

### **It's all a matter of timing**

Be it agriculture, baseball, music, marketing, comedy, or winemaking, it's all a matter of timing. When you: plant your crop, swing the bat, set the tempo/attack the note, roll out the product, deliver the punch-line, or pick/punch-down/press, it's all about the timing. No vintage illustrates this concept better than 2004. An early budbreak and unusually warm March weather put everything well ahead of the usual schedule. The ensuing months saw beautifully moderate to cool conditions that promised great things if it would continue.

Unfortunately, there was a sudden long, hot, dry period during late August lasting through mid September, just as the grapes were trying to finish ripening. Because the vines were not accustomed to very high temperatures, they did not handle this well. We saw shriveling even in under-ripe grape clusters throughout Sonoma County and across all varieties. This made for difficult winemaking. We were fortunate to have good cooperation with the growers we work with and were able to wait until the last reasonable moment to harvest, before shriveling became a significant problem, quickly snatching the grapes out to the vineyards in the early morning. While some of the more exposed clusters succumbed to the solar punishment and became unusable, this patient attitude allowed the more protected, but less ripe grapes finish their ripening. With rigorous triage removing the over ripe clusters at the vineyards and at our sorting table at the winery, we were able to make the very best of a challenging situation. [The early ripening Scherrer Vineyard Chardonnay was the notable exception being fully ripe and harvested before the unwelcome heat arrived.]

Now that we occupy the entire building, combined with the fact that there was a scarce crop even before triage, there was plenty of space and consequently more time to devote to creative, sensitive winemaking and less on forklift shuffling. I have never experienced a more satisfying, yet challenging harvest than this one. There was time to really think about each wine, and make well-thought-out decisions often departing from our normal routine. Right now, the Syrah is still in the field, but everything else is in barrel so they are easier to assess. Of the wines in hand, I am thrilled by their overall quality and find it hard to believe they are all so beautiful despite what I thought the weather would cause. Another one for the memory banks...

We will have another **November Open House** Friday the 19<sup>th</sup>, Saturday the 20<sup>th</sup>, and Sunday the 21<sup>st</sup> from 10 to 5 at the winery located at 4940 Ross Road, Sebastopol (707) 824-1933. You will be able to taste the new releases (below) as well as a selection of older library wines, some of which will also be for sale.

### **NEW RELEASES**

**2002 Helfer Vineyard Chardonnay:** Beginning with the 1999 vintage, I began to understand how this vineyard's Chardonnay needs several years in bottle to begin to reach its potential. I am also learning to give it more than 12 months in barrel as well. It is more like a white Burgundy than a California Chardonnay, often fooling experienced tasters. The vineyard is so well suited for this variety that the Helfers have grafted over most of their Pinot Noir to a selection of Chardonnay budwood that they got from Kistler vineyards, their neighbor across Vine Hill Road. This vintage is most like the generous 2000 except that there were only two barrels, one new and one old. 45 cases produced. \$35 per 750 mL bottle. Limit 4.

**2002 Fort Ross Vineyard Chardonnay:** This is our second and final bottling of vineyard designate Chardonnay from this coastal vineyard. It usually ripens just as most of the red wines fermenting in tank are ready to be pressed [and the decision on the timing of pressing the reds is of paramount importance] and threatened to interfere with our primary focus at a critical time. It was not an easy decision to stop working with this Chardonnay, but a necessary one. This wine is extremely generous and complex, somewhere

### **It's all a matter of timing**

between the 2001 vineyard designate and the small 2001 reserve bottling shown last Spring. It should age and develop well for quite a number of years. 400 cases produced. \$28 per 750 mL, \$15 per 375 mL.

**2002 Fort Ross Vineyard Pinot Noir:** This is what Pinot Noir on the Sonoma Coast is about. It has more structure and focus than the more open and generous Russian River Valley Pinot Noirs that we released last August. Sassafras and red fruits come out of the glass hours after being poured, indicating a long life ahead. This wine is the graceful, balanced, yet perfectly conditioned gymnast. There will be another bottling released next year called 'High Slopes' which is the most dense, nearly impenetrable part of the vineyard. 280 cases produced. \$38 per 750 mL, \$20 per 375 mL. Limit 12

**2001 Scherrer Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon:** This is what I consider the finest part of Dad's vineyard that is unique to the site. If you liked the 2001 Alexander Valley bottling released earlier this year, you will love this wine. It has the structure and density of fruit to age a very long time and the complexity to tickle your imagination as well as satisfy one's hedonistic urges. Unmistakable, classic Cabernet Sauvignon with friendly texture to make it reasonably approachable in its youth. 440 cases produced. \$42 per 750 mL, \$23 per 375 mL, \$86 per 1.5 L.

**2002 Bliss Vineyard Syrah:** We first met Don and Dianne Bliss at our first barrel tasting in 1992. Don was taken prisoner by our Zinfandel that day, and has generously offered support and assistance in many ways since that day. Lately, he has been an essential part of our operation, and a welcome intelligent mind to bounce winemaking and grape growing ideas around with. When the Bliss' planted their Pinot Noir vineyard several years ago, we agreed that if they were bold enough to plant a small amount of Syrah in their "barely warm enough for Syrah" site, we would be bold enough to make the wine from it each year, rain or shine.

More like a Northern Rhone than an Australian Shiraz, this has white pepper, blueberry perfumes, notes of smoked meats and a firm Pinot Noir lovers' mouthfeel. Do not buy this wine if you prefer Australian wine to Côte Rôtie. This wine needs and wants little or no new oak. It is complete on its own. We are so encouraged by the first two vintages that the Bliss' are planning to convert some of their adjacent Pinot Noir to Syrah this next season. 34 cases produced. \$35 per 750 mL. Limit 4

**Thinning out the library:** Every year at this time, we take a fresh look at what we have held back for our library and retrospective tastings. We also like to pull out the magnums at this time, since the holidays are such a great time for the large format bottles as well as older gems. The following list may include items where there are only one or two of these available, and they will be sold on a first come, first served basis.

**Other events:** We will be participating in a new Pinot Noir event called "Pinot on the River" held at the Retreat Resort and Spa in Guerneville, CA, October 29 thru 31, 2004. For information, call 866-737-3529 or visit [www.pinotfestival.com](http://www.pinotfestival.com). Next year, we will be at "World of Pinot Noir" held in early March at the Cliffs Resort in Pismo Beach, CA ([www.worldofpinotnoir.com](http://www.worldofpinotnoir.com)) as well as the Hospices of Sonoma Pinot Noir Charity Auction late held in late April ([www.hospiceofsonoma.org](http://www.hospiceofsonoma.org)).

Thanks for your continued support. It allows us to do what we love to do.

### It's all a matter of timing

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. **The new entrance is around the back on the west side of the building.** Parking on the gravel side will now be closer to the entrance, so don't hesitate to drive clockwise around to the other side of the building.

