

SCHERRER SPRING 2000 RELEASES

Since most of us survived Y2K ‘disaster’ a couple of months ago, we can really begin to focus on important things: wine. Our Spring 2000 releases will be available for sale and/or pickup at the winery on **two consecutive weekends only**: April 1&2, and 8&9. If you have any wines (futures or purchases from this offering) not picked up after April 9, you will be contacted to arrange shipment. The wines available this spring are the 1998 Zinfandels, the 1998 Chardonnays, the 1999 Vin Gris, and, at long last, the 1997 Cabernet Sauvignon.

I’ll remember the 1998 Vintage as the very cool, rainy, non-spring followed by a non-summer. The crop levels were quite low, with loose clusters, which aided air circulation and light penetration (when the sun *did* shine). In the vineyard, we responded to the vines’ tendency to grow bushier under these conditions by removing unnecessary shoots and leaves. This also helped compensate for the reduced heat and sunlight of the cool season. Additionally, our typical method of harvesting based on flavor development once again paid dividends. All the wines have lovely balance and depth of flavor, particularly the 1998 Cabernet Sauvignon, which is another year away from release.

1998 ‘Old & Mature Vines’ Zinfandel: The clay soils really show their ability to even out vintage variation due to differences in rainfall. Rain penetrates clay slowly. Whatever can’t be stored within the soil either runs off to somewhere else, or it pools on top. If the roots are deep, they don’t seem to notice the big variations that we surface dwellers do. Consequently, the flavors of the 1998 ‘Old & Mature’ Zinfandel have followed last year’s wine quite a bit, with some of that blueberry quality that appeared last year in the 1997 Zinfandel. Similar to the previous vintage, the 1998 red wines were also left on their initial sediment (‘lees’) from harvest until the following May and June. They were racked for a second time during the winter and bottled without filtration in late January. This minimal handling really preserves their delicate perfumes (like Pinot noir), and should increase their aging potential.

While it has temporarily ‘firmed up’ about a month after bottling, I’m excited by this wine’s promise. 1170 cases produced. **Release price: \$27 per bottle, 6-bottle limit.**

1998 Shale Terrace Zinfandel: Low production plus high futures demand means we have **none left** to sell here. Some restaurants and wine shops will still get their tiny allocations, however. It has good focus and will probably age even more gracefully than the 1997 will, if given the chance. Fortunately, the 1999 Shale Terrace is more plentiful.

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1998 Scherrer Vineyard Chardonnay: As I said last year, when I began to experiment with our Alexander Valley Chardonnay in 1997, I was accustomed to working with Russian River Valley fruit. So, I was not prepared for how much I would like this wine. Barrel fermented with special, temperamental yeast, full malolactic fermentation, and bottled without fining, cold stabilization, or filtration, this 350-case experiment exhibits great richness and complexity without going over the top. This second vintage is a little more fine-tuned than its predecessor. Pressing was stopped at moderate juice yields based on taste and, yes, a little juice chemistry. Due to the 1997's graceful bottle development, it looks like this vineyard's wine will easily handle at least moderate cellaring. 350 cases were produced. **Release price: \$24 per bottle, 12-bottle limit.**

1998 Helfer Chardonnay: This is a new wine for us. The vineyard is located on Vine Hill road, near a couple of famous vineyards you might recognize. Few California vineyards are planted so densely as this (42" apart); so weed control is accomplished with a lawn mower (generally by Patricia Helfer). There are three 'clones' planted, and the total production of these 799 vines (0.22 Ac) should average about two barrels per year. The wine was made in the same way as the Scherrer Vineyard Chardonnay, but the expression of fruit is quite different: more like burgundy than California. This is one of the finest Russian River Valley Chardonnay I have been fortunate enough to work with. 45 cases were produced. **Release price: \$35 per bottle, 2-bottle limit.**

1999 Vin Gris: By popular demand, we made more of this bone-dry Zinfandel rosé. It has a crispness and focus that reminds me of elements of a rosé champagne base wine...lots of cherry, raspberry & a citrusy finish. Restaurants fought over this stuff last year. Seafood dishes with garlic and/or tomato cry out for this wine. Ignore the call if you can. 170 cases were produced. I bet the family will still try to consume half. **Release price: \$15 per bottle, 10-bottle limit.**

1997 Cabernet Sauvignon: This is our first bottling of this variety from my Father's Vineyard in Alexander Valley. Quite frankly, I was skeptical that it would become amazing wine. How wrong I was. Dad was right...again. It was his idea to plant this variety.

I drove everybody crazy during the development of this wine, because I didn't know what or when or how I was going to deal with it, therefore no commitments were made. The idea was to let the wine dictate all of that. So, here it is: exotic but still 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. It has high-toned aromas like what Viognier gives Syrah sometimes. There is a very little bit of dried herbs (like thyme) on the nose, lots of ripe Cabernet fruit, and a little pretty oak in just the right places, etc. The texture is supple on the 'outside', with a sufficient and appropriate structure for many years of bottle development. It is kind of like a gentle giant. 250 cases were produced. **Release price: \$35 per bottle, 6-bottle limit.**

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The 'buzz' is that 1997 is supposed to be a great Cabernet Sauvignon vintage with 1998 and 1999 being lesser, or uneven vintages. However I'm happy to report that our Cabernet Sauvignon has actually improved in these vintages. Both 1998 and 1999 were relatively cool, damp growing seasons. While very high temperatures punctuated these two cool seasons at times, the overall trend was cooler than normal for much of these two growing seasons. This cool weather has its own effects on grapevine physiology, affecting both the current and following vintages' size and personality. A grower can alter the vine canopy to ameliorate conditions within the vine canopy, but this is costly, time-consuming, and requires highly skilled labor. To us, it is worth it, and a matter of good vineyard management regardless of the variety.

Because of this customized grapevine canopy work, the vines were poised to make the best of these unusually cool conditions in 1998 & 1999. The result is more consistent wines. These are some of the things that separate the better growers from the rest in certain vintages. It also doesn't hurt to go for modest yields as well.

The 1999 Zinfandels and Chardonnays look to be very special wines too. I'll write more about the 1999 vintage this summer, with the Zinfandel futures offering. But for now, let's just say that lovers of very dense, ageworthy reds will be pleased. The 1999 Scherrer Chardonnay completed malolactic fermentation quite early this year, and is showing remarkable fineness. The Helfer Chardonnay, by contrast, has conducted a very slow malolactic fermentation, yet appears remarkably consistent in character to the previous vintage.

We began playing with Pinot noir (another year away from bottling, folks) in 1999 as well: sixteen tiny fermentation lots, actually. Unfortunately, I suspect I will be accused of the same non-committal attitude as with the early days of our Cabernet Sauvignon. With so many Pinot lots, the blending options are numerous. There could be vineyard designates, big blends, or little blends. I just don't know yet. There is no substitute for experience...with vineyards *or* in life.

Thank you for your interest and support of our wine. It has allowed me to achieve my longtime dream of operating my own small winery. I hope to see you at our open house this spring and I hope you will enjoy what we have produced.

Sincerely,

Fred Scherrer