

## 1998 Scherrer Zinfandel Futures Offering

According to the early growing season weather last spring, 1998 didn't promise to be a great harvest, if even *any* harvest. With above normal soil moisture and fewer grapes to ripen, the vines grew with unusual vigor. Allowed to grow unmanaged, the fruit would be excessively shaded, yielding more rot-prone, vegetal, less interesting wines. In an effort to make the best of this unusual growing season, we removed many more 'lateral' vine shoots and basal leaves from the vine than usual. This increased the illumination of the 1998 crop as well as the basal buds (which were in the process of determining the following year's crop). Whether 1998 would remain colder and damper than normal, or settle back into 'typical' weather, the vines were now poised to make the best of it. And they did.

In a typical growing season, my father would thin the crop by performing a couple of passes through the vineyard. Since 1998 promised a small crop, there was no need to spend the usual amount of time reducing it. For this reason, the huge amount of labor my father, sister, and vineyard crew put into the previously discussed canopy work in 1998 (and 1999 as well) was somewhat offset by less crop reduction work, so total labor was about normal. It is great to see someone like my father, in his early 70's, be so adaptable in his farming practices. This is what separates the 'men from the boys' when conditions become unusual.

The cold & wet springtime weather during the bloom of 1998 was also unfavorable for thorough pollination, so there were fewer seeds per berry. Fewer seeds make smaller berries. In a situation like this, one tends to get more skin extraction relative to seed extraction during red fermentation. There is also more skin relative to juice. If the skin material has been properly warmed and illuminated during its development and maturation on the vine, one obtains supple and flavorful red wines with deep fruit flavors. This is the major reason for trellising and canopy work done by hand. When these grapes are allowed to come to full maturity, the results are...well, quite pleasing.

Our 1998 red wines are a study in proportion and balance. There is a quiet strength to them, probably due to the reduced seed extraction (bitterness). The yields were rather low, which allowed ripening to proceed at an appropriate rate, even during sub-optimal temperatures. In John Gladstones' excellent book, Viticulture & Environment, he proposes that pigment and flavor development in grapes is driven by constant sugar production in excess of the berries' need for respiration. (It's like what dollar cost averaging does for a brokerage account). I think this (sugar flux, not brokerage accounts) has a lot to do with the importance of yield restrictions in marginal climates.

The following is a short discussion of the two Zinfandels we have available as futures. We are very pleased with them and look forward to showing them off. Please come and taste these for yourself at our **barrel tasting, August 7 & 8, 1999 from 10 to 5**. This is not open to the general public. Only those on our mailing list are invited to this 'private party.' Family and friends are welcome, but if you wish to bring more people than you usually do, please just let us know so we can plan our resources. Please drive slowly on our shared driveway, as there are often children in the area. In addition, please do not park along the north side of the gravel road near the other winery, which shares our driveway. We need to respect our neighbor's privacy. There is additional unpaved parking available around the 'rear' (west) of our winery, near the outhouse.

**1998 Old & Mature Vines Zinfandel:** This wine is very typical of the clay soils of the Scherrer Vineyard.

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It has great balance, concentration, and continuity. Interestingly, the components were rather angular and tannic immediately after fermentation. The synthesis of these elements has become rather velvety and sensual. It is as much fun to drink as it was to make. While 1998 was a much different growing season, this wine reminds me quite a bit of the 1996 'Old & Mature' Zinfandel at the same stage. Considering the low yields, and the growth of our Zinfandel futures program, there will probably not be much, if any, available for retail sale from us upon release. *Estimated retail at release: \$26 per bottle. Futures price: \$210 per case.*

**1998 Shale Terrace Zinfandel:** The Zin voted most likely to impersonate Pinot, this wine reminds me of a raspberry-rhubarb tart. It is focused & refreshing, while approaching ethereal. Enough for nebulous descriptions, just come and taste it for your self. Yields were low in this area as well, so this will probably not be available for retail sale by the bottle in April. *Estimated retail at release: \$22 per bottle. Futures price: \$180 per case.*

Both these 1998 Zinfandels were made using the same basic techniques as in the past vintage with one exception. Being self-employed for the first time, I was able to absolutely focus on our own fermentations in order to 'raise' them according to my perception of their own personality of origin. As future vintages unfold, I expect that there will be certain areas of the vineyard which demonstrate consistent and unique personality worthy of separate bottling. Of course, this should only be done for the right reasons and after sufficient study. I certainly don't want to sacrifice the balance and complexity of future 'Old & Mature Vines' Zinfandels. The 1997 'Special cuvée' came to be because it was great on its own, but hurt the 'Old & Mature' Zin when included. By contrast, in 1998 this area fit perfectly into the blend, as usual. So, it may be some time before you see new separate bottlings from the Scherrer Vineyard besides the 'Shale Terrace' and 'Old & Mature Vines'.

**Non-Zinfandel update:** With the 1997 vintage I began working with both Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon from the family's vineyard. I appreciate the overwhelmingly positive feedback on the 1997 Chardonnay, released last April. The good news is that there is a little more in store from 1998, of which I am even more excited than its predecessor. The 1997 Cabernet Sauvignon continues to do nicely in barrels. It should definitely be worth the wait, though.

I have also had the good fortune to be allowed to work with our first non-Scherrer vineyard under our own label. From Don & Patricia Helfer's vineyard on Vine Hill road in Sebastopol, the entire production of their Chardonnay vineyard in 1998 gave us...two whole barrels of wine. I'm tempted to keep it all for myself, but the time I'd have to spend in purgatory will probably make me share. More on this and other new things on the horizon (can you say Pinot?) will be announced in April.

**The wackiness continues.** You have probably heard enough about what the 'Evil Empire' and its unholy alliance with opportunistic, ignorant politicians are doing to limit access outside California to uncommon wines, so there's no need to cover it here. The bottom line is this: **We can only set up futures purchases for either pickup at our open house in April, or shipping to the legal or 'reciprocal states' listed on the order form.** If you live in a 'shipping-challenged' state, and set up your futures purchase for pick-up, you can find a 'legal' destination between now and April, then have it shipped. Alternatively, there are third-party shipping companies with more options for shipment since unlike a winery, they don't have a Federal

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operating permit to endanger. This works only when the winery does not set up or pay the shipping company directly. The recipient does this. Due to some problems attributed to internet sales of alcoholic beverages (beer), there is legislation in the works in some states that would prohibit my direct communication with you in the future. Wasn't the internet supposed to increase the availability of information? This is Liberty?

If it is any consolation, I have notified distributors (middlemen) in the 'unfriendly' states that I will not do business with them as long as their State limits consumers' access to small production wines directly from the winery. This is good news for those in 'friendly' locales, where our wine could become more available. Switzerland, Japan and the Netherlands also look better all the time. How about Mars? Maybe certain legislators could be sent on the first human missions to the red planet to see if there are any minors lurking about, ordering Zinfandel futures for prom night. It wouldn't be the first time we sent a 'mature' Senator into space. John Glenn did just fine. I would even donate some of dad's venison jerky for the long trip.

We will hold our seventh **annual barrel tasting** at our winery facility on **August 7&8, 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 deadline for orders is the last day of the tasting, August 8, 1999.**

**The 1998 Zinfandels will be released in the spring of 2000.** (Relax, I keep a paper copy of all receipts). You can opt to have the wine shipped to your legally allowable location or pick the wine up at our open house in April of Y2K. The open house in April 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 your wine up, but find you can't make it, we will ship it to a legal location and bill you later.

**Long-term futures:** While we have not offered futures for our other varietals, we plan to continue to offer futures on our usual bottlings of Zinfandel indefinitely. There are varied reasons for this: First, you are much friendlier than a bank. Second, when we started this project in 1991, it was those of you who supported us by buying futures that got us here in the first place. You are, in a sense, partners. Third, 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 1999 growing season so far:** Up until the last part of June, 1999 looked like another small vintage with a cool, but drier growing season than 1998. The cool weather during the spring of 1998 probably caused the reduced number of clusters formed for 1999 (for a great review article on this subject: *Am. J. Enol. Vitic., Vol 32, No. 1, 1981 pp.47-63*). If it were not for the canopy work in 1998, we would probably have even fewer Zinfandel clusters on the vines than we do in 1999. As of the end of June and early July, it appears we will have a warm summer after all. If the weather is not too extreme in any one direction, 1999 has the potential of being a very special vintage. Time will tell.