

## SLOW WINE FOR SLOW FOOD

This time of year, it seems that many small wineries offer their 'lesser' wines, holding back their more exciting small lots for later in the year. Characteristically out of sync, last fall I decided to hold some of our smaller, interesting reserve lots from 2001 even longer and release them at this time. We tend to handle our wines sparingly, aging them a little longer in barrel than most producers. We also find a real reward with some additional time in bottle. So, while our bottling and release schedule may be inconsistent with many other wineries, we find this consistent with what our wines want. Some of life's pleasures, including food and wine, are best undertaken and enjoyed at a slow pace...don't you think?

The exception: The Zinfandels have always been released in April, yet as our winemaking evolves, we scarcely have time to bottle and label the wine by April. So, while this is inconsistent with "the wines' schedules" and allows little time for bottle development, we still release futures purchases and offer the newly-bottled Zins for sale to our mailing list in the spring. We understand you are cellaring these new Zinfandels yourself and you are also the most qualified to decide when the wine is ready according to your own taste. We wait to release most wines to restaurants and wine shops after additional bottle age because most are not able to do this themselves. That is why you will often see some offered here first.

You are invited to our annual spring **open house on the weekend of April 3 and 4, and also Friday and Saturday April 9 & 10, 2004 from 10AM to 5 PM**. We will be closed Easter Sunday. Everything listed here will be open for tasting, whether already sold out or not. You may pick up any wines ordered now or from last August's Zinfandel futures offering at this event or we will schedule them for shipment.

**2002 Scherrer Vineyard 'Old & Mature Vines' Zinfandel:** While I continue to be impressed by the concentration and slow, deliberate development of the 2001 OMV Zinfandel, I am also pleased by both the structure and balance of the 2002 as well as the more sprightly fruit it possesses. The 2002 promises to age quite well, but will readily offer up its youthful charms. The flavors are quite similar to our 1995 Zinfandel, centered on ripe, but not jammy fruit, with red berries and blueberry notes. Due to the more 'traditional Burgundian' techniques we have gravitated toward over the years, there is also a welcome, intriguing, earthy, toastiness in the background as a bonus. 1220 cases produced. **Release price: \$28 per bottle, 24 bottle limit. Half bottles (\$15) and magnums (\$58) also available.**

**2002 Scherrer Vineyard 'Shale Terrace' Zinfandel:** Due to a slightly larger yield (10%) we made slightly more of this wine than the past few vintages. After the futures offering, we also decided to allocate only enough of this for existing 'Shale' restaurant accounts, so we actually have a little to sell at this time. Its high-toned aromatics of stone fruits, dried herbs and its 'minerality' define and separate it from the OMV bottling. 230 cases produced. **Release price: \$24 per bottle, 6 bottle limit.**

**2002 Vin Gris:** Bottled mid-May last year, released in late summer, this wine has now entered its prime

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drinking period and is worth mentioning here. I am tickled by the surge of interest in this type of wine, as well as the reviews this humble pink wine has gotten: Rod Smith, in the L.A. Times 7/2/2003 wrote: "Scherrer [2002] Vin Gris - a real wine, with structure, complexity and elegance-has quietly taken its place with the world's finest rosés." This versatile bone-dry rosé of Pinot Noir and Zinfandel (and a little Pinotage) can be enjoyed on its own on a warm afternoon, or used quite well with seafood or pastas and pizza (foods with tomatoes, olive oil, garlic and salt)...even in winter. 280 cases were produced. **\$14 per bottle, 24 bottle limit.**

**2002 Scherrer Vineyard Chardonnay:** We have worked over the past seven vintages to refine our expression of the minerality, complexity and finesse that this Alexander Valley benchland Chardonnay site possesses. [Imagine the 'fab five' taking on winemaking. Well...maybe not] This endeavor is like a tightrope walk. On one end of the rope, there is fruit and minerality. On the other end is rich mouthfeel and continuity. There is the danger of falling into coarseness and heaviness and there is no net. To make it across the rope, we begin with very gentle whole-cluster pressing, then integrate hands-on techniques to navigate this fine line. This vintage is our most successful to date. 290 cases were produced. **Release price: \$25 per bottle, 24 bottle limit. Half bottles also available (\$13)**

**2001 Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon:** This wine is proof of the exceptional quality of the 2001 vintage for Cabernet Sauvignon in the area. It is 100% varietal, from a portion of the Scherrer vineyard illustrating the concentration and focus of this region in a great vintage. This is definitely a serious wine. It has beautiful perfumed varietal aromatics closely related to the Scherrer Vineyard bottling, yet it's still different. Its beacon-like balance didn't harmonize with the Scherrer vineyard designate (still waiting to be bottled, even after 29 months). Stuart Piggot, a well-known wine journalist from Europe recently visited and told me that he thinks most Napa Cabernet producers he has visited would love to have even two barrels of this wine as a reserve lot and to charge significantly more. Cab lovers take note: this is not to be missed. 220 cases produced **Release price: \$32 per bottle, 12 bottle limit.**

**2001 Fort Ross Vineyard Reserve Chardonnay:** I have always wanted to make a Chardonnay in this style, but never seized the opportunity before. During its first year in barrel, I was impressed with the harmony between a combination of two different new barrels of the 2001 Fort Ross Chardonnay. When the time came to rack the vineyard designate to tank, I decided to satisfy a longtime curiosity by blending wine from these two new barrels into an older barrel for further sur-lie aging where yeast autolysis and further harmonization could occur. This wine is incredibly thick and unctuous, and nearly a meal in itself. Not nearly a food wine, this wine is nearly a food. 21 cases produced **Release price: \$35 per bottle, 4 bottle limit, orders filled until wine is gone.**

**2001 Fort Ross Vineyard Reserve Pinot Noir:** Last fall's release from this vineyard was from the more

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‘polite’ Dijon clones. This reserve wine is from Pinot Noir selections that have been grown in California for many decades and seem to have a more wild, unrefined side to them [now *there*’s a job for the ‘fab five’] that demanded more time in barrel and in bottle. Darker fruits, exotic iodine notes (like what you get from the coastal breezes when the surf is up?), perfumes in the upper register, woody, earthy notes and bass tones complete this lusty show for the senses. I think it will age and develop for quite some time. Its wildness will be tamed by decanting during its early years, allowing it to ‘open up’ and submit. 110 cases produced **Release price: \$42 per bottle, 8 bottle limit.**

**Coping with limited winery space:** Those who have visited the winery over the past handful of years have seen our open floorspace dwindle to a bare minimum at times. Last summer we located a bonded cellar nearby to store some of our wine barrels while they are aging. Later, we bring them back for final racking and bottling. While this has taken a huge load off our floorspace, the tradeoff has been more scheduling of trucks, dodging rainstorms with the electric forklift and other additional expenses. Someday it would be nice to have everything under one roof, but for now we will all enjoy a bit more elbow room for our open houses despite our increased production from the previous two years.

**The recent 2003 vintage:** As of more of the Fort Ross Vineyard comes into production, we are no longer able to vinify *all* their grapes as before. So, in 2003 we only received a small portion from some of the best blocks. Also, because of a lighter than usual crop in most of the other vineyards we work with, we made less wine in 2003 than the previous two vintages. Therefore, we had the luxury of indulging in more experimentation than ever before. Once again, the weather at harvest served up a couple of heat-wave related challenges for certain varieties and vineyards, but we were ready for these minor challenges. In one case, we called in a big favor and had a crew brought in all the way from Lodi to pick a block of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir that would not have survived another hot day. This kind of cooperation and flexibility is what helps make consistently superior wine vintage to vintage.

Also, for the first time, we were able to vinify separate lots of Cabernet Sauvignon from my dad’s vineyard that were planted on different rootstocks about a decade ago. The plan is to see how rootstock affects wine personality at this site. Additionally, we also separately vinified different Pinot Noir clonal/rootstock combinations from the Bliss vineyard. And that’s not all. I’m quite excited by the potential of all this, although it will be some time before we see the results in bottle.

When I talk with winemakers employed by large companies, I am reminded how fortunate I am to be self-employed and able to exercise relative creative freedom despite whatever headaches come with the territory. This is only possible due to your support. Thank you.

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**Expanding Horizons:** As many of you know, we’ve been working hard over the last 5 years to increase our production so we could have enough wine to expand outside of California. Unlike many small wineries, we have always believed in both supporting restaurants and service –oriented wine shops while maintaining relationships with people via direct sales. We are happy to announce that we have been able to expand our wholesale distribution to the following states: Oregon, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Texas, Ohio, Kentucky, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and recently Florida. So if your favorite restaurant or wine shop doesn’t currently carry our wine, please ask them to seek it out.

**Directions:** Below is a map of the area local to the winery. It assumes you have navigated as far as Sebastopol or Santa Rosa. This map is not to scale. **The winery address is 4940 Ross Road, Sebastopol.** If you get lost, the telephone number at the building itself is (707) 824-1933.

Please drive slowly down the driveway. Children (including our own) will be playing nearby. There will be signs to direct you to parking spaces on the east and around to west of the building.

