

Dodging Bullets

Ever since last fall when the fire burned right up to the barns at my parents' place, we have been on alert, adapting to new situations. COVID-19, business shutdowns and the resulting market shifts for wine made us find new ways to cope. Then Summer seemed to click right along without significant new business pivots needed. The growing conditions were quite favorable until August, when Nature seemed to turn off the natural air conditioning we normally rely upon here. Then mid-month, a strange weather system with dry lightning blew through Northern California igniting massive fires. The Walbridge fire began in the middle of a large, heavily timbered area just to the north of the winery and to the west of Windsor/Healdsburg. Initially, the reactive volatile smoke was kept high aloft by the same weather phenomenon that added to the lightning severity in the first place. Then winds shifted so the fire and smoke descended to ground level and headed instead toward the north.

Smoke exposure is very complicated. There are volatile and particulate/ash components that will vary depending on what is burning (structures, different types of vegetation) and whether it is smoldering vs. burning hot. Each have different effects upon people and plants. Evidently, it's the volatiles rather than particulates that are the main issue affecting the flavor of grapes when turned to wine. So, air quality indices which are highly connected to particulates/ash that bother people do not tell the plant smoke-reactive-volatile story very accurately. The age of the smoke volatiles is also critical to its reactivity and different volatile components have quite varied decay times that are dependent upon daylight and night-time conditions. Even chloride content from heavily marine-influenced air can play a factor in attenuating many of these volatile phenols as the minutes pass. Add to this, our varied topography in Sonoma County leads to highly variable conditions given different prevailing breezes and elevation. Even modest barriers such as rolling hills can prevent relatively static smoky air from leaking into the next little mini-valley. Like I said: It's complicated.

My family's vineyard in SE Alexander Valley sits on the bench of a wedge-shaped mountain to the east. So, when the smoky winds from Walbridge began to shift from N-S to SW-NE, the reactive volatiles in the air were not strongly drawn past that short stretch of Highway 128. My father said that has always been the pattern he's witnessed with agricultural burning of tree and vine prunings in the winter and spring when the winds shifted in a similar manner. By contrast, if the fires had been directly north or south of us, any relatively fresh, reactive smoke volatiles would have had a direct path over the vineyard. Glad to have dodged that bullet.

My experience with the 2008 Black Lightnin' bottling gave me more optimism that things would be OK for many sites. In 2008, the smoke was heavy in volatiles and particulates and sat in the Mendocino valleys and northern Sonoma Coast for several weeks. There really wasn't much experience with smoke-affected grapes in our area prior to this so most of us brought grapes in as we normally would. It was very clear that the 2008 Black Lightnin' was obviously

smoke affected by the second day in tank, even before fermentation began. I read up on the subject at the time and realized there were conflicting models of what would make the best wine possible under those conditions. After that harvest and conferring with several other wineries that had a significant portion of their grapes affected and tasting remediation trials, etc., I still did not see a clear path of ‘action’ that would erase the smoke effect without damaging the good things about the wine. So, I was determined to come up with my own model of how to navigate it. Fortunately, during the months of cogitation and further inquiry I discovered the wine was rather able to heal itself and make a pleasant wine, though it fell short of what it had been destined to be and was priced accordingly. Shortfall or not, we have had many, many requests for another vintage of this wine. So, I figured that anything much less affected than that in 2020, I could work with.

In the years following 2008, laboratory analysis for smoke taint ‘markers’ have been developed. As the Walbridge fire coincided with the onset of harvest and other fires, everyone was testing, and the labs were backed up beyond any point of obtaining useful data in time to make harvest decisions. So instead, I did small scale bucket fermentations as recommended by researchers and winemakers experienced with yearly bush fires. I inoculated them with a yeast that would more readily expose any ‘hidden/latent’ smoke effect so I could better assess if we were up against any significant problems. The results from these heartened me as they all came out ‘clean’ by sensory analysis at dryness.

While we lost the harvest from a couple of sites that the growers felt were too heavily exposed to volatiles, we went on pretty much as business as usual with other sites, cautiously optimistic. As I write this, I have just emptied the wine presses for the last time this year and all wine is in barrel. Tasting through the newly finished wines, I am quite heartened at the positive results so far and feel that we truly dodged quite a few bullets this year. It is theoretically possible for a small level of smoke effect to show in successive months after going to barrel. Yet as each week passes without issue, my optimism increases. And since yeast cell walls can adsorb some of these volatile phenols caused by smoke exposure and our wines will be on yeast lees for two winters and summers (which is atypical in our area), there is likely plenty chance to remain unaffected.

And if all of that weren’t bad enough, in the Napa/Sonoma/Lake county area, the Glass Fire started a few weeks later, causing vast destruction to wineries, vineyards, homes and lives. We were not directly threatened by that fire or smoke, as we were all harvested nearly 10 days before that fire started. However, looking at a map of areas burned in the past few years, there seems to be little area in the North Coast that hasn’t burned recently. We got lucky, and tragically many did not.

Open House canceled again.

COVID numbers in our county are still not allowing for any indoor gatherings and we will not be having our November Open House. Curbside pickup is always available, we’re here most days. Just call (707) 823-8980 or [email](mailto:info@scherrerwinery.com) and we’ll make sure one of us is here and will be happy to bring your wine out to your car. The winery address is 4940 Ross Road, Sebastopol, 95472.

Futures

2019 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir Futures

While we have offered futures on our Zinfandel since the 1991 vintage, last year we began offering futures on the other of our major-production wines: Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. We appreciate the delighted responses from people who had been asking for this for years and happy to add this to our program.

From the barrel, this is showing a nice bit of beets and earth at this early stage, there is also a hint of ginger. This youngster still needs about another 8 months in barrel to be done. More red fruit in the mouth than dark fruit it definitely reveals a peek at what the 2018 is showing at its own relatively early stage of development. Early on I thought this was an exciting vintage and still have that opinion today.

About 1050 cases will be produced. Estimated release price: \$50 per bottle. Futures price: \$360 per case (\$30/bottle). Full cases only. Offer available until December 31, 2020. Futures Release date November 2021, Retail Release date November 2022.

2018 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir Futures Release Notes

This description is for those who bought last year's Pinot futures. The rest will have to wait till next year's regular release. Dried flowers, Imperial plums (the kind we used to grow at the family vineyard in Alexander Valley-they were dried and made the most perfumed prunes I've ever tasted). Still very young but is showing fairly well at this early stage after being recently bottled. 1200 cases produced *\$50 per bottle at release in 2021*.

New Releases

New Release Sampler Pack

In our effort to bring the Open House tasting to you, we will be offering a special Sampler pack of one bottle of each of the following New Release wines (except the very limited Dry Rose' of Syrah) at 15% discount and free ground shipping. This offer is not on our regular public website. It is accessed only through [the link here](#) or the links provided on the email newsletter. You can also send in the attached order form or send us an email or give a call. 5 bottles, Special offer ~~\$255~~ \$217

2019 Dry Rose' of Syrah

I usually have an extra barrel or three of this above what is needed to perfect the usual spring blend of Grenache & Syrah. This year, there was only one 'extra' barrel, which I held through the summer and bottle later, just before harvest.

Roses and Santa Rosa plums on the nose. Good brightness due to a perfect thread of acidity that runs throughout the wine like a road map leading home. It is one of the most elegant versions of this we have made.

Since there is so little of this, we must limit each purchase to just 3 bottles per person for more people to have a chance to enjoy. Somehow, the varietal Rosé labels we had printed for this have disappeared over the summer. So just like the first time we did this, we are using the same label as the wine the spring release. Just understand that the black capsule always denotes our Syrah Rosé. Only 32 cases produced *\$22 per bottle. Limit 3.*

2018 Scherrer Vineyard Chardonnay

This wine juxtaposes my favorite parts of California barrel fermented Chardonnay and old-world restraint, acidity and lift. Left in barrel nearly 2 full years, the yeast continued to ‘give back’ to the wine in the form of texture, nuance of non-fruit elements, continuity and persistence.

Lemon curd, a tiny hint of lime, golden delicious apple with a wee dram of the smell of the first rain of the fall on the sidewalk. A mouthwatering entry and surprising viscosity for the acidity level and aromatic cues, the oak and lees have integrated into a savory, non-fruit counterpoint to the initial fruit elements on the aromas. It’s about as seamless as they get just a couple months after bottling. I think 2018 is a fantastic vintage for this variety in Sonoma County in general. 160 cases produced *\$40 per bottle. \$22 per half bottle and \$84 per magnum*

2017 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

Our main Pinot Noir bottling which is treated as though it were an estate bottling (if we had one!).

When there is a heat spell at the beginning of harvest (usually around Labor Day) it is very important to be prompt about harvesting thinner skinned varieties. This lesson is well-illustrated by my learning curve with ‘The Hill’ Zinfandel from Scherrer Vineyard: wait too long and the spell is broken. Because of the extraordinary competition for harvest personnel in 2017 when it was time to pick, we were able to call in some favors and get the grapes in while the spell was still in effect.

Rose hips, beets, hibiscus tea accent the red and slightly black cherry notes on the nose. Tons of red fruits, mouth-watering acidity on the mouth, this just makes you want to take another bite of food and another sip of wine. For those of you who are chemistry-focused, the pH of this wine is the lowest of any vintage I have bottled. That tells a lot about how lively the wine is and how promptly we were able to harvest. 1100 cases produced *\$50 per bottle, \$29 per half bottle, \$104 per magnum*

2016 ‘High Slopes’ Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

The vineyard site where the grapes came from are at a crossroad between Russian River Valley and Sonoma Coast. It shows characteristics of both AVA’s: Generosity of fruit from the RRV with tannic and acidic structure from the coast.

2016 gave us another energetic vintage with many seedless berries that were harvested before they went ‘over the top’, which is easy to do as the itty ones can dry up in a snap of the fingers. The great success with the 2015 vintage under these same conditions made it much easier for me to forge ahead with the higher level of seedless berries.

Black pepper, blue fruits that lead to red fruits on the nose. Savory, fruity, savory, then fruity again, then mouth-watering on the middle and finish where the black pepper and blue fruit reappear with another toggle of savory/mouth-watering. From Vinous April 2020, Antonio Galloni writes: ‘The 2016 Pinot Noir High Slopes is another stellar wine in this range from Fred Scherrer. Black cherry, game, mint, licorice and dried flowers give the High Slopes a distinct wild character, but there is more than enough fruit to provide balance. This is one of the more savory wines in the lineup. I would prefer to enjoy it along similarly hearty fare. This is a gorgeous Russian River Pinot. 94 points’ 46 cases produced *\$75 per bottle*.

2015 Calypso Vineyard Syrah

So far, this is my favorite stand-alone Syrah site. 2015 was a vintage that in our area gave great verve, energy and vitality. There was some unevenness at bloom which handled properly at harvest can amp up the liveliness of the wines without bringing underripe or overripe notes to the forefront.

Violets, white pepper, hibiscus tea with crushed blueberries, freshly tilled loam are on the nose. On the palate it enters with still fairly firm-ish tannins right from a freshly opened bottle. Highly intriguing, I find myself going back to the glass many times to see other facets revealed in this complex wine.

As I said last year: ‘How can a wine made so simply be so complex? When the grapes are a complex array of clones, rootstocks and trellis systems (dozens of separate blocks on a three-acre site) and have intrinsic multi-layered character it follows that the wine will be so as well. Equally successful with salmon, 5-spice moussaka, grilled antelope, flour tortillas, this style allows the grape perfumes to resonate without being buried in tannin or new barrels. I remember doing a winemaker dinner in GA with the 2008 vintage from this site. The chef paired it with miso-infused butterfish. It was like a white wine pairing where the tannin disappeared, and the perfumes and acidity were what were in the forefront. That validates the depth of what this vineyard has to offer. Not all sites produce Syrah that has such equal facility with such a wide range of foods.’ The same is true of this vintage and speaks volumes of the site. 91 cases produced *\$50 per bottle*.

2017 ‘The Hill’ Zinfandel

This is the third vintage where I have kept this part of the vineyard separate and bottled on its own. The fact that we have three truly unique expressions of Zinfandel on the same property may seem unlikely unless you actually visit, walk around and see the different soils, exposures (and probably) clones. As I try to follow the lead of the material, it is natural that they will seek their own paths. I just follow along with a helping hand here or there to help the material stay on the path itself.

Fresh plum, red and black cherry on the nose. The more time in the glass after pouring, the more the cherry notes dominate. After a couple days open, more spices and darker fruits appear. On the mouth, it’s more about dark fruits. Nice, racy brightness make this a really perfect wine for the table. It should work with an incredibly wide range of foods: From tomato and herb-based dishes to waterfowl, lamb, game, etc. 98 cases produced *\$40 per bottle*.

Library Releases

Be on the lookout for the library releases which will go live on *our website* on Saturday November 14 at 9 am Pacific. You’ll receive an e-mail that morning as a reminder. Despite the small amount of space devoted to it here, it is a significant focus of ours. There aren’t many wineries that are willing to commit and invest into holding back wines for years to slowly bring them back to offer them for sale. But since positive development with age is so central to our style, it is important to illustrate it rather than simply talk about it.

Very Recent Releases

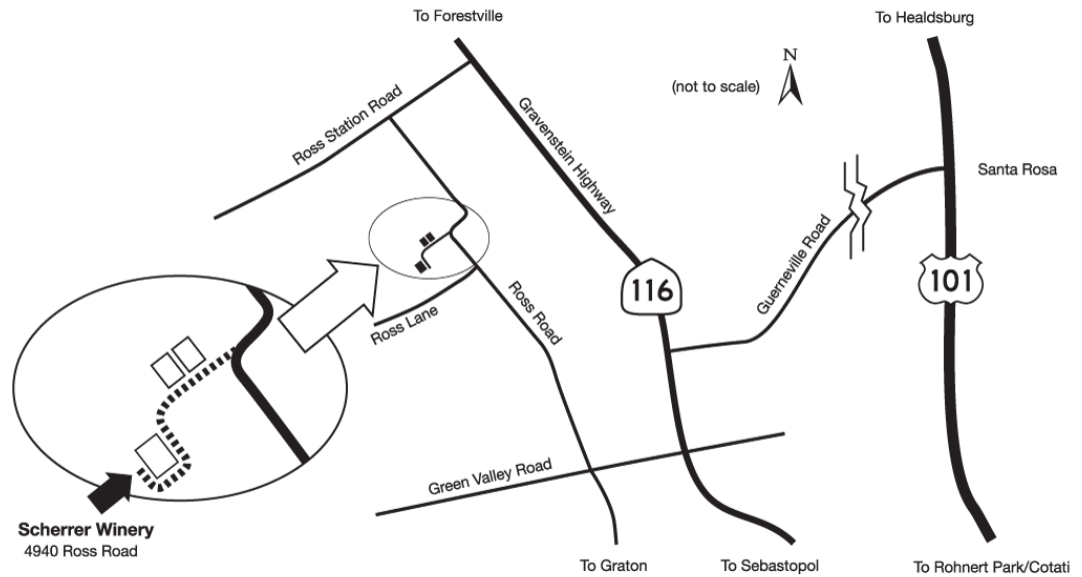
To scratch that Rhone itch, the 2015 Huntsman (\$34) is showing well as is the 2015 Kick Ranch Grenache (\$38) which will both go with some of the heartier game-centric dishes that come out this time of year. We still have some of the 2015 Scherrer Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon (\$66) which is enjoying a little time in the bottle and showing well, despite its long-term future in the cellar. The 2015 OMV Zin (\$38) showing spectacularly. For a real treat, the 2015 Hallberg PN (\$75) and the 2015 Platt Pinot (\$70) are undeniably special. A nice dinner for two would be both of these side-by-side on successive days with different dishes. The wines open up even more and reveal more and more of their depth.

Again, thanks for your continued support. Seeing what many other small wineries are going through with the shift in markets as a result of COVID-19, we are truly grateful for your support over the years. Without it, I doubt we would be here. Your support also allows us the creative freedom to do what we love and to support old and create potential new family legacies. As always, I am unable to fully communicate this in such a small space, but still try anyway.



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.



WARNING: Drinking distilled spirits, beer, coolers, wine and other alcoholic beverages may increase cancer risk, and, during pregnancy, can cause birth defects. For more information go to www.P65Warnings.ca.gov/alcohol.

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)
Curb-side Pick up is available at the Winery by appointment	NC	
GLS Delivery (recommended) to CA	\$21/box	\$1.75
GLS Delivery 2-Day to AZ, ID, NV, OR, WA and parts of NM	\$24/box	\$2
Ground to CA, AZ	\$30/box	\$2.5
Ground to CO, ID, OR, MT, NM, NV, WA or WY	\$36/box	\$3
Ground to AL, DC, FL, GA, IA, IL, IN, KS, LA, MA, MD, ME, MI, MN, MO, NC, NE, NH, NJ, NY, OH, OK, PA, SC, TN, TX, VA or WI	\$48/box	\$4
2-day Air to above states plus: HI & Alaska higher	\$120/box	\$10
Overnight to any above state. Delivery to any state address with liquor license. HI or Alaska higher	\$168/box	\$14

MAILING

SHIPPING

Name	Name
Street	Company Name Residential <input type="checkbox"/>
City, State, Zip Code	Street
Daytime Phone	City, State, Zip Code
e-mail:	Delivery Phone
I am over 21. Date of Birth:	Shipping Notes

Futures Wine - Released November 2021	Price (cases only)	Quantity	Amount
2019 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir	\$360 / case		
Futures Subtotal			
Sales Tax: Pick up 8.25% Shipping: AZ, CA, CO, FL, GA, ID, IL, IN, KS, LA, MD, ME, MI, NC, NH, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OH, OK, PA, SC, TN, TX, VA, WA, WI, WY			%
Choose: <input type="checkbox"/> Pick up at Winery <input type="checkbox"/> Shipping method and cost:			
Deadline: December 31, 2020			Futures Total

New Releases	Price	Quantity	Amount
2019 Dry Rosé of Syrah	\$22 / bottle, limit 3		
2018 Scherrer Vineyard Chardonnay	\$40 / bottle		
	\$22 / half bottle		
	\$84 / magnum		
2017 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir	\$50 / bottle		
	\$29 / half bottle		
	\$104 / magnum		
2016 'High Slopes' Pinot Noir	\$75 / bottle		
2015 Calypso Vineyard Syrah	\$50 / bottle		
2017 'The Hill' Scherrer Vineyard Zinfandel	\$40 / bottle		
New Release Sampler (one each except Rose', 15% discount)	\$217 / 5 bottle pack		
Subtotal			
Discount on wine for total orders of 12 or more bottles (the sampler builds toward the discount but is not further discounted)		-10%	
Subtotal			
Sales Tax: Pick up 8.25% Shipping: AZ, CA, CO, FL, GA, ID, IL, IN, KS, LA, MD, ME, MI, NC, NH, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OH, OK, PA, SC, TN, TX, VA, WA, WI, WY			%
Choose <input type="checkbox"/> Pick up at Winery <input type="checkbox"/> Shipping method and cost:			
Total			

Payment: Visa / MasterCard American Express Check

Card #	Expires:	Security Code Visa/MC: 3 on back Am Ex: 4 on front
Signature:		Date: