

June 29, 1994

What's Shakin' Now?

Here is this year's update on the Scherrer Family's Zinfandels.

Last spring, we released the 1992 Zinfandel, our second vintage. Very shortly thereafter, it was sold out. Jeff Cox in *The San Francisco Chronicle* called our wine "... the Quintessential Alexander Valley Zinfandel." In the July, 1994 *Wine Advocate*, Robert Parker gave the 1992 Zinfandel a '90', just as he gave our 1991 vintage a '90' last year. I'm pleased they like it too. But the reviews simply affirm what many of you already believe.

In 1993 we harvested Zinfandel from the same block of old vineyard planted by my Grandfather in the 1910's including a small area of younger, yet mature vineyard adjacent to the old block. I had hoped to keep the various fermenters from the different areas separate, but was obliged to blend them shortly after pressing in order to coax each fermentation on to completion. (Traces of sugar left after an incomplete fermentation could indicate sterile filtration before bottling so that the wine does not become a "sparkling" wine in your cellar.) The '93 Zin successfully completed fermentation, so I still have the opportunity to bottle without filtration, as usual. Although we lost an opportunity to assess the wine made from the two different blocks as they develop in barrel, it was more than made up for in overall wine quality enhancement as all of the elements have come together extremely well. Our 1993 Zin has got to be the most generous and hedonistic wine we have made yet.

We are offering a limited amount of the 1993 Zinfandel on a futures basis for \$120 per case until August 31, 1994 (or until we run out of our futures allocation). We will hold our third annual barrel tasting where the wine is made at the Dehlinger Winery, 6300 Guerneville Road, Sebastopol CA, on **August 6 & 7, 1994, from 10-5**. You will be able to taste the 1993 vintage for yourselves to see how the wine works with a few different new barrel types, and talk with us about things. **The 1993 Zin will be released in the spring of 1995** @ a retail price of about \$15 per bottle. Once again, you will be able to pick up your futures purchases at Dehlinger, so shipping is still optional. Since our "warehouse" space at the winery is limited, we ask that any 1993 Zin futures that are not shipped be picked up by August, 1995.

We have been exploring the use of some whole grape clusters in the fermenter over the past three years in the production of our Zinfandel. This technique is employed in the production of many Pinot noir and Rhône wines. (By contrast, in my experience, total destemming seems indicated with Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet franc.) It is the employment of whole clusters in the fermenter that can bring out some of the spicy, exotic characters found in certain great wines, and the fruit from our family's vineyard expresses itself very well with this technique. Our fruit has such supple tannins, so much raspberry and black cherry perfume and is so flavorful that there is ample room for the additional grape-stem tannin extracted from the whole clusters, allowing the wine to achieve and retain a wonderful balance. Pretty French oak barrels help provide both a seductive, smoky, perfumed 'sweetness' to the aromas & flavors, and a tannic foundation to help keep the whole thing anchored.

June 29, 1994

What's Shakin' Now?

I suggest the analogy of our wine to a berry pie. The grapes are the filling. The oak is the crust, which not only physically keeps the filling from oozing all over the table and onto the floor (making the dog very happy), but it has a subtle, toasty, textural character that can be appreciated all on its own as well as lending interest and contrast to the personality of the pie filling. It's also true that our German Shepherd appreciates berry pie and Zinfandel about equally.

This past spring I did some more bench grafting of grapevines in Sebastopol, where Judi & I live. The primary reason grapevines are grafted is that the European wine varieties with which we are familiar (*Vitis vinifera*), develop roots that cannot withstand the feeding of Phylloxera (kind of an underground aphid). If we graft our tasty European *Vitis vinifera* scion onto a resistant species or hybrid rootstock, the vine will survive a lot longer. I was able to acquire scions of rare clones of Pinot noir, Chardonnay, Pinot gris, and my Father's selections of Zinfandel from the old block (all of these are varieties of the same species: *Vitis vinifera*). The only difficulty I had was getting the rootstock cuttings I wanted. The nursery forgot about my small order and planted all the cuttings in the field. To pick up my order, I had to wade bootlessly through the mud, dodging sprinklers, pulling the sticks I wanted out of the ground, hoping to salvage what I could of the precious clones in our refrigerator (This year, research prevailed over dinner). I predicted a dismal 'take' of my grafts.

I was wrong. Owing to my 1993 experience, every single graft I made in 1994 callused (grew together) perfectly. The only failures we had were that the scion (top part) bud died due to the long, dry storage in the refrigerator and that some rootstock (bottom part) cuttings did not form roots (quite common for certain types, especially those with v: *berlandieri* parentage).

The vines from the 1993 grafting now planted in our Sebastopol garden are doing quite well. The Syrah is growing vigorously this spring. In the future, there should be sufficient home-grown rootstock to avoid having any more small, unusual orders forgotten by commercial nurseries. By the way, I'm open to any suggestions for gopher control.

The 1994 Zinfandel crop in Alexander Valley looks pretty small at this point. The number of clusters on each shoot is lower than normal, and another weird batch of bloomtime weather has caused each cluster to be smaller than normal, with tiny berries, just like last year. If all goes well between now and October, we could have another fantastic vintage. It is ironic that what is bad for the farmer (low crop), is good for the winery (better wine).

For those of you who are new to our mailing list, reprints of the vineyard history are still available. Please contact us and we will be happy to send it to you. If you missed out on our 1992 Zin, and would like to try some, please call (707) 823-8980 and leave a message so we can get back to you with information regarding retailers who might still have some on their shelves. There are also quite a number of highly regarded restaurants that have our wine on their lists.