



# THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

September 6, 2015

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

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Friends -

I guess news of the drought is everywhere you look these days. I don't have to tell you that the northern half of the state almost burned down last month. My wife joined the volunteer fire brigade, went off to Yolo County, and left me here with the kids and the Volvo station wagon. She's a real go-getter, my wife, a real bull-by-the-horns type. She probably would have been a great football player, except that she has breasts and weighs 120 pounds. Still, I think she could have made something of herself as a violent athlete in one field or another.

Anyway, we stayed home and watched the smoke. It wasn't so bad. I could still breathe alright, although I didn't feel like eating bacon, which was odd. Mostly the kids and I just watched old John Candy movies and ate Hot Tamales, which if you don't know about them, are these synthetic cinnamon gummies that are painfully spicy and get stuck in your teeth. They're a lot of fun. My wife can't abide the smell, so I am forced to keep them as a guilty pleasure.

Well, there we were, watching *Splash* for the third time in two days when the front door opened, and there stood my wife. I don't know what time it was, somewhere in the dark. I stopped keeping track of the hours as soon as she left. I don't like clocks. They have always had the feeling of a conspiracy to me. My wife was dressed in a yellow jumpsuit and holding an axe. There was soot all over her face. Had she been dropped out of a plane on our front lawn? Why couldn't somebody have supplied her with a baby wipe? But it wasn't just the getup, she's a naturally scary woman. Angry is her everyday mode.

I was wearing my long underwear bottoms and no shirt. There were pieces of popcorn caught in the hair on my stomach. I tried to look nonchalant while I brushed them onto the carpet and hid them with my feet.

"Hi, honey," I said.

"What the hell is the matter with you, soldier?" she said when she saw the kids sitting on the couch in the dark, their eyes as big as saucers, the image of the TV floating there.

She hung her axe on the coat rack and went into the kitchen. I'm an enthusiastic cook, but I had not done a lot in the way of cleanup in her absence.

"Conserving water!" I yelped, but in actuality, didn't see the dirty dishes until she arrived.

Within fifteen minutes, the children had their pajamas on and were in bed.

"Goodbye," I said, tapping on the glass of their window.

My wife had asked me to sleep in the yard again. The situation was not unfamiliar to me. Could my children hear me? Did my voice frighten them, or was it simply swallowed by the wind? If I stayed out there forever, or wandered down to the train tracks and hopped on a freight run up to Portland, would they remember me as their father or would the smoke of memory swirl about their minds until there I was, swapping one-liners with John Candy, God rest his soul, a citizen of the imagination?

I had the sense to grab a six pack of beer on the way out. I went over to the chicken coop and sat on a stump, cracked a can, and looked off at the hills.

"Well, ladies," I said. "It looks like we're together again."

The wind was blowing. I knew the air was full of smoke, but I couldn't even smell it anymore. Up along the ridge above our Red Winery Vineyard, I could see the orange glow of a fire painted in a ragged line across the night sky.

"Not to worry," I said, "this is all under control."

Harvest is upon us; a few days ago, we harvested and pressed the 2015 Home Chardonnay, a fact that inspired me to look in the file for last season's lab work to see how the two vintages compare on paper. The numbers on these two vintages – brix, acid, etc. – are nearly identical, but the appearance of the grapes and their flavor are

drastically different. 2015 has been a difficult vintage for Chardonnay – some blocks are still green and taste like apple, others are already golden yellow and full of honey and tropical flavors. 2015 will have to be a mélange of different lots to create the flavors I'm after, whereas 2014, the vintage in this shipment, was perfect in terms of weather and made winemaking easy.

The **2014 Home Chardonnay** was harvested in the second week of September, put through our destemmer, fermented in a stainless steel tank, and sent to age on the lees (dead yeast cells) for about six months in old French barrels. Extended lees contact gives our Chardonnay a slightly bready aroma and makes the mouthfeel a bit creamier without involving ML. The result is a combination of bright citrus and tropical fruit aromas with a touch of honey and toasted bread, and a clean, bright finish that reminds one of the cool climate and mineral-rich soils of the vineyard.

In 2012 the conditions allowed our Merlot an unprecedented opportunity to hang on the vine and develop incredible depth of flavor without threat of rain. The summer was long and mild, and the fall was unusually dry. Our **2012 Merlot** is a pure expression of fruit: a single vineyard, one-hundred-percent Merlot from our Red Winery Vineyard. We used a light touch of new oak, leaving the vintage and site to speak for themselves. The nose is dominated by black cherry with a touch of baking spice, and the finish is long and, as always, slightly tart. For all its power, this wine is more about balance than it is about strength. Drink now or age a good ten years.

I feel as though I have been waiting to release the 2012's since before we harvested the grapes. Part of the euphoric feeling I associate with this vintage has to do with how perfect it was, but my enthusiasm is also a reflection of how difficult the years that preceded it were. In 2011, it never got warm, then rained during harvest; in 2010, the grapes were sunburned in September, then rained on during harvest; in 2009, it rained and rained during harvest; in 2008, we had the worst spring frosts in a hundred years and half the grapes were ruined before they even had a chance to get rained on, then they got rained on a little bit during harvest.

In 2012, none of that happened. It is the first of the drought vintages – a dry summer followed by a dry fall, followed by the best Cabernets we have ever made. So: each of you is getting at least a few bottles of our **2012 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet**. It's a blend of fruit from all three of our vineyards – Red Winery, Pyramid, and Stone. This wine is composed of about two dozen lots of Cabernet harvested throughout the month of October, crushed, fermented, and aged separately, then blended, barrel by barrel, to make this wine.

I last tasted these at six this morning, just before my first cup of coffee. Here are my impressions: all the 2012 Cabernets are incredibly dark. The Alexander Valley, although it is lighter than our single vineyards, is still intense red-black. The nose is all fresh berries, ripe and lush, and the texture is soft and round on the mid-palate, then closed and dusty on the finish. The mouthfeel of this wine is not exactly what the smell would lead you to believe – it's ripe, but delicate. Likewise, the acid is very strong but there is not a hint of greenness. Like many of my favorite Cabernets, there's something paradoxical about it – very powerful, but very delicate as well. Balance, is I guess what you call that. The 2012 will show drastic improvement with a few years in the cellar and will last for at least another ten years after that.

Our **2012 Red Winery Cabernet** comes from a vineyard at the base of the Mayacamas Mountains where we have been farming since 1973. We have twenty acres of vineyard there, about fifteen of which is Cabernet, and this lot of wine comes from a single block, up at the top of the hill on the vineyard's eastern edge.

The 2012 Red Winery is as tannic a wine as I have ever tasted from this vineyard. It is noticeably bigger and rounder than the AV. It shows stewed cherries, mint, and a little bit of cedar on the finish. Not close to ready. In some ways, it feels like a shame to be evaluating it now at all. Still, as is the case with great vintages of Cabernet, this wine is so bursting with character, so exciting and exuberant, that even if it is a bit rough, it makes for very interesting drinking. All that said, I'd give this wine at least a year in the cellar before drinking more than a bottle or two. The potential rewards are too great to be short-changed. Drink 2017 through 2030.

The summer is already coming to a close, and our last music and food party of the season will take place on September 26th at our tasting room in Alexander Valley. Folkies, Richie and the Yolos, will be playing on the patio and Jimtown Store will be cooking Tres Tacos in the back garden. Come out and let us by you a glass of our delicious 2014 Vin Gris before it's gone.

Happy drinking and thanks for your support. – Jake