

2000 Scherrer Zinfandel Futures Offering & 1999 Fall Releases

We are happy to announce the 2000 Zinfandel futures offering (our tenth vintage) as well as our first fall wine releases. Over the past few years, the number of wines we produce each year has grown to nearly a dozen. Some of these wines beg for more time in bottle before release, so it seems natural to go to two releases per year (spring and fall) despite the difficulty in managing the paperwork so close to harvest.

The 2000 growing season was punctuated by several very hot periods. The early heat reduced the crop size, as well as the homogeneity of ripening of the Zinfandel (generally and issue). Where 1999 gave us Zinfandel with few shriveled berries and raisins, 2000 yielded many shriveled and raisined berries along with perfectly ripened ones on the same cluster. Our destemmer is modified to deal with this, so the majority of raisins stick to the stems and are discarded. Then a hot streak at harvest dehydrated most of the berries, pushing the alcohol levels to just over 15%. This is now commonplace with other producers, yet unusual for us. The resulting 2000 Zinfandels are a bit more generous, jammy and smoother than usual for us at this point, particularly compared to the 1999's. The alcohol level shows after drinking about half a bottle, so be careful. I bet some critics will give our 2000's better marks for these very reasons.

Stylistically, this vintage breaks new ground for us. Imagine the 1996 Zinfandels with somewhat riper flavors. Granted, I usually underestimate the ageability of our riper vintage Zinfandels, I expect the 2000's to be most fun in their first half-dozen years. Past 'Old & Mature' bottlings have aged very well, beyond my initial expectations. We recently had a bottle from 1992 out of my parents' cellar. It was gorgeous, at a perfect point between vigorous youth and the patina of experience. I don't remember it tasting better. And that bottle still could have aged longer. At this point, the tightness of the seal provided by the cork determines the vibrancy of individual bottles of our 1991 and 1992 vintages. Since 1993, I have used a more traditional paraffin coating on the corks, as well as a more gentle peroxide 'cleaning' on the uncoated corks. This delays seal-related bottle variation.

If possible, please come and taste our 2000 Zinfandels and the 1999 fall release wines for yourself at our ninth annual **barrel tasting, August 4 & 5, 2001 from 10 to 5**. As usual, this is not advertised to the general public. Only those on our mailing list and their guests are invited to this 'private party.' Family and friends are welcome, but if you plan 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, and we plan to have someone assist with parking.

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If you expect to take any bottles of our fall releases home with you that weekend, please plan protection for your wine from the possibility of high temperatures. An ice chest or at least a styrofoam shipping container would be a good idea. Bottled wine shipments will be made in the fall when weather will be kinder to the wine. I will have all shipment information finalized well in advance. When the weather is right, I'll 'pull the trigger' and have the wine shipped. I will be very busy with the harvest then, and will not be able to make last-minute changes to addresses, etc. So, please plan carefully.

2000 Old & Mature Vines Zinfandel futures: If I had made a Zinfandel in 1981, the starting material would have been a lot like this. We could not have made a wine like this then, though. The availability of such a wide range of coopers' barrels, gentle handling, unconventional winemaking ideas, etc. were not standard fare at that time. I was only twenty years old then, having worked only two commercial harvests in a winery. Crop levels in 2000 were very low, giving good concentration of very ripe material. There are full, soft, and sweet tannins with hints of surmaturité. There's slightly higher alcohol than usual, just above 15%. The wine holds it well, but you can feel it after drinking some. This wine was racked off its lees for the first time very late this year. So I doubt there will be any point in showing many of the different new barrels as usual because there has been little time for the barrel to make its mark. This is the first time I would consider this an 'OMV' to enjoy for its more youthful assets (first 5 years) rather than to expect that age will tame its alcoholic edge to reveal its potential. A truly American wine, with a relatively short image of the future (but, I have been wrong before). *Estimated retail at release: \$28 per bottle. Futures price: \$225 per case. Released April 2001*

2000 Shale Terrace Zinfandel futures: With the exception of 1999, sweet, round, supple tannins are the usual hallmark of this wine. This vintage is classic 'Shale.' Yields were low in this area again, so this will probably not be available for retail sale by the bottle in April. *Estimated retail at release in stores that get some: \$25 per bottle. Futures price: \$195 per case. Released April 2001*

1999 Helfer Vineyard Chardonnay: This vineyard makes unusual-for-California Chardonnay. It seems to demand more bottle age than the Scherrer Vineyard Chardonnay from the Alexander Valley. My second vintage with this Russian River Valley Chardonnay, I felt it has the material to move toward a more edgy, controversial style that would benefit from bottle age. It was harvested a little riper racked a little 'dirtier', and fermented warmer than in 1998, giving it less of the pretty floral notes and more meaty, leesy, 'stinkiness' reminiscent of some young white Burgundies. It is not a style for everyone, but them that likes that style, is them that will be pleased. 44 cases produced. *\$35 per bottle (\$31.50 w/12 or more bottles total.) Available now.*

1999 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir: Arguably, this could be the finest of our four 1999 Pinot Noir bottlings. It should probably be called 'Irony.' Our *smallest production*, from the *widest*

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appellation, appears to have the *highest potential*. Go figure. This wine knows what it wants to be. There is a firm core of dark fruits and earth, surrounded by notes of rose hips, roses, cherries, toast and a twist of black pepper. 85 cases produced. *\$40 per bottle (\$36 w/12 or more bottles total.) Available now.*

1999 Hirsch Vineyard 'Diaphanous' Pinot Noir: After returning from the dictionary, imagine the following. Picture your ideal lover clad in only nearly see-through gossamer robes. You see just enough. The breeze blows gently. The camera pans to the window, music crescendo...Oh, the wine: I have never seen a Pinot Noir change so much day-to-day than this. What is this? Wine, or a moody performer? Sometimes it is tight and taught, other times showing and open, delicate, nearly ethereal presence. Many delicate flavors and aromas playing cat and mouse. Before you know it, the bottle is empty. Most of the Hirsch bottlings from the Sonoma Coast are very powerful, dense, firmly structured, somewhat masculine wines. There is one part of the vineyard where every so often, it yields a gracefully feminine wine...at its own pleasure. 140 cases produced. *\$40 per bottle (\$36 w/12 or more bottles total). Available now.*

2000 Unfiltered Vin Gris: When I racked the 2000 Vin Gris from barrel, just before filtration and bottling, I accidentally stirred up the yeast sediment on one barrel. This would have made filtration painful, so I re-settled the barrel and try again in a couple months. I normally re-settle the turbid last gallon from the barrels and bottle unfiltered for family use, so I have some experience with this sort of thing. The wine is slightly opalescent, broader, creamier, and less fruit-focused than the filtered spring release. Please don't age it next to the water heater. Drink with pleasure and abandon this summer and fall. *\$16 per bottle (\$14.40 w/12 or more bottles total). Available now. 28 cases produced.*

We will hold our tenth **annual Zinfandel barrel tasting** at our winery facility on **August 4&5, from 10-5**. You will be able to taste the new Zinfandels and bottled wines for yourself. 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 5, 2001. The 2000 Zinfandels will be released in the spring of 2002.**

"Signed, sealed & delivered": **We can only set up futures purchases for either pickup at our two open house weekends on April 6 & 7, 13 & 14, 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, you can have someone you trust come pick the wine up and hold it or somehow find a way to get it to you.

Mailing list and allocation policy development: Many of you have told me that you are afraid to tell your friends about our wine, and that you have mixed feelings about seeing great press,

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because it will mean that the wine will get harder to find and insanely expensive (right Alan?). This past decade, we have been fortunate to have had a good match between supply and demand. In the event that demand should ever greatly exceed supply, I have a plan, or at least a dream.

The Dream: We have every sale to every body in the database-all the way back to 1991 Zinfandel Futures. We should be able to offer a customized selection of what you have told us you want in the past. If you want to try something different than what you have purchased, there should be a way to accomplish that too. The desire is to take care of those of you who have allowed me to do what I love. I am on mailing lists too, and prefer to be treated like a Human Being, not a cow heading for slaughter or a stereo typewriter. New clients should have to wait until there is sufficient supply to spread around. Once the telephone booth is full, it's full. Try a Volkswagen Beetle (do students still do that?). How about a bus? This may be the future system (the booth, not the magic bus.) Any suggestions? Any database wizards out there? As Hendrix said "I know what I want, but I just don't know...how to go about getting' it."

The Reality: Currently, I set bottle limits on certain wines at release so that everyone on the mailing list has a chance to establish their likes and dislikes, yet I still should be able to fill the orders placed. If you want more than the limit, feel free to mark up the margins of the order form. By the time the open house arrives, once everyone has a chance on the mailer, the limits disappear, and additional requests are filled in the order they arrived. To be fair to those far away from the winery (most of you), I must assume that tasting first is not a requirement I am not happy about this, but it's the best I can do. That's why sometimes I sound lukewarm about the wines, trying to give a dispassionate description of the facts sans hype...perhaps overcompensating sometimes. With Zinfandel futures, there has usually been plenty available, so limits have been unnecessary. On the other hand, bottled wines in small production are more difficult to distribute and still have everyone happy.

Even the rarer wines are priced to give value relative to the market, and still allow me to do what is best for the wines through equipment, barrel choices, and compensating growers. With 'new' wines for us, like the Pinot Noirs, we conduct many comparative blind tastings including some very famous and expensive benchmark wines, to evaluate where that point lies. Last Spring's 'Big Brother' and 'Little Sister' have greatly exceeded my earlier estimation through this process, and has even turned a couple of critics into advocates (no names this time, they know who they are).

The 2001 growing season so far: Early budbreak followed by spring frosts in some sites and uneven weather at bloom have made for an interesting season. The Helfer Vineyard was the only one with any significant frost damage, which will serve to merely lessen the crop. I expect the Helfers will sort through each cluster, discarding the unripe, later-developed ones without mercy.

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As I write this, we have just about ended an unusually long hot spell without fog. It sounds a lot like 1981, when everything came in early...and all at once. The late varieties are encouraged by the warmer nights, and the early varieties are relatively slowed by the uncomfortably hot days. At the winery I worked at during the summer of 1981, we were completely finished with harvest before I had to return to U.C Davis for fall classes. I recall doing iron and concrete work on their new crush area during that hot summer. Boots, gloves sunglasses, water and hats. Little more. At harvest, I remember harvesting Gewurztraminer and Cabernet Sauvignon from adjacent blocks on consecutive days (and nights), and working my first 36-hour shift...along with a couple of 24's that week. I also remember falling asleep in the bathtub. Never more. We have learned a lot about viticultural suitability as well as sustainable work conditions in the subsequent 20 years.

A dry spring and hot, dry summer, will be hard on the less established vines in the unirrigated old Zinfandel vineyard. Fortunately, low crop levels will allow most vines to do the job without 'crashing.' Moderate, measured irrigation in small increments will help mature vines get through season gracefully. The 8 year old Cabernet vines have shallower root systems, and will enjoy an occasional sip too.

The dry Winter and Spring have been an asset to some vineyards, though. Some blocks of older coastal vineyards (Hirsch) have come back quite well from root drowning rains in the last couple of Springs. Younger vines in Schwartz's coastal vineyard show awesome promise based on a tiny quantity wine made in 2000. Bliss' vineyard is near the Laguna, but reflects tremendous planning.