

July 4, 1997

A Farewell to Fawns: The Fence Also Rises

The deer had A Moveable Feast below the Green Hills of Alexander Valley¹. The more they fed on the vines, the more we wondered what crop we were going To Have and Have Not. Winemakers without grapes, like Men Without Women, become desperate. For the deer, it looked like it would become A Dangerous Summer in The Garden of Eden. Armed and experienced, my father knew For Whom the Bell Tolls. For the deer there might be Death in the Afternoon. But like the fisherman in The Old Man and the Sea, he chose to let the deer live. So he put up a tall fence. And In Our Time, the vineyards will be safe like Islands in the Stream.

This letter is not just for listing titles, but to update you on what is happening with the Scherrer Zinfandels. This year we have two Zinfandel futures offerings. Although we appreciate all the recipes for venison we received last year, we found an antidote (anti-doe?) for deer damage in the vineyard that does not involve violence. More on that later.

The 1996 harvest had the lowest yields we have experienced since we began making our own wine from the vineyard in 1991. Our production was down 20% from 1995's already low level. After several years' experience making wines from different parts of the family vineyard and watching them develop separately and together in barrel, I think that the wines' best interests will be served by keeping them as distinct bottlings in certain vintages. These are the same guidelines I use while making blending decisions at my daytime job at Dehlinger.

My favorite part of the oldest vineyard block (the 'Old' part, planted in 1912) makes a very intense, brooding, concentrated base component for our wine each year. It usually does best with a high proportion of whole clusters in the fermenter. Another part of the vineyard planted in 1978 (the 'Mature' part), makes a really racy, blackberry/raspberry wine with classical Zinfandel varietal character. These two areas, grown on mostly clay-like soil, complement and complete each other as the 'Old and Mature Vines' blend. We will have about 600 cases of this wine from 1996. I think this is the most focused and vibrant 'Old and Mature' blend we have had yet.

Another 'mature' area planted in 1975 produces a very soft but lively wine with an interesting cherry/strawberry-rhubarb pie character with a hint of black pepper. The wine is shaped very much like a good Pinot noir, and responds very well to Burgundian cooperage. Grown behind the family barn primarily on shale subsoil, its growth habits and wine personality seem consistent year to year. Rather than call it the Barnyard bottling, I think we will call it the 'Shale Terrace' (after all these years, I'm beginning to learn about naming things.) We will have about 200 cases of this wine from 1996. In the past, it was difficult to wait for this last area to ripen fully because of deer damage. This spring, a deer fence was installed to frustrate those poor beasts' efforts at summertime fruit thinning and shoot trimming. Although my father pinned his arm under a fallen tree (fortunately suffering only minor injuries) while clearing the path for this fence, we all agree that it is worth the trouble and expense. We will just have to buy New Zealand venison now.

¹ With all due apologies to Ernest, I could not resist the title, or the rest of this opening paragraph.

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We will hold our sixth annual barrel tasting where we make the wine at the Dehlinger Winery, 6300 Guerneville Road, Sebastopol CA, on **August 2 & 3 1997, from 10-5**. You will be able to taste these wines for yourselves to see how they work with a few different new French barrel types. At this point I think the 'Old & Mature' blend is well shaped by cognac-style barrels, while the 'Shale Terrace' wine prefers to live in burgundy barrels from Dargaud et Jaegle (a new type for us). Just like blending complimentary wine personalities or separating balanced beauties, the same concept applies to barrels.

The 1996 Zins will be released in the spring of 1998. The retail price will be about \$20 per bottle. The futures price of the Shale Terrace wine is slightly lower than the Old & Mature blend because we have less experience with how it will continue to develop on its own. Because of the changes at Dehlinger, shipping is now required. If things change so we are able to offer pickups, we will contact you. But for now, shipping is obligatory.

We have still not yet instituted an allocation system. This mailing will go out to our previous supporters ahead of the newest ones. Due to the early harvest this year and the tiny quantities of wine, **the deadline for orders will be the last day of the tasting, August 3, 1997.** If you are going to make a purchasing decision at the tasting, please bring your checkbook, since we don't do credit cards. I hate to cause a race, but with two jobs and a family, there has not been time left to invest in getting more sophisticated with the mailing list.

The 1996 Zinfandels were made using basically the same techniques as in past vintages. The fruit is destemmed but not crushed, with the inclusion of intact grape clusters when it is appropriate, 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 unmanipulated grape clusters lengthen the fermentation time and add a spicy, exotic character to the finished wine. As usual, no fining or filtration is intended for these wines.

Experimental 0.03 Acre Sebastopol Vineyard update: New baby in the house = no time to pull weeds or water. Result: vines were highly water stressed last summer, yielding no fruit worth mentioning. This past spring we had a late frost which killed many of the new succulent shoots. The vines have grown out of it, but I think we have lost another year's results to nature. By contrast, in *the real Vineyard* in Alexander Valley, my father had no such problems. *That* is a great site.

After a very wet mid-winter, we have experienced a very early spring, followed by unusually warm weather. The absence of any Torrents of Spring (sorry Ernest) allowed good pollination of the grapes. The 1997 Zinfandel harvest promises to be very early, and plentiful. It is now up to humans to judiciously thin the crop back to an appropriate level. This scenario is preferable to having far too few clusters on the vines. Since we are looking at such an early harvest this year I'm glad I ordered new cooperage to arrive months ahead of normal. Wineries that look at their calendars more than their vines will have a very unpleasant surprise this August when grapes are harvested while their new barrels are on a ship.

