



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

February 20th, 2015

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

Friends-

My name is Jake. I'm a marketing guy. I consider myself a marketing guy, anyway, even if I'm not "paid" for what I do. I may not be the captain of this ship, but I'm a mate of some kind – first, or second or maybe third. Maybe I'm like a third mate, is how you could describe my position here at Hawkes. I don't know what Jeremy's job is. I don't even know what his qualifications are. He's been to college and I guess that's supposed to scare me or something. Dear whoever: the fact that you've been to college doesn't scare me.

Anyway, we were in the midst of a strategy meeting over breakfast when Jeremy holds up a piece of bacon and looks at it like he's Nostradamus and says, "There's something the matter with this country. People don't eat pork like they should."

"Wait," I said, "how are you supposed to eat it?"

"I'm not talking about bacon. Bacon is fine. Bacon is booming. I'm talking about your lesser-known cuts. Jowls, for instance. Who's fighting for jowls?"

"Not me, man," I said. "Nope."

"Pigs need a slogan. What about, 'Reach for the Peak. Reach for Pork.?'"

"Taken," I said. "By Geysir Peak, I think. How about, 'Pork: Processed to Perfection?'"

"I don't think that's the message we're trying to send," said Jeremy said. "How about, 'Pork: it gives you wings?' You know the whole 'if pigs could fly thing.' Assuming knowledge of a well-established cliché is a staple of modern advertising."

"Um," I said, "this is really digressive, man."

"We're work-shopping ideas," Jeremy said, taking a bite of the bacon. "This is how the ad game is played."

"Alright," I said, "then how about 'Pork: the Smartest Meat on the Market.' And it would be a whole campaign about how smart pigs are, you know? It would feature these very intellectual looking pigs, with like monocles and pipes –"

"I think we're digressing here," Jeremy said.

"And there could be this one pig in like a crazy gray wig, looking like he just stuck his hoof in a light socket, and the caption would read 'Alfred Pigenstein.' Boom!"

"Why would it be Alfred 'Pigenstein' instead of just Alfred 'Pigstein?'" Jeremy said. "Why the extra syllable in there?"

"Pigstein?" I said. "There's no poetry in Pigstein. Congratulations, you basically just cut your market in half."

"I think we should at least make a passing effort at historical accuracy, here," Jeremy said. "The name Pigenstein simply has no basis in reality. It's just a made up name. Period."

"There's something I need to discuss with you," I said.

"You have my attention," Jeremy said.

"You have a problem recognizing a great idea when you hear it. That's your Achilles heel."

"I'd say I'm a pretty self-aware leader, actually," Jeremy said.

"Leader?" I said. "You want to explain our roles, here? These are our roles: I come up with progressive, money-making ideas and you bury them in a mountain of medieval horse pucky."

"A wine bazooka? That was one of your great ideas."

"It's pronounced 'V-now Ca-non.' It's an express wine delivery system designed for hectic modern-day life."

"Edible wine?"



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

“That’s a bankable idea. Edible wine is literally a bankable idea. You know how I know that?”

“Your mom is not a loan officer.”

“Wait, did she or did she not loan me money on the basis of that idea?” I said. “Yes or no? Moisture in wine is a major impediment to many people’s enjoyment of an otherwise perfectly serviceable product, man.”

“What about space wine? Perhaps the worst idea of the 21st Century, thus far.”

“Tell Ed Harris that, man. Tell Peter Mondavi. Tell Peter, man. He won’t even drink wine from a glass anymore, that’s how philosophically advanced he is. Your outlook is prehistoric, man. Get your knuckles off the ground and let’s sell some wine.”

“What does Ed Harris have to do with it?”

“Hello? ‘One small step for man, etc, etc.’”

“That was Neil Armstrong.”

“You want to split hairs?” I said. “So don’t avail yourself of my services, then. Desist from employing me as your consultant, man.”

“You’re not my consultant.”

“Then I guess this conversation is over.”

“I guess it is.”

“Veenow Cannonn!” I said and made the wine power sign. Then, while he was trying to answer, I got up and just frickin’ walked away. Boom! Left him frickin’ sitting there, stewing in his college juices.

Most of you receiving this shipment will find a couple bottles of our 2011 Alexander Valley Cabernet in it. 2011 was originally considered a problematic vintage but, these days, it has come to embody the modern debate of California Cabernet. Whereas the last three years – 2012, 2013, and 2014 – have all featured warm summers and long, mild falls, 2011 was a cool summer followed by a wet fall. The wines that resulted, especially reds, are much lighter and more floral than the years that followed (vintages marked by intense color, heavy tannin, and heady fruit). As the 2011’s age, they are gaining more and more adherents and are often cited – by San Francisco Chronicle wine writer Jon Bonné, among others – as an example of the sort of finesse and elegance that is possible for California wine and is almost always lost in riper vintages.

I think Jon Bonné is kind of a pedant who would rather devote five hundred words to something like skin-fermented Trousseau Gris than write about what people actually drink, but he and those in his camp have a point: when we get the grapes as ripe as we usually do in California, we lose something. So, while I’m grateful not to be rained on while I’m picking grapes, the benefits of picking fruit before it’s overripe is something to keep in mind even in the best and easiest vintages. As a matter of fact, I consider balance to be a hallmark of our wines.

Our **2011 Alexander Valley Cabernet** is at the front edge of its drinkable life right now. It’s one-hundred-percent Cabernet, blended from all three of our estate vineyards with about half coming from Red Winery. The cool vintage, coupled with the high percentage of fruit from Red Winery, give this wine a lot of brightness and lift. It is just starting to open and beginning to show its Pinot-like aromatics, along with raspberry and red cherry and notes of allspice and anise. Cherry and dusty cocoa dominate the palate and the finish is long and a bit flinty. Drink 2016 to 2026.

Everybody on our list is receiving at least one bottle of the **2011 Stone Vineyard Cabernet**. This is the only shipment we’ll make of this wine and my temptation is to counsel cellar time, but I actually think it’s a bit more accessible right now than the Alexander Valley Cabernet. The Stone Vineyard is named partly for my mom (whose maiden name is Stone) and partly for the soil in which it grows, which is compressed volcanic. The whole vineyard is one big, crumbly, yellow rock with a tiny bit of topsoil. Not surprisingly, the signature trait of Cabernet from this vineyard is a sort of salty, mineral character and, while it exhibits plenty of that, it is also surprisingly soft and open.



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

In contrast to typical Cabernets from this cool vintage, the 2011 Stone shows lots of dark aroma and flavor: coffee, blackberries, plums. The mouthfeel is pleasingly broad and the finish is tannic but doesn't leave your mouth in a knot. Drink now through the next fifteen years.

Some of you are also receiving a bottle or two of our 2011 Merlot and 2013 Chardonnay. These wines have been hard to keep around.

We make very little of our **Alexander Valley Merlot** – about four hundred cases in 2011. It is one-hundred-percent Merlot from our Red Winery Vineyard, planted by my folks in 1973, and I think what attracts people to it is how it stands apart from our Cabernet rather than in its shadow; it is Merlot made to taste like Merlot. The aroma is dominated by red fruit and baking spices – raspberry, red cherry, nutmeg, and cloves. The finish is still a bit tart and tannic. All Hawkes Merlots have aged well, and this one shows a great deal of long-term potential. Drink 2016-2026.

The **2013 Home Chardonnay** is a single vineyard Chardonnay from the ranch on Chalk Hill Road where I grew up. The vineyard lies at the very southern edge of Alexander Valley where it joins the considerably cooler Russian River Valley, and our Chardonnay always reflects that borderline climate – citrus and an almost grassy character from the cooling fog off the river, balanced by riper, tropical notes of mango and lychee from the warmth of Alexander Valley. Underlying all of this is the signature minerality of this vineyard, something like sucking on a piece of slate. It sounds odd, I know, but somehow it works.

There are barrels of 2013 Cabernet in both tasting rooms and the wildflowers are just kicking into gear. Please come see us anytime.

Thanks for your support. - Jake