Scherrer Spring Release Notice: April 1, 1999

As I put together this letter in February, Judi and I are expecting our second release, a boy, in early March. So, by the time you read this we will probably: 1) be critically sleep-deprived, 2) finally have a name for the new addition to our family, and 3) remember to mail this letter out on time. Assuming that we did mail this out on time, we are pleased to announce not only the release of the 1997 Shale Terrace Zinfandel and 1997 Old & Mature Vine Zinfandel, but a few surprises as well! We are also releasing a 1997 Special Cuvée Zinfandel, our 1997 Chardonnay, and 1998 Vin Gris! All these Spring Release wines will be ready for ***sale*** and/or futures pick up during our open house days this April. **We will be open for three days from 10 AM to 5 PM: Saturday April 3rd (the day before Easter) and the weekend of April 10th & 11th.** We will be closed on Easter Sunday.

Due to the relatively plentiful crop in 1997, our use of more of the family vineyard, and our ability to increase production in our own facility, we actually have some wine for sale this year upon release. However, there will be some limits on the scarcest wines to assure more of you the chance to see what we are up to.

1997 'Old & Mature Vines' Zinfandel: This is a wonderful expression of the clay dominated soils of our family vineyard: Pomegranate, raspberry, black and red cherry, cedar, and fresh pie crust. All the 1997 red wines were left on their initial sediment ('lees') from harvest until the following May. This is the longest I have left our wines undisturbed during their early voyage in barrel. The Zins were racked for the second time in December and bottled without filtration in late January. This minimal handling really preserves their delicate perfumes (like Pinot noir), and should increase their ageing potential. That does not say that these wines normally have a short lifespan. All our past vintages, since 1991, have aged and developed much more slowly and gracefully than I had anticipated at the beginning of this project.

I have never been more satisfied with one of our 'Old & Mature' Zinfandels at this stage. It has a very dense, but friendly core and should be the longest-lived of these we have bottled (and that is saying a lot), without being heavy or ponderous at any point in the wine's development. 1300 cases produced. **Release price: $25 per bottle, 12 bottle limit.**

1997 'Shale Terrace' Zinfandel: I have often been told that this area of our vineyard tastes more of Dry Creek than Alexander Valley. I think it is like Chambolle raspberry with a smackerel of Charmes black pepper. It is seductive & complex with flavors ranging from earthy, smoky bass tones to soaring raspberry/cherry, a hint of mint and perfumed stone fruits, all wrapped in a silken robe. 400 cases produced. Most was sold on futures, hence the tiny limit. **Release price: $20 per bottle, 2 bottle limit.**

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1997 'Special Cuvée' Zinfandel: This is a new wine for us. It came into existence in this vintage because it did not support or improve its usual destination, the 'Old & Mature Vines' blend. You might think that that would be disappointing, but it is really wonderful on its own. I kept this wine a secret until now because it might have finally fit into the 'Old & Mature' blend as it continued to develop in barrel. It did not. As the months have progressed, this has proven to be a wine with individuality, balance, grace, an agenda of its own and a refusal to submit to our usual blending plan. I even toyed with the idea of calling it 'Dominatrix,' but at the thought of the potential trouble with BATF, as well as the folks at Petrus, I settled on 'Special Cuvée.' Grown on the tighter clay portion of the 'Old' vineyard (planted in 1912), and fermented with plenty of whole grape clusters, it is probably the most exotic Zinfandel we have bottled. 350 cases produced. **Release price: $25 per bottle, 12 bottle limit.**

At this time, I do not foresee bottling this area separately every vintage. If it is indicated in a given vintage, so be it. As I learn about our vineyard there may be other areas, which need to remain separate. Therefore, I reserve the term 'special cuvée' for the odd orphan wine. The point is to make the best wines possible by appropriate combination or separation. It's like being the host of a large dinner party where by seating certain guests together, everyone has a lousy time (sometimes it's better not to invite certain guests in the first place). Similar or complimentary personalities belong together while others do not. In 1997, we had this beautiful wine which refused to associate/cooperate with the usual blend, while being simultaneously ostracized by that same blend. The wines spoke. I listened. They fought. Both wines won.

1997 Scherrer Vineyard Chardonnay: When I began to experiment with our Alexander Valley Chardonnay, I was accustomed to working with Russian River Valley fruit. So, I was not prepared for how much I would like this wine. Barrel fermented with special, temperamental yeast, full malolactic fermentation, and bottled without fining, cold stabilization, or filtration, this 215 case experiment exhibits great richness and complexity without going over the top. After many separate assessments, I can report that the flavors remain on the palate a full minute after swallowing. As this is our first experience with Chardonnay from our vineyard, I have no idea how long it will age. In our home, it won't have much of a chance…to age for very long.

This is an uncommon Alexander Valley Chardonnay. Those of you who tasted a barrel sample of this wine last spring will find that over the last year it has developed more butterscotch, vanilla, and hazelnut notes in addition to its perfumed apple fruit. I think it is best served just a few degrees below cellar temperature (~50 F), then allowed to expand while warming to room temperature. 215 cases produced. **Release price: $22 per bottle, 4 bottle limit.**

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1998 Vin Gris: We doubled our production of this dry rosé to two barrels. It is slightly crisper and has a little more pink grapefruit character than the previous vintage. This is *not* 'white Zinfandel' (unripe & sweet). It has much more in common with Bandol Rosé. Seafood dishes with garlic and /or tomato cry out for this wine. So does a thirsty mouth. 44 cases were produced; the family will probably consume half. **Release price: $14 per bottle, 2 bottle limit.**

Due to popular demand, by the time you read this we expect to be able to accept VISA and MasterCard. However, we cannot give cash refunds (rarely needed anyway) for shipping charges or wine purchased by credit card. In that case we would issue a credit toward a future purchase. Personal checks and cash still work too, of course.

Once last year, we briefly previewed our 1997 Scherrer Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon from barrel. Still developing perfectly in barrels, it will probably be ready for sale about a year from now. You will hear more about this as the time approaches. Believe it or not, the 1998 Cabernet Sauvignon will probably surpass the 1997 vintage. A couple of years ago, while receiving calls from all over, I suggested that there was no intelligent life on Mars since we had not been contacted from there…or that maybe they are Cabernet drinkers. Well, there may be a chance for the red planet to have some red wine. "Take me to your liter, earthling."

This spring marks the first full year I have been completely self-employed. In 20 years of making wine, I have never had as much fun during the harvest as I did in 1998. The cool and rainy growing season was the most challenging I have seen, so we spent the entire non-spring and summer arranging and removing the vineyard foliage. The resulting fruit was some of the best material I have worked with…very loose and open grape clusters that began flavor development at lower than typical sugar levels. Nevertheless, the alcohol levels generally ended up in the mid-14% range. Fortunately, we were able to harvest the Zinfandel under cool conditions. The 1998 harvest went smoothly and the winery facility (big garage) was easier to work in than anticipated.

Thank you for your interest and support of our wine. It has allowed me to achieve my longtime dream of operating my own small winery. I hope to see you at our open house this spring and I hope you will enjoy what we have produced.

Sincerely,

Fred Scherrer

Scherrer Winery Sebastopol CA
TEL/FAX: (707)823-8980