

1997 Scherrer Zinfandel Futures Offering

Summertime is finally here, and so are our 1997 Zinfandel futures offerings.

But, first a review of the near past. In the spring newsletter, I discussed my friendly departure from Dehlinger after 10 vintages there, and it rained. We held an open house at our 'new' location and were pleasantly surprised how many people showed up to visit, offer encouragement and pick up futures...between rains. Although it was not advertised, we sampled those who came on a few experimental wines we made in 1997: a Chardonnay, a dry Zinfandel rosé, and a Cabernet Sauvignon...then it rained. These wines will be the subject of a future newsletter and those of you on our mailing list will be the first to hear about any offerings on these limited wines...rain or shine.

Rain *and* shine is what we had for the 1997 growing season. You might say it was a vintage of excess in the North Coast. Excess heat and excess moisture, with both sometimes very pronounced and potentially damaging depending on the state of the vines at the moment either occurred. In cases where there was excess crop, any of the following problems were compounded. Some vineyards ran out of soil moisture during heat spells before the grapes could accumulate truly ripe flavors and had to be harvested so as not to make raisin wine. Other vineyards were affected by the untimely August and September rains only to have *botrytis* gain a foothold, forcing the issue of harvesting before true ripeness was achieved. Some growers were prescribed ulcer medication and were told to delay harvesting their grapes until wineries, swamped with a large and rapid harvest, had room in fermentation tanks. What initially looked like a very early, plentiful and dry vintage, became the cause of many uneasy nights for grape growers and winemakers. All is not doom & gloom, however. Many growers and winemakers had wonderful luck and wines to match. I feel we were one of the fortunate producers.

Regarding our own wines, overall I'm as happy with the 1997 vintage as I was with 1996 at this stage. Considering the success of our 1996 vintage, that says a lot. It's all a matter of perspective. The 'Old & Mature' wine is a bit more dense, and 'The Shale Terrace' is a bit more elegant in 1997 than in 1996. One tends to miss any low points of a given vintage by taking extra care all along the way and having a great vineyard site. While it is always important to harvest on flavor maturity rather than 'by the numbers,' a keen interest in the physiological state of the grapevines and proactive, yet gentle vinification were equally important for great success in 1997.

We were able to use more of the family vineyards for our own wines. Our total Zinfandel production grew to 2,000 cases in 1997. I'm thrilled to have so much high quality wine. What it means to you is that there are no limits and you can get all you want from this offering. It also means that you can tell your friends and family about this offering without endangering your own supply.

The following is a short discussion of the two Zinfandels we have available as futures and what the challenges of the vintage were. I encourage you to come and taste these for yourself at our barrel tasting, August 1st and 2nd, 10am to 5pm.

1997 Old & Mature Vines Zinfandel: The grapes used for this wine were minimally affected by the fall rains, and the clay soils had sufficient moisture to overcome the hot spells. Nonetheless, the usual selection

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of fully ripened fruit has resulted in one of the most dense and concentrated versions of this bottling we have encountered. Because we had more fermentation lots to work with, there were more options to fine-tune the blend. This wine contends to be the 'best' expression of these vines yet. Please come taste this wine and let it speak for itself. Happily, because we used more of the family vineyard for our own wine production, we have twice the amount of this wine than last year. *Estimated retail at release: \$24. Futures price: \$190 per case.*

1997 Shale Terrace Zinfandel: Not everything we had was unaffected by the late summer rains. The same things that probably cause the wine from this area to be so supple, also made it more susceptible to negative effects of fall rain and ensuing *botrytis* infection. My family removed most of the leaves which covered or touched the fruit and sprayed this area immediately following the late rain. Additionally, affected fruit was removed a couple of days before the harvest, helping to ensure that sound fruit would be harvested. I had a sorting table built for my destemmer so that we could hand feed the machine, making it easier to discard unwanted portions of grape clusters that might have made it to the winery. The extra work paid off as the resulting wine shows. It exhibits its typical round & supple character so well expressed by the 1996 bottling. The 1997 Shale Terrace also exhibits some exotic stone fruit aromas like plum and apricot, and is a shade more elegant than the 1996 Shale Terrace Zinfandel. The type of yeast I used to complete most of the fermentation has enhanced the wine's mid-palate thickness. Our resulting wine seems to soak up the new burgundian oak like chamois soaks up water. This speaks to me as a wine for near-term enjoyment for three reasons: 1) It is never structured to last decades, 2) Whenever there is significant botrytis on the fruit, aging is accelerated, 3) It is so satisfying while young that it is hard to keep one's corkscrew away from the bottles, leaving no point in saving the wine forever. *Estimated retail at release: \$20. Futures price: \$160 per case.*

All these 1997 Zinfandels were made using basically the same techniques as in past vintages with one exception. I left the wine on its initial lees (sediment) in barrels for a lot longer than I have ever before (7 months vs. 2 months). This is commonly done with the better red Burgundies and California Pinot noirs, but I have never heard of anyone doing this with Zinfandel. The improvement I sense is that the lees and the oak work together to become more integrated into the grape flavors. There is more complexity, yet better continuity.

We will hold our seventh **annual barrel tasting** at our 'new' winery facility on **August 1 & 2, 1998, from 10-5**. You will be able to taste the new Zinfandels for yourself to see how they work with a few different new French barrel types. A map to the winery building with the address and telephone number is included in this newsletter.

The 1997 'Shale Terrace' and 1997 'Old & Mature Vine' Zinfandels will be released in the spring of 1999. You can opt to have the wine shipped to you or pick the wine up at our April 1999 open house on April 3rd, 10th and 11th (but not Easter Sunday on the 4th). The open house is the only time we can offer pick ups. I'm sorry, but I can't afford the time or the staff for more extensive pick-up dates. If you opt to pick-up your wine, but find you can't make it, we will ship it and bill you later.

Because of our increase in production with the 1997 vintage we have not had to institute an allocation system, so you can still order whatever you want. **The deadline for orders will be the last day of the**

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tasting, August 2, 1998. If you plan to make a purchasing decision at the tasting, please bring your checkbook, since we still don't do credit cards.

Long-term futures: We plan to continue to offer futures on our usual bottlings of Zinfandel for as many vintages in the future as we can. There are two major reasons for us to do this: 1) We have expanded our Zinfandel production about 2-fold and we still need to collect necessary winery equipment, so there is still a financial reason for us to offer futures. 2) When we started this project in 1991, it was those people who supported us by buying futures that got us here in the first place. These people are, in a sense, partners. Even though many of you have only recently joined us, we like to see good people get a good price on good wine.

As for the 1998 growing season so far: With the seemingly endless parade of rainstorms this spring, the vines *and* their custodians were stressed. When we were finally able to get back out into the vineyards to do the necessary hand work, we found that the job would be more important than usual, and more time consuming as well. Without going into much detail of grapevine physiology, in anticipation of unusually vigorous growth, we removed much more new vegetation than usual in order to approach a more normal environment in the fruiting area of each vine. Our goal was to increase sunlight exposure of the interior buds (for next year's crop) and the baby grape clusters (for this year's crop). Actively growing shoot tips also compete with flower clusters for the vine's 'attention.' We wanted to keep the vines focused on producing grapes. This is expensive and labor-intensive, but very important for years like 1998. We have periodically returned to each vine, repeatedly arranging and/or removing unwanted new growth as it appeared.

Once vine growth began this spring, the younger replant vines within our established vineyards responded to the wet spring soils differently than the more established vines. These younger vines, already at a competitive disadvantage had much of their shallower root systems damaged by the soggy soil conditions (active roots need oxygen too). Once warmer weather returned in late June, these vines began to turn somewhat yellow. Some leaves even reddened, and showed signs of water stress and potassium deficiency. We decided to remove all grapes on these vines to allow them an easier season to rebuild their root systems. Hopefully this will save most of these younger vines. The older and more established the vine, the less stressed it seemed to be by the unusual spring.

Our efforts at helping the vines set a normal crop were helpful, but could not completely offset the cool and rainy weather conditions during the bloom period. The 1998 crop on our vineyard will still be somewhat reduced. The Zinfandel looks to be its usual, rather uneven self with beautifully loose clusters and lots of tiny berries. I'm accustomed to this. The Chardonnay bloomed over a long period of time, and should have a particularly light crop. Our Cabernet Sauvignon, which bloomed later, during more favorable weather looks very encouraging. We won't have a large crop this year, but at least we will do everything we can to produce the highest quality fruit we are capable of.

Regarding the wacky world of out of state shipping: Currently, we have a shipping company that can deliver wine to most of the 50 states with the exception of AK, KY and UT. I'll take orders for delivery to 'non-reciprocal states' with the understanding that if things change between now and April so that I cannot ship your wine to you there, we will try to make other delivery arrangements.