

July 7, 1995

No Intelligent Life on Mars

Isn't it amazing how things change with the passage of time? Not just how our own bodies and minds age, but it is interesting how certain things become more or less valuable, coming in or going out of style. Stock prices and interest rates fluctuate. There are constantly new "hot" automobiles, clothing, hairstyles, music, and *wines*. Four years ago, after finding that our grapes were no longer wanted at a particular large winery, I called every Zinfandel producing winery I could think of. No interest. So, we made our own wine. That was then. Now, there have been urgent telephone calls from more wineries than I have ever visited, all wanting to buy grapes. I have had calls (to our unlisted number) from wine distributors and retailers from all over the U.S., Canada, U.K., Switzerland, and Germany. Yes, even Utah. There must not be intelligent life on Mars. They haven't called yet... or maybe they are Cab drinkers?

Soon after the April release of the 1993 Zinfandel it sold out. That was before any positive press on the wine. Most recently, the Connoisseurs Guide to California Wine put a photograph of the vineyard on the cover and gave our 1993 Zin three stars (***) (The publisher calls them "stars." Most people call them "puffs." I suggest calling them "stuffs"). In the latest Wine Advocate, Mr. Parker gave it 89+ points (he liked the wine too). One can't expect such good press all the time, but it is nice when it happens.

In 1994 we continued making wine from the same block of old vineyard planted by my Grandfather in the 1910's and two small areas of younger, yet mature vineyard near the old block in Alexander Valley. We were able to keep the wines separate for several months to assess the different areas' personalities yet found that a blend of them had the best balance. In fact, if one could say that our 1993 Zin was the most generous and hedonistic wine we have made, the 1994 is probably the most balanced, similar to the 1992 Zinfandel.

We are offering a limited amount of the 1994 Zinfandel on a futures basis for \$130 per case until August 31, 1995 (or until we run out of our futures allocation, which will probably happen early this year). We will hold our fourth annual barrel tasting where the wine is made at the Dehlinger Winery, 6300 Guerneville Road, Sebastopol CA, on **August 5 & 6 1995, from 10-5**. You will be able to taste this highly regarded 1994 vintage for yourselves to see how the wine is affected by a few different new barrel tYPes, and talk with us about things. The **1994 Zin will be released in the spring of 1995** at a retail price of about \$16 per bottle. Once again, you will be able to pick up your futures purchases at Dehlinger, so shipping is still optional.

Because our production has not increased with this vintage and the popularity of our wine has gone up dramatically, we have sent this futures offering out to our past supporters a few days ahead of those newest to our mailing list. In the future, I may have to start a waiting list or adopt some sort of allocation program. Whatever occurs, I want a system that is fair to those who have been with us from the beginning.

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The 1994 Zinfandel was made using the same techniques as in past vintages. The fruit is destemmed, not crushed (sounds like a James Bond Martini), with the inclusion of about 15 – 20% whole grape clusters into open top fermenters. I pay particular attention to the flavor of the stems when deciding how many whole clusters to add. These uncrushed grape clusters add a spicy, exotic character to the finished wine. Once again, no filtration is planned for this wine.

The 1994 Zinfandel has a raspberry & red cherry aroma, with the usual perfume & delicate oak undertone. In the mouth, the flavors are similar with a hint of Strawberry/rhubarb pie on finish. With a few minutes in the glass, an exotic spiciness due to the whole-cluster proportion arises. I think the wine has excellent balance: the alcohol is under 14% (for once). It has good acidity and just enough tannin to sing with your supper.

The 1994 Zin, like the 1992 vintage should *really* begin to show its stuff after about 16-18 months in bottle. I'm amazed at how many people have called to tell me the same story about the 1992 Zin: A little bit left in the bottle overnight (I understand this has occurred in rare instances) becomes even more deep and interesting. While very young, the wine improves after a few hours in the glass. I don't understand this; I just accept it.

Experimental update: This fall I anticipate the first small harvest from our experimental Syrah vines at our South-Sebastopol home. Don't expect a release of this wine, since there are only 30 of these vines. But we will begin to find out if any potential exists for this area in future years. The Pinot noir vines are smaller than the Syrah, and will not produce grapes this year. The other rootstocks were budded this spring, and are growing reasonably well considering the odd weather we had. From these vines, next year we will see how Gewürztraminer, Chardonnay and Zinfandel perform in this very cool part of Sonoma County. Although I don't expect the latest-ripening of these varieties to succeed, we will learn as much from what doesn't work as from what does. Especially, we will see what effect rootstock plays in the ripening of the fruit. This could apply to the Alexander Valley site too.

Last year I predicted the possibility of a fantastic 1994 vintage in Alexander Valley due to the small crop, and the smaller than normal berry size. This year, due to the unusual springtime weather (now becoming more usual), it appears that we have similar conditions for small berry size. Due to the huge amount of winter and early spring rain, there has been no need for irrigation. Strangely, the oldest vines look fantastic this year, especially in the area that typically doesn't drain as well as the rest of the vineyard. I cannot exactly predict what the 1995 vintage will be like, but I'm very encouraged. It will probably be an uneven year where those in touch with their vineyards will manage the vines well and harvest vines when they are ready. In years like this I'm especially glad my father is caring for the vines.