

Tales of Brave Ulysses

Most of us are familiar with this [Cream song](#) from the psychedelic era of western rock music. It references a part of the extensive journeys of Ulysses (or Odysseus for the Greek) on his way home from the Trojan War. At this point in his saga, lashed to the ship, he endures the full assault/seduction of the sirens songs as they try to lure him away, while his obedient (and ultimately rather unfortunate) crew plug their ears to avoid becoming victims to their song. I arranged an acoustic version for two Martin guitars. Here is an [extemporaneous jam](#) with the addition of mandolin where the song would not stop. Sometimes, when playing alone, I will tune the *Martin Sharp* a tad in respect for the brilliant lyricist of the song and artist who created the album cover.

In a number of ways, the winemaking life has analogous characters and challenges to Ulysses' story. On top of the normal farming/weather vagaries, there are existential threats (fires threatening lives and buildings), monsters that arise from the depths of the sea or from above (smoke affecting fruit, worldwide pandemic, the weather... drought then flooding within 2 weeks), thieves & suitors for one's position of authority (politicians, tariffs, supply chain issues, huge price increases on bottles and certain facets of the commercial wine trade). Ulysses had to not only be very good at the tasks at hand but also had to be able to avoid the pitfalls during the lengthy journey by using his head.

Existential threats, Fire and Smoke: While the 2019 fires burned right up to the barns at our family's vineyard, we suffered no significant losses (other than sleep) during that episode. The hillsides have mostly healed except for some larger trees in the far reaches of steep wild land that were too damaged to recover. Regarding the 2020 smoke exposure to fruit on the vines, it's an ongoing learning process. With my experience with the *heavily* affected 2008 Black Lightnin' Pinot Noir bottling (which ended up a very delicious wine with many fans), I developed some theories that did not align with conventional wisdom at the time. I've kept eyes and ears open since then and have more information to work with.

First, since the kinds of analysis of 'marker' compounds in grapes is still an imperfect measure of current and future sensory effect, I focus more on sensory, looking at nuance. Rather than merely looking for smoky aroma, I look for a lack of continuity/clipping on the finish. A sense of 'desiccation' on the finish can be an indicator of very low-level smoke effect. This is becoming more widely accepted as a more sensitive and predictive method than by aromatic assessment alone due to enzymatic action in the saliva liberating sugar-bound smoke components. These same bound components can become liberated later during a wine's development (particularly during first or so year in the barrel) and become significantly aromatic. I think this is a reason many people say it shows up later in the wine's aging. Second, once you have committed to making a red wine and extracting from skins, where the much of the bound forms of these compounds are located, extended time on skins and yeast (a key here) post-fermentation plus a longer than usual time in barrel on lees (yeast, again) may ameliorate trace levels of smoky compounds. Third, new oak seems to 'eat' much of the smoky taste. I read an Australian review article around 2011 that discussed an experiment showing

that the new wood adsorbed the smoky marker compounds, essentially irreversibly. Properly matched and applied, new oak can focus fruit and streamline texture in any case. That is all definitely what 2008 Black Lightnin' experienced, which began life in the fermenter very highly affected. Fortunately, we extend time on skins and on lees with longer than typical time in barrels on lees anyway. We poured relatively young, 11-month-old barrel samples of the 2020 Old & Mature Zinfandel during our week at Region back in August and everyone was quite impressed with the wine.

Bottom line: I think the smoke issues, while conditionally significant according to location, were regionally generally overstated (especially by folks who did not attempt the vintage at all). Unfortunately, this overstatement has been repeated to the point of becoming conventional 'wisdom,' painting all wines from the vintage with the same brush. That is truly unfortunate because it appears that is not the case. Better to lash oneself to the mast and endure the sirens' misleading songs without surrendering reason.

Open Houses still on hold.

Due to shifting local health regulations, and reluctance to combine groups for disease exposure this early, we have decided to continue our hiatus from hosting open houses at the winery. Pencil in April 1-3 and 8-10 for 2022. I know we said this last year, but things ought to be better settled in by then!

Schedule permitting, we will start to host **tasting appointments** again, with some changes. While we will host groups that are already in close contact, we are refraining from combining different groups as we have in the past. If not everyone is vaccinated, tastings will be held outside under our covered entry. We don't want to be responsible for spreading this virus between different groups and even for me, losing my sense of smell or taste (even temporarily) would be devastating and not something to risk any more than necessary at this point in our understanding.

Curbside pickup is always available, we're here most days. Just call (707) 823-8980 or [email](#) 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

2020 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir Futures

With the 2018 vintage, we began offering futures of our main Pinot Noir, the Russian River Valley bottling. While it is not from a single site, it is our primary Pinot Noir focus and punches well above its weight class, as always.

While the 2020 Vintage on the West Coast had its challenges, primarily smoke exposure in certain sites, I am finding that the few, very carefully selected lots used for this bottling are not exhibiting issues from this and I'm quite confident to offer it on futures, just as I did with the 2020 Zinfandels.

Ginger, red beets, red and black cherry, tarragon, and a touch of damp loam on the nose. Juicy roasted beets and cherry pie on the mouth. Very nice continuity, focus and length with a quite

mouth-watering finish. I've endeavored to maintain clarity and focus of this wine during blending trials and have learned a lot in the process.

We had already cut back on overall sources ahead of the vintage anticipating more of my time needed at the family vineyard. Then further winnowing and carving occurred due to fit and finish of the parts. So only about 250 cases to be produced (we have normally produced 4 times this quantity). *Estimated release price \$50 per bottle. Futures price: \$360 per case (\$30/bottle). Full cases only. Offer available until December 31, 2021 or until the futures allocation sells out. Futures Release date November 2022, general retail release date November 2023.*

2019 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir Futures Release Notes

As with last year, this description is for those who bought last year's Pinot futures. The rest will have to wait till next year's regular release. While recently bottled, it is showing some floral hibiscus and rose notes. But the main thrust is freshly turned loam and black cherry. Rich and luxurious with upward trajectory, there is a slight toasty note on the finish. We have already received several calls from happy people who have picked this up or had it shipped. 1000 cases produced *\$50 per bottle at release in 2022.*

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 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. It is possible to purchase multiple samplers, by the way as many have. *5 bottles, Special offer ~~\$267~~ \$222*

2018 Winners Circle Vineyard Chardonnay

Winner's Circle is a vineyard owned by an old friend of mine and his business partner. The business partner started a wine brand with the goal of showcasing their grapes and is the only client I make wine for. They are just up Vine Hill Road from Helfer Vineyard, with the same white, powdery twist of Goldridge soil type where white wine varieties truly thrive. Planted to two high-quality clones of Chardonnay, it presents a perfect palette to work with. In 2018 they ended up with more vines set aside for the project than planned. Having had experience with this site the year before, and Helfer nearby for a couple decades, I happily volunteered to take some of the excess to develop under my own label for this vintage.

Fresh apple, baked apple, floral, citrus, earthy and savory notes abound. Seamless progression of flavors, angles to rounds and back again, with a persistent, graceful finish. It is like taking a motorcycle ride on a smooth road with gentle curves, properly banked and freshly paved. 'Rich, pliant and creamy, with superb balance, the 2018 is flat-out gorgeous. Apricot, lemon confit, marzipan, white flowers and chalk all open as this beautifully layered, textured Chardonnay shows off its personality. The 2018 is a stellar effort from Fred Scherrer. Don't miss it. 94 pts. Antonio Galloni'. Just a few barrels produced *\$50 per bottle.*

2018 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

This vintage is proving to be a perfect fit for our style of wine. Good verve, aromatics, luxuriously textured without being gaudy...

Classic black cherry/orange peel nose. I always look to have good non-fruit elements to balance this AVA signature: Herbal, lees, new barrels, etc. Yet with a year in bottle, the cherry fruit and perfumes are getting into higher gears of the bicycle. Types and percentages of new barrels vary according to site and vintage character as always. Interestingly though it seems to hover most of the time near 40% overall new. I experiment a bit with types of barrels in a small way in order to continue refining the mix. Unfortunately, unlike the way albums like Disraeli Gears were produced, I only get one take per year to adjust the mix...live.

I like the way this wine centers itself. It is as though it is clear as to its personality -not diffuse or conflicted, but focused. On the mouth it is exactly what the nose promises. Straight ahead pleasure and satisfaction. There is a homing beacon of acidity and core fruit that emerges on the finish, beckoning to return to the glass just as Ulysses' heart drew him back to Penelope and Ithaca. Or could that instead be the Sirens' singing? This is Pinot Noir after all. 1200 cases produced *\$50 per bottle, \$29 per half bottle, \$104 per magnum*

2017 'High Slopes' Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

As stated last year, the vineyard site where the grapes came from are at a crossroad between Russian River Valley and Sonoma Coast, located South of Sebastopol. It shows characteristics of both AVA's: Generosity of fruit from the Russian River Valley with tannic and acidic structure from the Coast. The unevenly set and ripening berries (hens and chicks – seedless, tiny berries mixed with some less ripe, seeded ones) causes it's amazing concentration to be hitched to appropriately balancing structure.

The 2017 vintage was another one where significant heat and dry winds arose around Labor Day. While this site is a bit later than most of the area North of Sebastopol, the heat did advance ripeness and richness rapidly, giving us a tad more dark fruit than 2016. However, there is still a ton of red fruits here.

Aromas of red cherry and plum tart, hints of almond, and fresh pastry crust get the juices flowing. There's also super-ripe cantaloupe perfume with air time. Rather than sweet and luxurious, this shows a great balance between angles and rounds. The acidity leads, with mouth filling red and black fruits, hints of cassis on the mid-palate being followed by the refreshing and appropriate tannin which then comes full-circle to the upward trajectory of salivary-eliciting tartness. There is cassis and substance enough to work reasonably well with beef. However, I think duck is an even better fit as the flavors and acidity really drive the ship here.

'The 2017 Pinot Noir High Slopes is a powerful, explosive wine loaded with intensity of fruit and structure. It emerges from a site in the Sebastopol Hills with a strong marine influence. Still very, very young, the High Slopes is done in a super-classic style intended for cellaring. Readers who can wait will be rewarded, as the 2017 is a Pinot of tremendous stature. 94 pts, Antonio Galloni' 72 cases produced *\$75 per bottle*.

2018 Kick Ranch Grenache

This site is in the cool edge of where it can thrive, at the lower elevations of the Fountain Grove AVA Northeast Santa Rosa. While this is a varietal Grenache, it ripens the same time as Lolita and Calypso (named after the orchid, not the sea-nymph) Syrah in the Western edge of the Russian River Valley AVA which also gave rise to our Huntsman blend. A student and consumer of Grenache for nearly 35 years and as a winemaker for a decade, I find a strong tendency to look at it in context with other varieties with Huntsman and find that there are

parts of Kick that perform solo perfectly.

As I often reflect, vinification of this variety is like witnessing a David Bowie concert: Often masculine but turning feminine at the last minute, it always surprises, amuses and is satisfying in the end. It has firmly textured berries that resist crushing. So a significant proportion of them undergo a form of carbonic maceration during fermentation, yielding their magic when *in the press* turning what was an initially masculine, structured, earthy brute into a more floral, suave, and layered androgynous being.

On the nose, a type of fruitiness that comes from the carbonic berries (which sort of reminds me of my mom's brandied fruit made around 50 years ago when I was a kid-got to smell, but rarely got to eat) overlays the equal measures of red fruit, peaches and earth, with a dash of petrichor on the side. On the mouth, it is juicy/mouth-watering with rather meaty, savory flavors that captures and echoes the peach slightly and rolls over the tongue with a saline presence like a gentle wave on a sandy beach such as the mythical Ogygia. The fine-grained tannins are present but cloaked in the richness that Grenache typically offers. The result is a somewhat chewy sensation that resolves to smoothness and echoes the meaty/fruity whole that this wine is.

In our research at the dinner table with Kick Ranch Grenache, we have found that it works well with a surprisingly wide range of foods, particularly the Mediterranean type of fare, which is no surprise. But it's the chewy, then juicy progression that really gets me and something that makes it so versatile at the table. You can serve it with most great Pinot Noir pairings and do the same with many of the Cabernet Sauvignon friendly dishes as well. 140 cases produced \$38 *per bottle*.

2018 Gunsalus Vineyard Pinot Noir

We have worked with Glen and Pamela Gunsalus for well over a decade and really appreciate their hands-on approach to their 10-acre vineyard in the Green Valley. 2018 was a perfect example of a growers' vintage with ample crop levels that made stunning wines across the board. From the early ripening varieties of white and red to the later ripening reds, they all show great balance, freshness and promise good longevity.

Freshly opened bottle: Gorgeous aromatics of fresh black cherry *and* maraschino cherry [quite a contrast in approach to production of these cherries], roasted red beets, slight hibiscus and earth with some rose petal and juniper. It's like CSNY in perfect harmony: Stills is the beets, Crosby is the cherries, Nash is the high-toned florals and Young is the earthy, non-fruit parts. Day 2 is perfect resolution of day 1. Day 3 in the bottle: Beautiful balance, it floats and hovers effortlessly fruit elements slightly receded. This is delicate, yet flavorful and compelling. 71 cases produced \$48 *per bottle*.

Library Releases

Be on the lookout for the library releases which will go live on *our website* on Saturday November 13 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.

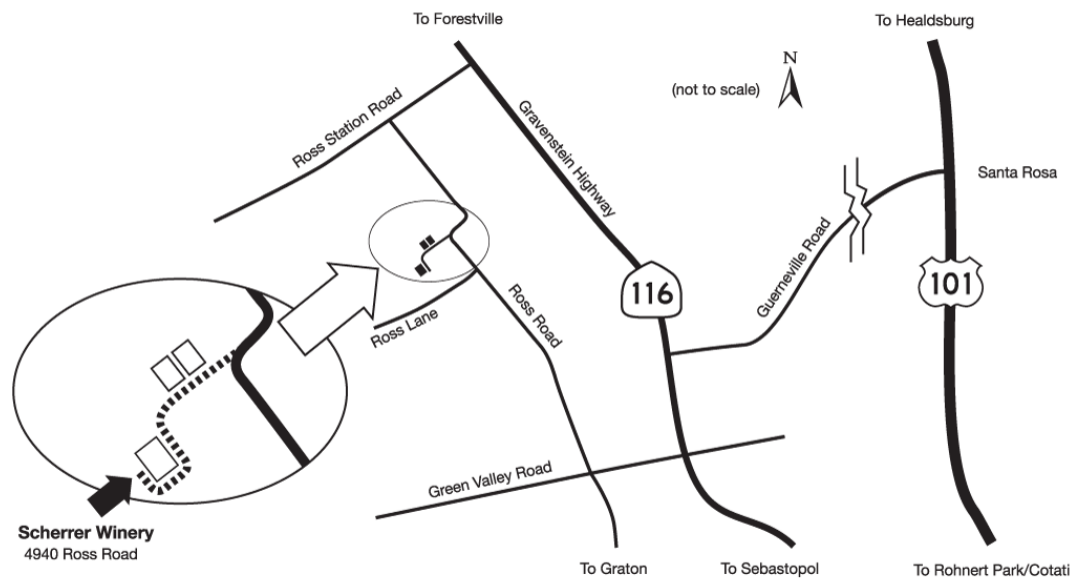
Very Recent Releases

The 2016 Huntsman (\$38) is showing so well right now it would be a shame to ignore it. We still have some of the 2016 Scherrer Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon (\$68) which has opened up nicely this summer despite its long-term future in the cellar. The 2016 Old & Mature Vines Zin (\$38) is showing spectacularly at this point just as the 2015 did a year ago. A comparison of 2016 Russian River, High Slopes and Platt Pinot Noir bottlings would be a nice treat or holiday gift pack for someone wanting to explore the AVA progression within the same vintage context.

Again, thanks for your continued support. Seeing what many other small wineries went 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 is 707-824-1933. Please drive slowly down the driveway. The entrance and our gravel parking area are on the west side, so please 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 2022	Price (cases only)	Quantity	Amount
2020 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir	\$360 / case		
Futures Subtotal			
Sales Tax: Pick up 8.5% 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, 2021			Futures Total

New Releases	Price	Quantity	Amount
2017 Winners Circle Vineyard Chardonnay	\$50 / bottle		
2018 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir	\$50 / bottle		
	\$29 / half bottle		
	\$104 / magnum		
2017 'High Slopes' Pinot Noir	\$75 / bottle		
2018 Gunsalus Vineyard Pinot Noir	\$48 / bottle		
2018 Kick Ranch Grenache	\$38 / bottle		
New Release Sampler (one each, 15% discount)	\$222 / 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 8.5% Shipping: AZ, CA, CO, FL, GA, ID, IL, IN, KS, KY, 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: