



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

February 22, 2021

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

I drank a bottle of wine the other day called La Toison D'Or. You might have heard of it. Roughly 2,800 years old, the single greatest bottle of wine ever made, etc. Big deal stuff. I was with my cousin, Remington. I got a letter from him, inviting me to come "evaluate" his cellar. He's 102. He lives in New Jersey and hangs out with Napoleon's grandson. They both love wine. They travel the world shooting things and competing in blind tastings, both have huge wine collections.

"Rick and I opened a bottle of Côte-Rôtie from the 1192 vintage on Tuesday," Remington told me in his last call.

Rick is Napoleon's grandson - Rick Bonaparte. Short for Richard, I assume. Or Ricard, maybe.

"Yeah?" I said.

"The bottle was a sort of earthenware jug and the wine itself was brick-colored dust. The cork had to be extracted with a dentist's vacuum. In the end, we snorted it while listening to Monteverdi's L'Orfeo."

"How was it?" I said.

"Oh, marvelous, of course. Incredible finish. No great Syrah reaches its peak without at least three centuries in the bottle."

"Totally," I said.

All my friends are charismatic losers. Part-time janitors. Tow truck drivers in southern Oregon. Carnies. Farmers. They mostly drink Schlitz. The last time I gave Jeremy a glass of our Single Vineyard Cabernet he looked in it and said, "where's the olive?"

I'm sort of an outcast by virtue of success. I'm not saying I'm rich. I just don't sleep in a ditch and eat ketchup for breakfast anymore. Sometimes I feel like a stranger in my own life. I like a good bottle of wine, but I like a good corn dog, too.

"What does that mean, 'evaluate my cellar?'," I asked Jeremy.

"It means get hammered," Jeremy said. "You accept. Let him know that I shall be accompanying you in a consulting capacity. Use those words: shall and consulting capacity."

"You're not invited," I said.

"Why?" Jeremy said. "You afraid Rick Bonaparte is gonna be there?"

"Yes," I said.

"Do I embarrass you?"

"Yes," I said.

Then Jeremy said, "Come on come on come on, man. You know I'm the original wine drinker, the wine stinker, the wine rinker dinker, the wine tinkerer, the wine winker, the –"

So we flew out. And I'll tell you this: the state of New Jersey goes on forever – not just slag heaps and abandoned chemical factories colonized by dogs, but nice old housing tracts and tree-lined streets, mountains clad in evergreen and meadows touched by moonlight. There was an iron gate and then a very long, straight drive between two rows of trees so stooped, so weighted with the responsibility of age that they created a passage through time,



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

with the future behind us and past ahead of us. There was the house.

“Total Dracula,” Jeremy said.

Cobblestones and a circular drive. A butler holding a lantern aloft. My cousin Remington was standing at the top of the stairs when we came in. He gestured grandly and coughed. Watching him come down the stairs was like watching a trapeze act with death on the line. I introduced Jeremy.

“My thanks, indeed, for making the journey,” Remington said. “How splendid to have another expert on hand. May I offer you some refreshment?”

“No refreshment needed, your honor,” Jeremy said. “We’re ready to start evaluating right away.”

The butler went on ahead and we followed Remington. I confess that I found myself resenting his pace. His walk was the rotation of a planet. Finally, a door slid aside and we descended into a cellar so vast that you could feel the void of it pulling at you in the dark. A light went on and then another, further away, and then another and so on, until many thousands of bottles of wine spread out before us.

“Good googly moogly,” Jeremy said.

“Yes, yes,” Remington said. “I was inspired by the great caves of Champagne, you see. Moet, I believe it is, has more than fourteen miles underground, not to mention myriad works of art, and so on.”

He waved a hand.

“All I’ve managed is four and a half kilometers and a few Rembrandts,” Remington said, “Poff.”

“Don’t beat yourself up, Count,” Jeremy said, “you’ve got some very worthwhile stuff here.”

We started with a bottle of Malvasia from the cellar of Charlemagne.

“Charlemagne, as I’m sure you know, was simply mad about seafood,” Remington said. “Malvasia may seem a pedestrian choice, but it’s a perfect, unobtrusive compliment to, let’s say, whole branzino roasted over a fire of stone pine or sun-dried octopus rubbed with yellow peppercorns and kumquat zest.”

“Or corn nuts,” Jeremy said. “Corn nuts go with everything.”

We drank on, through five hundred-year-old bottles of Gewürztraminer from the cliffs of the Nahe, through Cabernet Franc from the cellar of Cardinal Richelieu, through the Madeira of the American Revolution. Remington talked the whole time:

“Jefferson never went past noon without half a bottle of Malmsey, of course,” Remington said. “Arsenic was used as a preservative in those days. That’s how we ended up with the electoral college.”

It was about dawn that Rick Bonaparte showed up. We were upstairs in the foyer, taking a breather and drinking Perrier. He arrived in the backseat of a Bugatti pulled by draft horses. His cape trailed behind him. We introduced ourselves.

“I guess Rick James is a major influence, huh?” Jeremy said.

We went down to the cellar. Rick Bonaparte’s man servant, Gaston, came down after us, bumping a hand truck on the stairs. It was a huge bottle of something – a Balthazar, a Nebuchadnezzar. I’m not sure. It had a velvet curtain over it.



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

“Gently, you lout!” shouted Rick.

Rick kept on like that, some in English, some in French or whatever, until he had the bottle where he wanted it, then cleared his throat and put his heels together and pulled the curtain off like a matador.

“Wah wah,” Jeremy said. “A bottle of wine.”

“Is it,” Remington said, “could it be –”

“Behold,” Rick said, “La Toison D’Or!”

“The Golden Fleece,” said Remington.

“I thought that was like a vest,” Jeremy said.

“Trod by the feet of the goddess Athena in Alexandria,” Remington said, “quite literally the nectar of the Gods.”

Jeremy and I held the bottle while Gaston had at it with the corkscrew. Remington narrated, of course.

“Stopped with a cylinder of ram’s horn, the beast himself a god, offspring of Poseidon and Nephele.

Rebottled seven times. First, by incredible coincidence, in the town Nazareth –”

The cork, or whatever it was, came out with a sound like a gunshot.

“Bravo!” Remington shouted.

“Me first,” said Rick Bonaparte.

He took a metal cup out of his cape. Jeremy and I lifted the bottle while Gaston guided the neck of the bottle. Out came the wine.

“So,” Jeremy said, “what’d you think of the old Poison D’Or?”

We were back at Newark, sitting in the sports bar, drinking Clamato and waiting for our flight.

“Once in a lifetime,” I said.

“You know what it reminded me of?” Jeremy said.

“What?”

“Root beer. Without the fizz, obviously.”

I thought about it.

“I see where you’re coming from,” I said.

“Never underestimate the appeal of a good root beer,” Jeremy said.

“Amen,” I said.

We clinked glasses.

This will be the final shipment of our **2016 Pyramid Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon**. This is a rugged, mountainous vineyard with a propensity for producing incredibly dark, tannic wines. That signature tannin and darkness is certainly present in the 2016, but it’s more balanced than many past vintages. I love the aromatics and acid of the 2016. I get violets and fresh plums and currants. A hint of allspice. The palate is full of ripe blackberries. The finish is smooth and long and bone dry. The 2016 Pyramid is an easy, complex wine to enjoy right now, but I



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

think its balance makes it a particularly good candidate for aging.

In a brief digression on aging I'll say this: the best old wines are the ones that retain vibrancy while developing the profound, tertiary aromas and flavors that only come with age. In my experience, powerful, enchanting, lopsided wines don't age with the same grace as is often achieved by wines that start life with less apparent attention-getting charisma but more elegance. In short: a wine that starts out balanced stands a good chance of staying that way. So: drink now through 2040.

Most of you reading this letter have received a bottle or two of our **2016 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet Sauvignon**. This wine is 100% varietal, blended from all three of our vineyards - Pyramid, Stone, and Red Winery. 2016 is a dark, luscious vintage in Cabernet and this wine shows that: purple-hued and laced with dark fruit on the nose and palate, most notably blackberry and plum. It has a brambly, herbaceous character, too - a touch of thyme and sage and violet to balance the dark fruit. Today, this is an exciting, tumultuous wine that demands food. Give it a year or two and watch it get broader in every direction. Drink now through 2035.

Hawkes is a Cabernet house and, as such, our Merlot is bound to get short shrift. That's the world we live in. It's a world - a wine world - that tends to value power over elegance. That makes us lucky - we farm sites that are suited to produce the dark, tannic archetypes of Cabernet Sauvignon so prized in that varietal. But, one of them - Red Winery - has also proven itself to be a world-class site for Merlot.

We have produced every vintage of Merlot we've ever bottled from the same few acres of clay and hair loam on Red Winery Road since our inaugural vintage in 2002. Our customers and friends in the industry love this wine, and I do, too. It doesn't have the color or tannic intensity of our Cabernet, but it has a grace and elegance they rarely achieve. The **2018 Alexander Valley Merlot** is still young. There's a lot of fresh blueberry and blackberry here, along with the signature baking spice this wine always delivers - star anise, nutmeg, cinnamon. This wine has a long way to go. Drink now at a barbecue, drink in ten years with your best friend.

The best wines, as they (I) say, are made in the vineyard. Enter our **2019 Home Chardonnay**. This wine always comes from our family ranch on Chalk Hill Road, where, on a given day, it is about 5 degrees cooler than the rest of Alexander Valley. The vines grow in the sand and gravel of an ancient riverbed, and the wine expresses the character of its origins - flinty, saline, decidedly cool-climate. The 2019 is a touch richer than in most years - there's a layer of honey and toasted bread on the nose - but the finish is a flash of silver light - citrus, lemon verbena, a hint of salt. No new oak, all fresh fruit.

I miss you folks. Please take care of yourselves. We can't drink a glass of wine together if you're not here.

Thank you for your support.

-Jake