

My Esteemed Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for inviting me to be here today. I'm honored to be welcomed into this prestigious and highly selective circle. For me, a winemaker dedicated to that niche known as Riesling, it truly represents something special.

I'd like to offer a few words to you today on a topic that affects us not just as winegrowers and wine producers, but ultimately as members of western society. That may seem like quite a lofty goal, but with your leave I'll try to explain.

While one might define the 'western world' in political or historical terms, it seems to me, as a winemaker, that there's also a much simpler explanation: the West is anywhere where wine is not just grown, but actually anchored in the culture. And right now, this western world is experiencing a great amount of uncertainty.

In an age of globalization and omnipresent networks, people perceive a concerning void that they feel cannot be ignored. That void can be summed up in a single word: identity.

In this globalized world where relationships have no real basis, where agricultural space is disappearing at increasingly rapid speeds, and where goods, currencies and services flow wildly around the globe, a growing number of people are left feeling uprooted.

The decisive question during the transition from the 19th to the 20th century involved the role of labor in era of urban rootlessness; the decisive question around the transition to the 21st century appears to be the growing number of people who are frightened of globalization. This fear can end up introducing an uncomfortable amount of disarray into our social and economic conditions, elements that have been remarkably stable and of which we are usually, proud.

Whether it's in the USA, Brazil or Italy: movements that decry the advance of globalization are present in almost all western countries.

British sociologist David Goodhart, writing in his book "The Road to Somewhere," describes the new crisis in the West as reflecting conflict and alienation between the 'Somewheres' and the 'Anywheres.' I find his terminology highly illuminating.

Goodhart defines the Somewheres — and I'm simplifying greatly here — as those people who have ties to their home regions, who prefer to communicate in their regional dialect and who guard their relationships closely.

The 'Anywheres,' by contrast, feel at home everywhere. They are internationally educated, multilingual and think globally.

They can navigate New York just as easily as they would Paris or Shanghai. And the hotels in Berlin resemble those in Singapore. And this makes the Anywheres feel comfortable.

These Anywheres have completely different lifestyle expectations from my generation, or my father's. The current cohort of Anywheres, often called 'Millennials,' comprises those born in the 1980s and 1990s, and they have radically different consumption habits than my generation. While our dream was once to have a high-powered car with leather seats in our

garage, the Millennial/Anywheres instead fantasize about unrestricted mobility.

Rather than own a vehicle, they'll gladly choose carsharing to drive to the airport and from there journey into the wider world. Limitless and virtual networks are more important to them than limiting property.

Here's why this matters: our wines — and I am referring to the wines of all those present here — our wines long ago stopped being aimed at the Somewheres. They cost too much, and have primarily earned their reputations from being served at the finest restaurants around the world. The Somewheres aren't interested in all that. They drink wines from winemakers they know personally and, where possible, from vineyards that they've walked themselves.

Our customers are the Somewheres. And the Anywheres are, by nature, fleeting. In their world, the digital holds primacy. They are constantly online and they expect their information to be available everywhere and at any time. They don't draw knowledge from newspapers and magazines, but rather from whichever networks they are actively using. Whether it's on Facebook, Instagram or Pinterest: the things that are presented to them are relevant, while everything else recedes into the fog.

Perhaps the most quintessential example of this fleetingness of the Anywheres is the Snapchat app. I don't know if you are familiar with Snapchop, but it allows you to post an image for just a few seconds to be shared with your virtual friends — before it disappears forever into digital Nirvana.

Our customers are precisely these fleeting personalities, with attention spans that continue to shrink all the time. It is a brutal customer base, I might add. Where talking to wine journals was once an essential marketing maneuver, surely none of us need reminding of the importance of maintaining a presence on all these digital channels today.

The wine consumption habits of the Anywheres is also different from the generations that preceded them. Up until just a few years ago, alcohol consumption was on the rise in the western world. This benefited us in the same way that the rising tide lifts all boats. Roughly a decade ago, though, wine consumption began to stagnate and even decline. Nicotine provides an illustrative example of how a leisure product can be affixed with a reputation as hazardous or even fatal; it's not difficult to imagine that the same fate is in store for wine in the near future.

The next generation of customers for our wines will likely limit their wine consumption. They are health-conscious and seem obsessed with a yearning for purity and eternal life, in ways that I sometimes struggle to understand. I say this as a winegrower who knows that even the loveliest of wines must be wrested from the earth before it can ever shine like a diamond. This wisdom appears to be increasingly lost.

One could bemoan that our customers, these globalist Anywheres, are victims of a conformist, globally normative taste profile that prevents them from appreciating what good, let alone great, wine can be.

I actually believe the opposite.

Because, as with all things, there is a dialectical process at work here: the further that

globalization and universalism progress, the greater the uniformity; and as uniformity rises, so too does the importance of specificity and regionality. In short, a capacity for differentiation.

Unlike most other industrial products, grand wine cannot be endlessly reproduced. And yes, I just called wine an industrial product. There's no need to gasp at taboos here, for we winegrowers are also under the thumb of technology and industry.

Until the middle of the last century, wine was extracted from nature by man. Today technology performs that extraction. What I mean by this: we are using technological processes that were unthinkable 100 years ago.

And despite that: grand wines can only arise in those places where technology cannot reach, where illogical humans still make intuitive decisions. There is no algorithm to tell us winegrowers whether and when we should thin the canopy on our vines.

For all the digital networking and cutting-edge technology in our cellars: our product is a wine that has its origins in the dirt and which still shows and tastes like the soil — literally our 'homeland.'

And while these Millennial-Anywheres tend to be more sensible and moderate in their wine consumption, they do have a tremendous longing for that which they have lost: for a sense of home, for the earth, for the authentic — for the things that can only be acquired away from technology.

By the time I bottled my first vintage in 1991, I had already converted my vineyards to organic agriculture. This was still considered highly exotic back in the late 80s. Many people laughed at me then.

But the majority of wines in 80s Germany were powerfully mediocre. Back then, if you wanted to make wines that tasted different from all those familiar bottles, if you wanted to achieve a new vision of taste, then you had to depart from technocratic methods.

Ultimately we winegrowers don't know how the wine should taste, but we do know the taste of our region, of our vineyards, of our sites, of the soils and the grapes. This inner picture is where winemaking begins. And to achieve this picture, there has to be a decision to forgo the blessings of technology and chemistry.

I'd like to return to what I said at the beginning: our customers are the Anywheres. We winegrowers, though, we are Somewheres. And we have relationship with the earth and our homeland. Ours is instead a tangible one. And when we recount a story to our customers, a story that captivates and moves them to truly long for something, then it is the story of the Somewhere, of the unique, the here-and-only-here that one can tangibly experience in our wines.

Bliss to me is when I can keep the recounting of my story brief. Because the sole story that I have to relay is that of my wines. Best of all is when I can remain silent and my wines tell the story instead.

As a winegrower I'm no politician or sociologist, and yet I nevertheless believe that we winegrowers living in an age of globalization and confusion can achieve something beyond the reach of any politician or sociologist. We can convey the beauty of the Somewhere to the Anywheres. And not with words, but with the senses. And that, in an age in which the Anywheres and the Somewheres stand estranged from one another, is perhaps more important than we might ever have dreamed.

When philosopher Walter Benjamin wrote his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in 1935, he already sensed that the modern would be fundamentally defined by precisely this technical reproducibility, and that it would brush aside all art and all individuality. Digitization has taken this reproducibility further toward its logical extremes.

Major brands such as Nike, Coca-Cola and BMW have made this technical reproducibility a understanding for their products. When it comes to wine, we've certainly observed that the larger trading houses and wineries strive for a product that can also be reproduced endlessly. We winegrowers cannot do this, nor should we want to.

I am often asked by young winegrowers how I managed to build up a brand. I used to always say: I don't know. I consider brands to be the wrong approach for the wine world.

This doesn't mean at a professional level that we winegrowers can work with anything less than the greatest of precision. Or that we can ignore appearance and design as irrelevant. Nor does it even mean that outward appearance is just ephemeral distraction and that the only thing that matters is in the bottle.

And yet: our brand building occurs in a context that positions our product as finite and limited. But we are mere outsiders when it comes to the branding game. The limited volumes and lack of reproducibility inherent to our products make us small fish in the grand scheme. Furthermore, our credibility relies on entirely different mechanisms than major brand-name products.

Brands are like religions. One must already have faith in them before their power can take hold. When you buy a Harley Davidson, you're expressing belief in the myth of the rocker and the myth of Easy Rider, and you're looking to claim a piece of that myth for yourself.

If you fly Lufthansa, you're believing in the safety of an airline that works with maximum attention to detail and is worthy of being entrusted with your life.

And for wine? Here too you might be inclined to say: the brand gives certainty that it will taste good. But that's not enough. If our wines just tasted good, then our business would collapse.

Above all else: we winegrowers promise no certainties. Just the opposite. To stick with our comparison with Lufthansa: some vintages are First Class and long haul; others are merely Business Class and local routes only. That's nature's little game.

But this unpredictability, this uncertainty is no flaw in the system, but rather an expression of precisely that which is not reproducible. Which cannot be planned. And that is the highest thing accorded to us as humans. That is culture. For uniqueness, homeland, and identity are not solutions to any questions. Quite the contrary, they are narrow, problematic and point to something inherently human: fallibility.

And so we winegrowers are lighthouses in the flood of reproducible despotism. Insofar as we insist that our wines are unique, we achieve the necessary luxury to prevent a culture from sinking into a sea of reproducibility. We are the liaisons between the Anywheres and the Somewheres.

And if a young winegrower comes and asks me how I built up my brand, I ask back: how in your own mind's eye do you picture how the soil tastes? What do you want for the people out there in the world to taste that they don't yet know?

If he understands the question then I know that his wines may potentially at some point break new ground from what's already out there.

If he doesn't understand the question, then he'll probably look for investors, found a big brand and be a huge success. And that's ok too.

But I'm constantly reminded of a passage by the great French author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, who wrote:

"If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea."

This longing is our capital. It's what distinguishes us from uniformity and interchangeability.

And it is this longing that can be tasted in our wines!

Merci beaucoup

Oliver Spanier