

Why winemaking is like parenting

There is something that we are beginning to realize at this stage of our lives. It is that winemaking, like parenting, is an endeavor that requires patience, resources, patience, sensibility, patience, responsiveness, patience, and most of all, patience. The very creation of a family, like the planting phase of a vineyard can be quite fulfilling and is often looked at as an end in itself. In fact, there are businesses solely devoted to this phase of both endeavors. However, for those that continue, then comes the training phase which is inextricably connected to protecting one's rapidly growing charges from pests and harmful conditions. These training and establishment phases can seem to take forever, and can, at times, be quite unrewarding. Time, money, and effort can all seem to go into some kind of mini 'black hole' with absolutely no reward.

Then as the first crops come in from the vines, and in seeing the developing personalities of the two-legged crops, we begin to realize that there is indeed light at the end of the tunnel. I suggest that vinification of the first grape crops could be thought of as dealing with the dreaded 'teenage years.' Only after the wines have been blended and are still in barrel do we see that there is hope once again for a favorable outcome, just as many parents find as their children reach young adulthood. Bottling is the 'letting-go' part. And finally, after months and/or years in the cellar we may fully reflect upon, enjoy and learn from the entire experience.

Unlike parenting, where one is not normally able to see dozens of these cycles begin and end before beginning another, winemaking is a process that offers the opportunity for cause-and-effect to be better understood. It allows for it, but does not guarantee that true understanding will ever be achieved. Wines, like humans are all individual, staggeringly complex things. The mystery is part of the enjoyment.

We are pleased to announce the Scherrer Winery fall releases and 2005 Zinfandel futures offering at our annual **barrel tasting, August 4, 5 and 6 from 10 to 5** at the production facility, **4940 Ross Road, Sebastopol (707-824-1933)**. There is a map hidden on our website: www.scherrerwinery.com/map 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.' The least crowded times to come should be on Friday, and early in the day on Sunday. If you expect to take any bottles of our released wines home with you from the open house, 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.

FUTURES

2005 Old & Mature Vines Zinfandel futures: Coming on the heels of two vintages with heat-related challenges, it is understandable why such a cool, leisurely vintage has been hyped so much. The long, cool growing season, punctuated with a long cool period right before the beginning of harvest really tested our patience. Fortunately, the payoff was huge. It is sufficient to say that in 15 vintages of making Zinfandel, I do not recall having more seductively fruited young Zinfandels that also possess adult-style structure. Generously fruited with the typical aromas of blue, red and black berries, as well as cassis flavors meld into a long and persistent finish. This is a very fine vintage for Zinfandel, seductively fruited with remarkable depth which could easily become my favorite OMV bottling...ever. About 870 cases to be produced. *Estimated retail at release: \$30 per bottle. Futures price: \$235 per case. Futures released April 2007*

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2005 Shale Terrace Zinfandel futures: Typical stone fruit, bramble berries and supple tannins with a nice lift at the end are counterbalanced by a comfortable 'grounding to earth'. Because of the limited production, this is offered 'first crack' to those who bought Shale Terrace in the past, but that should not stop you from 'wishing' for some on the order form. We find that there is usually some available after the 'first crack' deadline. About 200 cases to be produced. *Estimated retail at release: \$26 per bottle. Futures price: \$205 per case. Futures released April 2007*

FALL RELEASES

2004 Sonoma County Pinot Noir: Despite the very long, hot, dry spell experienced right at harvest, we were careful to harvest the Pinot Noir before it became 'cooked' or 'raisined.' Fortunately, we had previously made sure that the vines were not leaf-plucked to the point of fully exposing these delicate grapes in case of a late season heat spike, which we normally get to some minor degree. At the time, we did not know how critical this choice would be. Careful sorting at the destemmer was still needed and long, gentle extraction during fermentation gave us some graceful Pinot Noir which shows no trace of the problems that many late-harvesters and heavy extractors have complained of. This bottling is from Russian River Valley lots that spoke more of the county in general rather than any specific appellation.

It has a color similar to the 2003 Russian River Valley PN. There are sesame and savory notes similar to the 2002 'Laguna' Pinot Noir but there is also a red-fruited strawberry/rhubarb theme as well. Combined as such, these give the impression of a fruit tart. Mouth-watering acidity reinforces this impression but then steps aside just enough to reveal its moderately thick texture. Then, coming full-circle, the red-fruits and mild earthiness/savory re-emerge on the finish with a nice touch of spiciness. It really invites another glass. 730 cases produced *\$30 per bottle. Half bottles \$16.*

2004 Scherrer Vineyard Chardonnay: I have been leaning toward extending barrel ageing beyond 12 months for this vineyard in recent vintages. While it delays both bottling and release of the wine, it also seems to round out the wine with good things (like mannoprotiens) 'leaking out' of the spent yeast in the barrel. This process appears to take much of what the yeast took out of the grapes and return it back to the wine adding more layers to the aromas, flavors and increasing texture. The young Fort Ross Vineyard Chardonnays seemed to have a signature tangerine note. It is starfruit for the Helpers, and lime for the Scherrers. Interestingly, these kinds of youthful notes are preserved well with longer barrel time while the bubble-gum 'baby-fat' is not. Due to the relatively early harvest date at the Scherrer Vineyard, this was harvested before the famous 2004 heat spell, so it was fermenting merrily inside our cool cellar with all its nuances intact.

The nose is lightly perfumed, with a mild Riesling-esque hint, that typical lime thing, rain on freshly tilled soil, and even a slight trace of pineapple. On the mouth, it enters bright, full, and clean, showing a very slight toastiness that supports adult-styled dryness, minerality and good mouth-watering acidity finally bringing us back to that trace of lime. As the initial duo of minerality and acidity lift, a full-texture and oiliness come and go in a slow wave. I think this wine hits a sweet spot between ballerina and belly-dancer. 190 cases produced. *\$25per bottle. Half bottles \$13. Magnums \$52.*

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2003 Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon: This is 100% Scherrer vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon that speaks more of the *region* than the *specific site*. Fortunately, this appears to be a vintage that will 'open up' a bit sooner than the previous two vintages. I am very pleased with both 2003 Cabs as well as the Cabernet 'Vin Rouge' offered right after bottling last Spring. The vineyard designate will be released in November.

This 2003 Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon has inviting initial aromas of cassis, sweet vanilla and freshly tilled loam. On the mouth, ample, round, but firmly-centered tannins are balanced by moderately soft acidity. Black fruits are the first flavors spiced up with hints of leather, then back to cassis and fresh loam toward the finish finally leaving a red fruit tone. In other words, it has all the things I value in CA Cabernet-based wines, along with an added bonus of a little red fruit pop at the very end. For those of us who eat red meat, this will truly shine with animals that say moo or baah. 220 cases produced. *\$35 per bottle. \$18.50 per half bottle.*

Press: We have tried to time any reviewers' access to our wines until the wines are released to wine shops and restaurants. Therefore we can only talk about reviews on recently released wines rather than wines 'new to you' in this mailer. A prime example is our 2003 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir released to you last November, and now just making it to restaurants. Burgundy specialist Allen Meadows, aka *Burghound* describes it in his most recent issue: 'A ripe and beautifully complex nose featuring spice, sweet dark berries and violets complements the rich, full, and textured flavors that possess excellent complexity and real character...90/2009+' Last year, our 2002 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir was his first domestic wine of the month and is still listed at his website non-subscribers' portion along with selected Burgundies.

Another example is the 2002 Old & Mature Vines Zin, which has been in circulation at restaurants only for several months now (offered as futures three years ago). *Gourmet* magazine's June, 2006 issue had a spread on balanced, food-friendly Zinfandels, stressing how hard they are to find. They picked our 2002 OMV among their top 5 recommended wines featured (of 125 tasted) giving a similar nod to the now sold out 2001 OMV. The 2002 OMV also got an 'insider's favorites' mention in the April 2006 Food & Wine. Stephen Tanzer's *International Wine Newsletter* gave this a '90' rating some months previously. [OK, I'll stop it.]

The 2003 OMV Zin is beginning to hit its stride, as many of you have reported recently. This sounds about right on schedule as I often advocate an additional year in bottle after futures release before getting serious about drinking our Zinfandels. However if you truly prefer them younger or older you should follow your own palate. Generally, restaurants and wine shops begin to see this wine after 18 months or so in bottle. I think the 2002 Cabs still need more time to reach their stride, but the material is certainly all there. After a day or two open, they better show what they have to offer down the road. The 2001 Scherrer Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, now in restaurants received a 93-point rating from *The Wine Enthusiast* last November. So, while some of our wines are still doing their studies, others ahead of them are graduating with honors. [I guess I didn't stop it after all.]

The fall releases will be available for pick up at the August open house. If you schedule pick-up for your wine and are not able to make it we will make arrangements to ship the wine to you and the shipping costs will be added to your invoice. Shipments of the fall and futures releases will vary depending on when the weather in your area will be kinder to the wine. If you are anxious to get your fall wine sooner, I suggest

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upgrading to Fed-Ex second day or overnight to minimize the wine's risk of extreme temperature exposure. **Intentional experiment:** To illustrate our concerns over conditions experienced by wine shipments, I recently performed a temperature study. Wine bottles filled with water were packed in typical Styrofoam 12 pack and left in our car on a warm day (85°F) with partially-open windows used to simulate conditions of transport by UPS (I measured 93°F in the truck that afternoon while a FedEx van was 86°F). In two hours time, the water warmed from 55°F to 63°F. In three hours it rose to 66°F, about the time it would take to get to their warehouse. These bottles of water only cooled to 64°F overnight when brought back into our cool cellar. I doubt the carriers' warehouses are refrigerated like our cellar is. Imagining another day in a transfer truck between cities and those bottles could warm to the mid-80's. Add an additional half day in a delivery truck to the final destination could bring it even higher. The point here is that trying to save a few dollars by allowing an extra day or two of transportation can expose the wine to significantly high temperatures. Outside of the CA coast, second day transport is worth the money, especially when the weather becomes volatile.

Unintended experiment: Due to a comedy of human errors, a case of 2004 Zinfandel futures was shipped to Texas last April as undeliverable. It was ultimately returned to us after a little over a week on the road. While the bottles had not warmed during this trip to the point of leaking [we tend to fill on the high side anyway], I was interested in seeing the effect on the wine. So far, in a blind tasting, the traveled bottles have slightly muted aromas and less full texture than bottles stored at the winery. Time will tell if things will get worse or better for these well-traveled bottles. Anyway, we go to a lot of expense and trouble to give the wine proper conditions all thru its production and initial bottle aging. It would be a shame to undo it all on its way to you.

More on The Direct Shipping Circus: Despite what the press often reported due to last year's U.S. Supreme Court ruling, we still cannot automatically ship to all locations. Many states are only just now implementing permit systems to conform with the Federal ruling. The Wine Institute's very useful website has a current state of affairs: <http://www.wineinstitute.org/shipwine/index.htm> Also, we have not licensed everywhere that might be open to direct shipping now. For several States, there can be huge annual licensing fees as well as label registration fees for each individual bottling.

The November 'Library' open house has been such a hit that we plan to do it regularly. The 2003 Scherrer Cabernet Sauvignon, 2004 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, 2004 Helfer Chardonnay, etc. will be offered for the first time. Plus, we will do our yearly reassessment of our library and offer a few bottles of selected older vintages as well. Oh, yes and magnums, too.

The 2006 growing season so far: Due to seemingly incessant cold, wet weather early in the season bloom-time was a few weeks later than recent memory, but not so late as to be too worrisome. Our reasonably good weather when bloom-time arrived should allow plenty of choices for which clusters to leave on the vines. I typically love these later vintages so long as they are relatively dry.

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

