plumpton, a lot of them are driven by people that have an axe to grind money wise...

Raj: Really?



David: Oh yeah, there's a lot of money in all this. You know in various methods, in selling people the bloody poles and selling people the vines, you know. There's a bloke, Dr Smart, who is a complete plonker, I mean how he's got Dr in front of his, he probably bought the title, he's some kind of Australian and he goes around telling everybody he'll come to a vineyard like mine and he will look at a vine and say 'that's got vine disease. That needs to come out' And poor souls have ripped whole vineyards out when, in my view and that of other people that know, there is no need to do it at all. And if somebody has put that vineyard in, that this bloke doesn't like, for example he's really got it in for a guy called Hans Schliker, who's a German, you know, Hans is a really nice guy, very knowledgeable. If he's put a vineyard in, this bloke will come along 3 years later and say, and condemn it, you know, 'it's got vine, it's got trunk disease' I just think the whole thing's bollocks. Nothing better than that.

Raj: So have they asked you to come down and talk to them at Plumpton?

David: No, not at Plumpton, they wouldn't have anybody like me down there

Raj: Well what a shame, you're the first person I would bring in.

David: Well what they should do actually is come here, come here and see what I do, how I do it, the results that I get and then you say 'ok, now lets look at' because the technical stuff, I don't know, i mean petual analysis, it's either growing or it's not, you know. And I know that every year I'm gonna need to put a little bit of bitter salts on, you know eposn salts, or some polyverdol or something to keep the growth pushing on.

Raj: Well how did you figure that out?

David: Just the colour of the leaves on the vines, you know and what the growth is like.

Raj: Is it common then to add Epsom Salts?

David: OH yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. It's when you do it. It's sort of knowing when and how, you know, they have these tremendous spraying machines that go and up over the vines and you sit there in air conditioned splendor in your cab, driving a 900 horsepower tractor along rows of bloody vines, spraying the countryside with all sorts of shite. That's not what I do, I've got a lovely little sprayer, sits on the back of my thing, it's got 2 jets, one either side, it's got a fan, it blows it into the canopy, direct at the fruit. It's cheaper, it's easier, less damage to the universe



Raj: To the structure of the soils and the ground

David: Yea, people are, they've got, it's like I say, there's always an axe to grind, there's always, somewhere in it, there is always a financial element that all these things, there probably is in the stuff that you do, everybody's gotta earn a living, that's not at doubt, but people will write books of the most mundane stuff, so they become accredited authors, to progress financially. I think it's not a bad strategy actually, but a lot of the stuff they write is just piffle, it really is.

Raj: Do you think they're just overcomplicating..?

David: Exactly that, I was going to go on to say that you could almost have 1 chapter, a 1 chapter tone, that would give you the real basic stuff of how to run a vineyard.

Raj: Right, so, well that's the thing isn't it, you set up an institution that's dedicated to, I don't know if you've been to the one in Toulouse, there's a whole university

David: Yes, yeah, I know of it.

Raj: and in Bordeaux as well, there they've created an institution to study vines and to study wine production etc and they're people who've invested their time and energy into that and they've gotta come up with something

David: Well they do!!

Raj: I do wonder whether or not and maybe it's just very fine, fine, fine levels of improvement that...

David: Sure, I mean, with clones, with plants, that's where study is needed. With pests. You know, particular sorts of pests, but the vine doesn't have many real pests, I mean the main pests are powdery and downy mildew. And then Botrytis in the bunches, well if your spraying regime starts early enough, and you get a anti botry.. or a botrytiscide in before the bunches close you probably won't get botrytis, you know. And what they do, they go into the minutia of the thing and it's not needed, it really isn't need, you know these people want to become decent growers and they can do it now, here in England. It doesn't need, you don't need to know the life cycle of the erinose bloody mite, what you do, you see a leaf 'Oh it's got erinose, ok I'll spray it with sulfur' you know? That's all it needs, so to go off into raptures of 'how did we get it, where did it come from' oh bullshit, bullshit. Vines are very good, they're not like sheep. I mean sheep spend all their life trying to die, vines spend all their time trying to live...

Raj: Very vital...



David: Yea, they really do, sheep don't seem to care!

Raj: Great, well is there, let's see, think we've pretty much covered all the things I was interested in covering. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

David: Like to add? No. Nothing. Nothing, he's been very patient with me

Raj: Brilliant, as I said, I think they're missing a trick if they're not, if places like Plumpton aren't bringing in people with experience to talk...

David: Yea, they should do, you should have people, it's mostly, in fact almost, I would say, 98% academia again.

Raj: A sort of technological approach to grape growing and vine, wine production, rather than a traditional, experience based approach which, I appreciate, my expertise is looking at local people's knowledge of plants and animals

David: I've had people come here for a week who've actually said to me 'I've learnt more in this week than I've learnt in 5 years' you know, with books and everything else. It's all there, you understand what's on the thing but you've got to get out there with the bloody plants and the leaves. I had a situation, 2 years ago - What we normally do is we take the leaves off the fruiting area. The thought is that it lets the air through, lets the spray in, lets the sun come in and over the years I'd seen this occur but nothing like it did a couple years ago, and that is that the Bacchus in particular, picked up a really brown, burned look, like a diseased look and all of the agronomists, I mean these are the guys who should know and certainly know a lot better than me about pests, diseases and everything else, were coming to me saying 'what is it Dave, what is it?' and what it was, was if you uncover grapes, they will burn. So what this was, was just burned grapes, everybody was spraying, the money people spent spraying it for downy mildew that had gone wrong, or powdery mildew that had gone wrong, it was nothing to do with it. It was simply that they took the leaves off too early. Simple.

Raj: Misdiagnosed. Well that's the kind of thing that I was wondering, in terms of the drought and the extreme heat, whether or not things like that would have occurred.

David: Well yes, particularly with Bacchus, the grape Bacchus, they will suffer if you get a lot of heat and continual sun

Raj: So can you just cover them?



David: Well no, what you do, you don't take the leaves off, there's a little email that does the rounds on a Sunday night and sometimes I put a little bit in there and a couple of, somebody said 'oh we started taking the leaves off' and it's way, way too early, you know, really is too early so...

Raj: Are you worried about this cold snap, cool rain?

David: No, not really. It'll be alright, it'll turn out alright in the end.

Raj: I mean, last year they had really good fruit didn't they?

David: Yeah, fantastic fruit, big fruit. The year before, it was horrible out there, now you talk about cold, it was bitter. I remember being out there in June and July and we still hadn't had flower, we still hadn't had flower, and it was bitter and it was pouring, but we still got a crop.

Raj: Right. But last year was much better wasn't it, I think everything did really well, the plums were amazing!

David: I think this year is gonna be bigger so...

Raj: Ok well, shall we, can we take a look around?

David: Yea, take a little wander out there

Raj: Ok, that's brilliant.