

About blending and balance

People have talked about balancing work and play for generations. ‘All work and no play make Johnny a dull boy’ so it goes. It is extremely difficult to navigate that type of balance in the wine grape growing/winemaking business. It takes so much effort to actually make something happen in vineyards and inside wineries, plus following through in either theatre requires patience, tenacity and high tolerance to repetition in most tasks. Fortunately, there is a seasonality to this business which should allow some slow time if one is either growing grapes or only making wine. Those that are doing both first-hand are tethered to their work very closely, with little time to themselves.

I talk about balance [in wine] a lot. My favorite definition is that *opposing forces are present in equivalent prominence*. I consider the fundamental axis of balance in wine as ‘angles and rounds.’ ‘Angles’ are the harsh, pointy things like acidity and tannins. ‘Rounds’ are the softer, plush, sweet and/or textural parts such as Glycerol (a polyol formed in proportion to alcohol) and sugar if present in the wine style [not mine, but many like German Riesling appropriately rely upon this]. One first gets that foundation balanced, and then builds upon it looking at other subordinate axes of balance such as Fruit vs Non-fruit. Then one goes on to the next levels where each side of that balancing act, types of fruit (red/lighter vs. black/darker) and types of non-fruit (barrel vs. savory/earthy). Just as the head of a company might have the ability to assemble a committee of balanced personalities and skillsets to run a business, so can the winemaker with blending for balance. To envision and then blend appropriate personalities that balance each other’s strengths is an art form that is common to multiple arenas.

This offering includes great examples as there is a high degree of blending done to produce most of these wines. The Old & Mature Vines Zinfandel is a careful blend of different parts of my Dad’s vineyard. Grenache and Syrah are blended for both our Rosé and for the Huntsman Red. Even single vineyard-single block-single fermentation tank wines like the Shale Terrace Zinfandel and King Family Vineyard Pinot Noir are blends of different types of new and old barrels. The Platt Vineyard Pinot Noir is a blend of different clones on a small site as well as a blend of different kinds of new and old barrels that bring out different facets of the material. Of course, Zinfandoodle is a wider kind of blend that crosses vintages for balance, harmony and deliciousness. So, just as I try to balance work and play, I try to blend ‘need to’ with ‘want to’ just like blending ‘angles and rounds’ according to what is on hand at the time.

Open House

We will have this large and diverse set of new releases to show at the April Open House. The dates are: **April 6-8, and April 13-15 from 10 am to 5 pm each day**. Everything listed below will be open for tasting, whether already sold out or not. You may pick up any wines ordered now or from last August’s 2016 Zinfandel futures offering at this event or we will schedule them for shipment.

New Releases

2016 Scherrer Vineyard 'Old & Mature Vines' Zinfandel

I racked and created a faithful blend of this to show what was to come at the August open house barrel tasting. However, the majority of the barrels were left alone on their initial lees right up until bottling. I have found that with other varieties like Pinot Noir, Syrah, Grenache, Chardonnay and even Cabernet Sauvignon, this technique has been a subtly positive step toward my end of preserving aging potential and layering both texture and perfumes upon earthy nuances.

What sets our OMV apart from most Zinfandels is that it is layered and subtly nuanced. It is not primarily a fruit-driven wine with obvious one or two types of flavor-all front-loaded with little carrying capacity. What's going on with Zinfandel? This variety ripens unevenly on each cluster. It is a varietal characteristic that vexes or amuses those of us who work with it. I embrace this characteristic, choosing to harvest after enough of the berries are *really* ripe and have great generosity, yet making sure that there are enough of the less developed population on each cluster as well. Why? These less-developed berries bring redder fruit characters, more acidity, and of critical importance: oxygen scavenging appetite. Fortunately, Zinfandel's variably ripened berries play nicely together (unlike most other vinifera varieties that may become muddled or unfocused due to the variable ripened components). Where we differ, from many houses, is that we are looking to layer in complexity from *within the variety* and site rather than by *including different varieties* to achieve a similar end. What I'm looking for is a wine that transcends *traditional* varietal expectations while working within *natural* varietal boundaries. What a paradox!

Now that we have just blended and bottled it, I am impressed with the mouthfeel and length of the boysenberry/bramble fruit and mildly earthy/meaty nuances. As essentially 100% varietal Zinfandel, this has darker, more earthy tones which can be best explained by material and approach. There is a spiciness that runs just below the surface that emerges gently on the finish, drawing out everything that came before. Still a bright, salivary-eliciting wine, it has substantial presence that I attribute to the extra time as 'a whole package' after putting to barrel in the fall. 578 3/4 cases produced. \$38 per bottle. Half bottles (\$21) and Magnums (\$80) also available.

2016 Scherrer Vineyard 'Shale Terrace' Zinfandel

As I write this after bottling day, the 2016 as a sleek shape and is unusually restrained, yet still a textural expression of Zinfandel. The typical stone-fruit thing (nectarine or Santa Rosa plum skin), some subtle spice to support the stone fruits and appropriate structure to keep everything reined in are all there. I think it is unlikely if not impossible to make this kind of wine if the material is not naturally headed in that direction. I seem to always call this the Zin that wants to dress up as Pinot Noir - and it looks really, really good that way. It has a very cleansing, mouth-watering finish and makes one want to have some (more) food. This is probably an inconsistent wine for those of us who want to lose a few pounds because we will want to eat more while at the table until the bottle is empty. 170 cases produced. I wish we could make a lot more of this unique wine. We choose not to sell everything through futures and so there is a little available to those who weren't able to secure the futures. \$38 per bottle.

2017 Dry Rosé, Sonoma County

As a pink wine, Syrah and Grenache are more similar than they are when vinified as red wines. Here, they are James Taylor and Carly Simon in harmony, their vocal range and overtones being rather similar. The grape varieties for this wine divide to conquer. The Syrah provides more plummy tones and texture while

the Grenache brings acidic focus and soaring high perfume in the places Syrah does not go naturally. Yet the majority of tones are quite similar and they blend perfectly. This wine is essentially a carbon-copy of the past two vintages, which I consider to be *precisely* in the pocket of my intentions.

Mildly perfumed, some red apple aroma, and a little Santa Rosa plum follows on the nose. In the mouth, a firm salivary response to the bright acidity results in awakening the palate (in case it was asleep.) As the wine wanes in the mouth the flavors re-emerge just to remind us that this is serious stuff. I find that with olives, pink seafood, salty stuff like potato chips or fatty things like sardines, this is the perfect pairing. Clean and lovely...while just bottled, this will be at its best late summer if you have enough to last that long.

I am often asked why we don't ramp up production as this type of wine has grown increasingly popular. My answer is that I want to produce one of the best domestic rosés and refinement is much preferred to exploitation. 410 cases produced. *\$24 per bottle.*

2014 Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon

At the Scherrer Vineyard, the Cabernet Sauvignon covers an area that transitions from higher to lower clay content in the soil. There are also two different rootstocks that cover both soil compositions with some degree of overlap. Frustratingly, they don't harmonize well in a blend and really speak differently as a result of their environments. So be it. This, our Alexander Valley bottling is primarily from the higher clay content on the rootstock 140 Ruggieri. This rootstock moderates vigor in the higher clay soil and offers more red fruits and acidity which I think speaks more clearly of the region in general rather than the specific site (which is why we don't vineyard designate this). After being told for decades this region *should* take a back seat to (any and all) Napa County fruit, it is nice to observe how our more food-friendly, approachable and age-worthy wines have gained respect. I've worked hands-on with this variety from Alexander Valley off and on since 1981 and with Dad's vineyard continuously since 1997. Food-friendliness is something that comes naturally to most Alexander Valley Cabs. They also age magnificently when the style respects that tendency. Whatever the reason, the speed both our Cabernet Sauvignons sell out now certainly reflect an increased interest in the area. It is a mixed blessing.

Plums & red fruit, fresh loam and appropriate tannin/acidic structure contain everything nicely. The bright acidity and red fruits make it a lively, energetic Cabernet Sauvignon. When a downhill skier leans backward, control and intensity are compromised (well, at least not in deep powder). This wine leans forward, carving gently graceful lines across the palate. It is still a baby that will reward moderate patience to allow its youthful enthusiasm to continue its temperance. Those less patient will enjoy its enthusiasm with richer food quite a bit. 140 cases produced. *\$44 per bottle*

Zinfandoodle v 14.5

When I first sat down to taste this 'seriously' for these tasting notes, I imagined 'Maria' in West Side Story singing 'I'm pretty, oh so pretty...'. The wine shows a very pretty side of Zinfandel which in this case was blended from two vintages. The song in the 1961 movie was a combination of Natalie Wood acting in front of the camera and Marni Nixon's amazing voice seamlessly dubbed in afterward. Blending is an art in many media.

This blended wine consists of 2014 and 2015 'extra' proportions of Scherrer Vineyard Zinfandel plus a touch of Grenache and Syrah has a refreshing stone fruit note and some fresh plum on the nose. Mouth-

watering and pert, this is an antidote to sweet, candied fruit examples of zinfandel at this price point – even those with a vintage date. The mission of Zinfandoodle is to simply be delicious [especially with food]. Mission accomplished. 550 cases produced. *\$22 per bottle*

2014 King Family Vineyard Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley

Typical dark fruits with a nice kick of red fruits and mild herbal spiciness is what you're in for here. The vintage experienced very low rainfall in the early winter which could push things more into the higher concentration, darker fruits and more substantial structural tannins. However, with the very warm spell that occurred right before harvesting this site, we chose to harvest on the earlier side tempering these traits just enough to yield a graceful, energetic wine that still has its typical generous signature. Only 50 cases produced. *\$48 per bottle.*

2014 Platt Vineyard Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast

Similar to the vintage conditions experienced at the King vineyard, this site also tended toward a more plush, deeper-toned presentation in 2014. Vintages 2007 and 2009 exhibited similar tendencies here as well. There are nuances of red beets, lightly smoked meats, red and blue fruits along with the normal perfumes this site exhibits of plum blossom, maraschino cherry, and fresh red, blue and black fruits. While it has still firm structure with surprising and welcome acidity, the nearly RRV-like plushness envelops its bones nicely at this time yet should develop very well in the long run as well.

Lew Platt, who envisioned, financed and supported this project had the means to do whatever he pretty much chose to do. Luckily for us, he invited us to become a ground-floor participant in his project, with the option of selecting whatever clones/selections we chose (within reason) for our allocated blocks. Tragically, he suddenly died weeks before he could even see or taste a ripe grape from this project.

I chose clones for my designated areas that performed well in warmer as well as cooler vintages that might be experienced at this coastal site. I am grateful for this opportunity and for my choices a decade and a half ago. It's good to be lucky. These choices were lucky and the results are good. While others own this site these days: Lew, this is for you, man. 230 cases produced. *\$70 per bottle, \$142 per magnum.*

2013 Huntsman Red

Expanding the metaphor for how well Syrah and Grenache blend as pink wine, imagine Country singers Johnny Cash and June Carter here as red wine forms of Syrah and Grenache. They have more differing personalities after fermentation on skins. While Syrah and Grenache are not considered as high-brow as varieties such as the operatic Pinot Noir in many circles, in combination the interplay and harmony are haunting, compelling and undeniably satisfying. Numerous vintages of Southern Rhone wines are proof of this. In difficult vintages, they bring complementary strengths where needed most by each other. In very favorable vintages, such as 2013 here, they build strength upon strength without overdoing it in any one spot. What a perfect varietal blend partnership!

In this Huntsman project I find that the relative proportions of these two varieties vary according to their prominence/volume, so to speak in order to be blended to a balance point. As a major player, Grenache brings that higher-frequency tone with its soaring perfumes. Syrah brings a darker, broodier textural side as well as its own brand of perfumes that fit with nice clarity among those supplied by Grenache. Strange as this sounds, this wine makes me think of a rich Pinot Noir: Just enough tannin to support things while allowing the texture and mid-palate red fruits to show thru along with hints of black and white pepper.

These parts wane just slowly enough to allow more of the inner-palate perfumes and red, then black fruits to show thru as a mini-cascade. Unlike Pinot Noir, though, this pairs nicely with tomato and garlic heavy foods, beef and heavier fare.

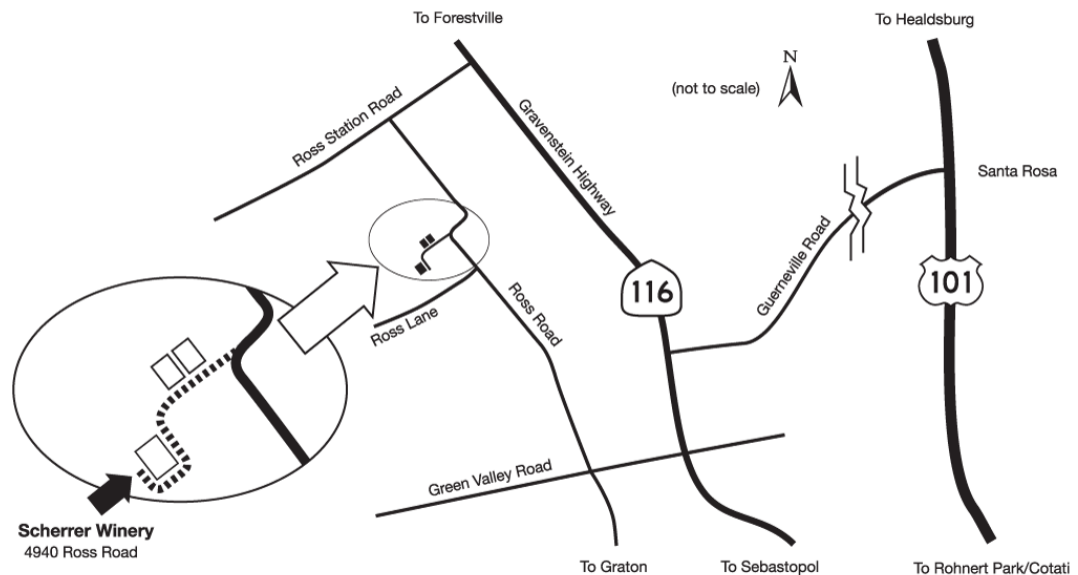
Here is a great example where blending two very different things become intertwined as a balanced, unified entity. 230 cases produced. \$34 per bottle.

Recent Releases

The 2012 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$48) has just recently been released to restaurants and wine shops. It shows a little more dark fruits and structure than the really lovely (sold out) 2011 vintage has been showing. The 2012 Big Brother is really getting into stride (\$55). The 2012 Platt Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$68) is sleek and shows its coastal structure: firmer tannin and more acidity than the Russian River Valley wines. The 2015 Helfer Chardonnay (\$50) has recently made a splash in the eyes of the Wine Spectator (94 pts), yet I find that the leaner, more acid-driven 2015 Scherrer Vineyard (\$40) is equally compelling from a different perspective. The currently seamless 2013 OMV Zinfandel (\$36) is enjoying a great run of early happiness and is very near the end of easy availability. The 2014 Sonoma County Pinot Noir (\$36) was recently first in its flight of a CA Grapevine Vine tasting (92 points). Despite any critical acclaim, it is your validation that matters most and keeps it happening here at our place. Thank you.

Directions

Below is a map of the area local to the winery. 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. The entrance and our gravel parking area are on the west side, so don't hesitate to drive clockwise around to the other side of the building.



Shipping Information

We will be happy to ship your order to any of the following states when weather is wine friendly.	Case: 12 x 750 mL 24 x 375 mL 6 x 1.5 L	Per bottle (750 mL equivalent)
<u>Pick up</u> is available during Winery Open House events or by appointment	NC	
<u>Golden State Overnight</u> to CA (recommended)	\$21/box	\$1.75
<u>Golden State 2-Day</u> to AZ, ID, NV, OR, WA and parts of NM	\$24/box	\$2
<u>Ground</u> to CA, AZ	\$30/box	\$2.5
<u>Ground</u> to CO, ID, OR, MT, NM, NV, WA or WY	\$36/box	\$3
<u>Ground</u> to AL, DC, FL, IA, IL, IN, GA, KS, LA, MA, MD, ME, MI, MN, MO, NC, ND, NE, NH, NJ, NY, OH, SC, TN, TX, VA or WI	\$48/box	\$4
<u>FedEx 2-day</u> to above states plus: HI, AK a little more	\$120/box	\$10
<u>Overnight</u> to any above state. HI, AK a little more	\$168/box	\$14

MAILING		SHIPPING	
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City, State, Zip Code		Street	
Daytime Phone		City, State, Zip Code	
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I am over 21, Date of Birth:		Shipping Notes	

New Releases	Price	Quantity	Amount
2017 Dry Rosé (Grenache & Syrah)	\$24 / bottle		
2016 Old & Mature Vines Zinfandel	\$38 / bottle		
	\$21 / half bottle		
	\$80 / magnum		
2016 Shale Terrace Zinfandel (limited)	\$38 / bottle		
2014 King Family Vineyard Pinot Noir	\$48 / bottle		
2014 Platt Vineyard Pinot Noir	\$70 / bottle		
2013 'Huntsman' Red Wine (Grenache & Syrah)	\$34 / bottle		
2014 Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon	\$44 / bottle		
Zinfandoodle v.14.5	\$22 / bottle		
Some Current Wines	Price	Quantity	Amount
2015 Helfer Vineyard Chardonnay	\$50 / bottle		
2012 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir	\$48 / bottle		
2012 Big Brother Pinot Noir	\$55 / bottle		
2012 Platt Vineyard Pinot Noir	\$68 / bottle		
2014 Sonoma County Pinot Noir	\$36 / bottle		
2013 Old & Mature Vines Zinfandel	\$36 / bottle		
Subtotal			
Discount on wine for total orders of 12 or more bottles		-10%	
Subtotal			
Sales Tax: Pick up 8.125% Shipping: AZ, CA, DC, FL, GA, ID, IL, IN, KS, LA, MD, ME, MI, NC, NH, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OH, PA, SC, TN, TX, VA, WA, WI, WY		%	
Choose <input type="checkbox"/> Pick up at Open House or <input type="checkbox"/> Shipping method and cost:			
Total			

Payment: Visa / MasterCard American Express Check

Card #	Expires:	Security Code:
Signature:		Date: