

July 1, 1996

Any good recipes for venison?

Here is the latest news about the Scherrer releases: past, present, and 1995 futures. Our proudest release, Rachel Ann Scherrer, was born on Father's Day 6/16/96, weighing 7 lb, 6 oz.

It has been a hectic spring. Upon release of the 1994 Zinfandel in April, the wine disappeared even faster than the previous vintage did. Later, after being listed in The Wine Spectator's list of "new producers to watch," we found ourselves long out of wine, and with lots of calls to return from all over. There have even been a couple of callers who claimed to be intelligent life from Mars. Most recently, in issue 105 of The Wine Advocate, the 1994 Zin received a very good review (90 pts).

The 1995 harvest was another low crop year. We harvested the same vineyard areas as last year, so unfortunately, we were unable to increase the amount of wine made. My favorite part of the oldest vineyard block planted in 1912 (the 'Old' part), made a very intense, brooding, concentrated component for our wine this year. Another part of the vineyard (the 'Mature' part), made a really juicy, blackberry/raspberry wine with classical Zinfandel varietal character. Yet another area, nearest to the woods, gave us a very soft, lively wine with an interesting strawberry-rhubarb pie character. It was difficult to wait for this last area to ripen fully because of deer damage. They kept coming out of the woods during the night to sample the fruit and shoots, severely pruning the vines about six months too soon. This made the pros and cons of waiting for proper flavor development a passionately debated topic of family discussion. Anyway, the grapes not eaten by the deer, made it to the winery in good shape and all three areas complement each other quite well.

We are offering a limited amount of the 1995 Zinfandel on a futures basis for \$144 per case until August 31, 1996 or until we run out of our futures allocation (which will probably happen even earlier this year). We will hold our fifth annual barrel tasting where we make the wine at the Dehlinger Winery, 6300 Guerneville Road, Sebastopol CA, on **August 3 & 4 1996, from 10-5**. You will again be able to taste this vintage for yourselves to see how the wine is affected by a few different new French barrel types, and talk with us about things. I really appreciate your opinions on what the different barrels do for the wine. Certainly, not everyone agrees which one is the best barrel for this vineyard, but the reasons for your preferences tell me a lot about what I can do to refine the barrel program. Just like blending complimentary wine personalities to achieve balance and complexity, the same concept applies to barrels.

The 1995 Zin will be released in the spring of 1997 at a retail price of about \$16-\$18 per bottle. Again, you can pick up your futures purchases at Dehlinger, so shipping is still optional. If you will pick it up after release, all I ask is that you make an effort to claim your wine before next year's tasting, so that we do not plug up their warehouse space.

We expect our futures allocation of the 1995 Zinfandel to sell out in record time this year. Because our production remains small, and the popularity of our wine has gone up dramatically, we have sent this futures offering out to our past supporters a few days early. In the future, I may have to start a waiting list or adopt some sort of allocation program.

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The 1995 Zinfandel was made using basically 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% intact grape clusters into open top fermenters. I pay particular attention to the flavor of the stems when deciding how many whole clusters to add because this could add unwanted "green" flavors or excessive harshness. These uncrushed, whole grape clusters lengthen the fermentation time and add a spicy, exotic character to the finished wine. Once again, no fining or filtration is planned for this Wine.

This vintage has a riper, jammier character than last year, yet with the usual perfume & delicate oak undertone. In the mouth, the flavors are typical of this vineyard (blackberry/raspberry, spice, jam and toast) including a hint of Strawberry/rhubarb pie on the long finish, just like the 1994. I think the 1995 Zin should age well, but it is so 'forward' that it will be difficult to keep one's corkscrew in the drawer. As usual, this wine should *really* begin to show its stuff after about 16-18 months in bottle. Our first vintage, 1991, is wonderful today. The 1992 and 1993 Zins still 'open up' and develop if some of the bottle is left overnight. This is especially true for the 1994 Zin. I wonder what these wines would taste like with venison.

Experimental vineyard update: Last fall, in my nonexistent spare time, I picked the first small harvest from our experimental Syrah vines (30) at our South-Sebastopol home. There was about 1 1/2 gallons of destemmed fruit: ~30% sugar by the time I got around to picking them (this yields about 17% alcohol). It fermented in a bucket next to my desk and macerated on the skins for about a month until the fruit flies claimed it, causing me to throw it out. What I learned from this was: 1. That fruit flies like grapes, and 2. These grapes could make interesting wine. The dozen or so Pinot noir vines are smaller than the Syrah, and should produce enough grapes for the birds and me to eat this year. The other 30 rootstocks that were budded last spring to Gewürztraminer, Chardonnay, Pinot gris, and what appears to be a seedless Zinfandel mutation I found are growing well. The budding success rate was very good, probably because a friend and I practiced on *his* vines first, where we made all our mistakes. Anyway, please don't expect any commercial quantities of wine from these experiments.

Two years ago, I predicted the possibility of a fantastic 1994 vintage in Alexander Valley due to the small crop, and the smaller than normal berry size. In 1995, due to the unusual springtime weather (now becoming more usual), I thought a similar potential existed. At the risk of sounding repetitive (too late) 1996 looks quite the same. Once again, 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 1996 vintage will be like, but I'm very hopeful. Again, it will probably be an uneven year where those in touch with their vineyards will manage the vines well and harvest when the grapes are ready.

The deer are back, doing their summer pruning so my sister, Louise, has begun spraying some of the leaves with an organic hot pepper emulsion. If the deer develop a taste for hot peppers, we may look up a recipe for "Tacos de Bambi."