



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

February 16, 2018

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

Friends –

I went down to Old Mexico last week. Things have gotten a little crazy around here. The world isn't what it used to be. Fires burned half the country. My wife put a padlock on the refrigerator after I drank a case of Schlitz and ate two gallons of vanilla ice cream while watching a *Cheers* marathon. I drive a station wagon. I went into the B and B Lounge the other night (a bar I used to own, psychologically speaking) and was treated like a tourist. I needed to believe it won't always be like this.

I've travelled the world. I've been to Venice. I've been to Reno. I've seen orcas from the ferry crossing the Puget Sound. I've seen the White Cliffs of Dover at sunset after accidentally eating too much hash-laced mincemeat pie. I've hitchhiked through the San Juan Mountains during a snow storm in June. Etc.

But since the first time I saw Mexico, it has occupied a special place in my heart. No, before that, even. Before I had ever been to Mexico, I knew it was a country where passion ruled, where beauty was prized above cleanliness, where loving animals and eating them were not thought of as mutually exclusive practices, where flowers grew from cracks in the crumbling walls of government buildings and drunks stop to smell them.

When I finally did go down to Mexico, at the age of seventeen, it lived up to what I had imagined, if not in every detail, at least in essence. I travelled the country in busses and cars and burros and on foot, moving over the land from crease to corner, like the fingertips of a man might move across the body of his lover (that is, if he were a patient and considerate man and his lover found his habit of moving his fingers around on her, if not pleasant, at least tolerable). But it was on my last visit to Mexico, about a decade ago, after I lost my hair but before I had my children, that I found the most remarkable place I have ever seen.

It was in the mountains outside of the San Luis Potosí - a hidden canyon, the walls so high that the sunlight seldom touched the ground, a place where flowers and silver clover laced their fingers on the banks of a singing brook. Maybe because I was always drunk in those days, or as I'd like to believe, because that place cast a spell on its visitors making it impossible to remember its precise location, I have never been able to find it again.

I haven't been to Mexico in a long time. I mean, not before this last visit, I hadn't. Like you, I'm old and rich and afraid of street food. My wife hits me when I speak to women under the age of sixty. I don't think of myself as "Mexico" material. It took me a long time to work up the courage to go back. My departure was facilitated by the absence of my wife and children. They were headed out to visit my mother-in-law in Florida. It broke my heart not be with them. I told my wife so. I tried to kiss her goodbye as a gesture of sympathy and affection.

"Brush your teeth," she said.

I don't blame her. I wouldn't kiss me. I waited till she had been gone for fifteen minutes. I wanted to be sure she wasn't going to circle back on me. Then I went out and got in the car and drove south. I was going to bring my friend Jeremy along on the trip. He has no moral character whatsoever. I lean on him when I need to do something dumb.

We crossed the border in the late morning bearing southeast, eschewing the coast in favor of the high country. Jeremy and I rode in silence, drinking beer and sharing the unspoken rapture of people newly returned to a



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place they love. The smell of unburned fuel and wood smoke in the air already had us thinking of happier things. “Hurray,” we actually said, driving into the shadow of the mountains.

But, in the falling darkness, it became apparent that no matter how far we travelled, we would not find that mythical canyon from years before. By then, we had spent hours crisscrossing those mountains. Befuddled, out of beer, bumping through the dark, we saw a light on the side of the road and stopped. I can best describe the place we were as an emptiness – a place where nothing was.

That’s not strictly true. There was a pile of used tires and a light bulb hanging from a wire. A ditch. A small fire in a garbage can. Some meat cooking on a stick. A sort of innkeeper named Billy, pronounced Bee-Lee. Many plastic jugs full of unidentifiable liquid. This is where we passed the night.

And this is the end of the story, too.

Yes, many other things happened before the sun came up. There were beverages. A dog. A blind woman who ground dried chile de árbol with a stone and could see the life on other planets. But you see the eventual outcome, don’t you? This place – this emptiness – was, of course, the place I had visited those years before and found a paradise. Had it been obliterated or never been what I remembered? Had it been merely a paradise of the mind rather than an earthly one? This story doesn’t answer those questions, because I don’t know.

Memory, we could say, is a burden. It clouds our view of the present by marking it with what we carry from the past. The same thing could be said of hope – it’s cargo we’re lighter without. It’s true, Mexico is not what it used to be. But it never was. The same thing could be said of our own country. The same could be said of ourselves. Is it not so that every paradise is a paradise of the mind?

Is it enough to live here, in this life, on this earth? Now? Do we have the courage to see it as a blessing?

To narrow the point, I’ll make it this:

Mexico was not as I remembered it, nor as I hoped it would be. Once I was able to get over that, I loved it.

Some of you are lucky enough to be receiving a few bottles of our **2016 Chardonnay**. This is a single vineyard Chardonnay from our family ranch on Chalk Hill Road, and to be modest, I think it’s an incredible place to be making wine from. The soil is river stones and volcanic ash and it’s the coldest vineyard in Alexander Valley, and the wine reflects both this heavy mineral soil and the cool climate. It’s bright and racy and lean, all green apple and lemongrass and flint, no oak and no butter. The 2016 saw no new barrels, but spent about six months aging sur lie in neutral French oak.

This is the second and final shipment of our **2014 Red Winery Cabernet**. By now, I’ve talked about how much I love our 2014 Cabernets so much I’m out of breath. Almost. 2012, 2013, and 2014 were all great vintages. 2013 is the critics’ favorite. But for me, there’s something special about the ‘14s. They came at the end of a historic drought: yields were down, berries were small, and color and concentration were exceptional. 2013 was a vintage of incredibly intense, bold wines, but I don’t think it achieved the fine-grained tannin and varietal character of 2014.

Anyway, about the 2014 Red Winery Cabernet in particular:



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Red Winery is a twenty-acre vineyard first planted by my dad in 1973. It's a mild-to-warm site for Cabernet, and tends to produce Cabernet with a bright spectrum of flavors and aromas. The 2014 stands in some contrast to that history - this is a dark, tannic, intense Cabernet with loads of black cherry and baking spice. It's impressive now, but it needs time to blossom. Drink it tomorrow with a steak or drink it in five years with somebody worth spoiling.

Did I mention I love the 2014 reds? I think the **2014 Merlot** is the best version of this wine we've ever produced. It's 100% varietal from our Red Winery Vineyard. This is the only vineyard we ever pull from to produce Hawkes Merlot. The 2014 shows both great tannic complexity and lots of fresh fruit on the nose - blueberry and blackberry stand out most. The French oak adds a touch of nutmeg. It's a bigger, darker wine than even the two great vintages that precede it. Beautiful now, better in a few years.

Many of you are receiving a bottle or two of our flagship **2013 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet**. This is a 100% Cabernet Sauvignon, blended from all three of our estate vineyards. 2013 is a benchmark vintage for California Cabernet - as I mentioned above, critics think it's the greatest in our state's history. Our 2013 Estate lives up to the vintage's reputation for intensity - dark purple in color and full of dark aromas: violets and chocolate and plums. Still, for all that fruit, this wine takes time to open in the glass. It's delicious now, but it's gritty. Give it another decade in the cellar to be at its best.

Our Futures sale, in which we offer limited amounts of single vineyard Cabernets to wine club members at 50 percent of the retail price - pay now, receive the wines in February 2019 - is now open. The current single vineyard Cabernets on offer are from the 2016 vintage. Drop us a line to buy futures or set up a complimentary barrel tasting any time. Even better, **register** for one of our **Futures Galas**, being held this year in downtown Healdsburg on **Saturday, March 3rd** and **Saturday, March 10th**. The Futures Galas are free for wine club members and their guests, but space is limited.

Our **Summer Nights** concert series runs on three Saturdays this year: **July 7th**, **August 4th**, and **September 1st**. They feature acoustic music on our patio and a food vendor out back in the garden. The weather is nearly always beautiful, the atmosphere casual and festive, and as a wine club member, you'll receive a free plate of food and glass of rosé just for showing up. These are community events, an opportunity for both our club members and neighbors to share a glass of wine and an evening in paradise. I hope to see you at one of them.

Last year, for the first time, we had a series of lunches in the vineyard. They featured live music, food catered by my family, and a variety of single vineyard wines from the vineyard where the lunch was held. This year, they're back by popular demand. We'll do classic barbecue at Red Winery, French cuisine in the Stone Vineyard, and cap the series off with Bistecca alla Fiorentina (grilled rib-eye steak) atop the Pyramid. Vineyard lunches are \$70 per person, \$59.50 for club members and are first come, first served.

Thank you for your support.

- Jake