



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

September 15, 2017

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

Friends – As wine club members, most of you are probably aware of my previous career as an elite, like, science person. Given this experience, I'm in a unique position to be able to reassure everybody about the fate of our species in the face of all this historically lousy weather. I have good news and bad news.

Bad news: our planet is about used up.

Good news: no big deal.

I've been to Mars. This was back in '94, when I was more available to new experiences than I am today. The years have really frozen me up. I've become a thinker instead of a doer. Knowledge, while a buzz word in the scientific community, leads to hardening of the imaginative arteries. Thinking is a barrier to experience. "Seek not to remember, but to forget." I forget who said that.

Let's not desemble: politics are on everyone's mind. While I obviously can't talk about that here, I can use it as a metaphor. Prophets from the world of AM radio have been talking for years about the idea of the Deep State. This is the theory that, beneath the facade maintained by our democratically elected government officials, there exists a cadre of amoral badasses who actually get things done – wars, dams, the occasional bill to fund education – while the politicians we elect spend two and a half hours every day eating lunch.

Science works pretty much the same way. You think some guy from North Dakota invented the particle accelerator? Give me a break. Never have I been surrounded by more people eating potato chips and watching YouTube videos on the company dime than during my brief tenure at Lawrence Livermore Labs. I try not to hold the white coat thing against doctors, but as far as I'm concerned, they're all in the same club. I'm here for the drugs, bud, spare me the "expertise." You know what I mean? People in glasses love to hear themselves talk.

I'm getting ahead of myself. We were talking about Mars.

The real work of science, including planetary exploration, takes place in the desert east of Los Angeles. The prototype for the Mars Pathfinder, the officially-released version of which landed on the Red Planet on July 4th, 1997, was actually made by my friend, Doug, three years earlier in a junkyard somewhere near Palm Springs. Doug is the kind of guy we'd have on Mount Rushmore if people could handle the truth. They can't. Missing teeth and hair down the back of your neck are generally disqualifiers for celebrity status in the science world, even if there is a well-established correlation between these physical attributes and high-level brain function. As usual, historical bias wins the day.

Desert junkyards are a natural birthplace for the innovations that will eventually make life on other planets possible. After all, the people who live there have already given up on earth and sought solace in a life sustained by machinery and set in a red-hued mineral wasteland. Plus, the absence of organized society relieves one's mental constipation that prevents the sort of non-linear leaps in thought we're going to need if we want to get off this exhausted rock and realize the true destiny of our species: lords of space. The Enlightenment was doomed the day it became taboo to drink wine in the morning.

"Yeah, man," Doug said when I first met him. "Mars is a trip, but it ain't that bad."

As I think I mentioned, this was in my travelling days, when Jeremy and I were acquainting ourselves with the great American countryside, living on No Doz and Coors Banquet which, in those simpler times, was just called Coors. I'd tell the part about how we got there, but it escapes me at the moment. Probably in a car or a train. Maybe on foot. Regardless, first the city lights and then plant and animal life gradually receded from the landscape until we arrived wherever it was we were, in the company of broken cars and free-thinking scientists. It was a beautiful evening. That much I remember. There is nothing like the change of light in the desert.

Doug wasn't talking about *the* Mars, of course. He was referring to the Mars Dome, a structure he had recently completed and begun conducting experiments in. It was very big, maybe not quite as big as the "real" Mars but maybe three, four stories high and more than a hundred feet across, and made primarily of sheet metal and used mattresses. Inside, Doug had assembled various pieces of debris to simulate the Martian environment: broken



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refrigerators, tires, animal skeletons. Some ditches and a hot tub pump to simulate Martian rivers, a phenomenon not discovered by NASA until 2015. I found the Dome so remarkable that I wondered, as I opened another beer, why we even needed to bother with the planet version of Mars at all.

Remember, this was back when the earth was in good enough condition that only visionaries like Doug and that Tesla guy could see the need for planetary migration.

“I had my friend, Nichols, over at Airgas dump a truckload of dry ice in there to lower the temperature to 80 below and virtually eliminate oxygen from the atmosphere while I rode a ten speed in circles and smoked Pall Malls.”

“I love Pall Malls,” Jeremy said.

“My ex-girlfriend, Renée, took my blood out and replaced it with Mercury to simulate Mars’ gravitational pull.”

“That sounds intense,” Jeremy said.

“That’s exactly how I’d describe it,” Doug said, “intense.”

At some point, it became dark. There were the cosmos. Daylight, like mental clarity, has the effect of illuminating one set of realities while obscuring another. It’s always a conundrum, whether or not to turn on the light.

“The only thing left is travel simulation,” Doug said.

He went on to explain how he had developed a new method of space travel involving a butane canon in which the vehicle’s peak velocity flirted with the speed of light. It had been proven to work with cans of 7-up.

“Only problem,” Doug said. “7-up doesn’t have human consciousness.”

“That’s what separates us from the beasts,” Jeremy said.

“I’ve always thought I’d make a great explorer,” I said.

“You?” said Jeremy. “Boff! You couldn’t handle sensory deprivation for five minutes.”

Here is how space travel works:

Drink a bottle of Nyquil.

Put in ear plugs.

Have Doug wrap you head to toe in duct tape: eyes, nose, ears, mouth, arms, legs. Make sure the sticky side is out, or it’s going to be a tough landing.

At this point, your existence is a technicality. The paths of time and space are converging black lines on a dark screen. Perhaps you remain in this state for thirty seconds, perhaps several years. All the conventional, binary modes of thought that plague us on planet Earth – life vs death, Pinot Noir vs Cabernet, the Giants vs the Dodgers – are rendered irrelevant.

Even as you emerge from the stupor of interplanetary travel and find yourself standing alone on the barren wilderness of a new planet, even as your mind clears to take in this world, a world void of the things you once held dear – water, television, pork – the absence of those things doesn’t trouble you the way it would have back on Earth. And, you know what, even after you return to Earth and get back in your car and drive off to wherever, once you’ve been to Mars, a part of you never comes back.

That sounds bad, but it’s actually good. Because that part, the part of you left on Mars, has already seen all this – fires, floods, the unraveling of nations – and knows that everything is going to be alright. Or maybe it won’t.

Either way, no big deal.



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By the time most of you read this letter, our 2017 Chardonnay will be fermenting. We have been growing Chardonnay on the ranch where I grew up on Chalk Hill Road since 1972, and I continue to be amazed by how consistent this vineyard is. Even in very hot years like this one or like **2015** – the vintage included in this shipment – we never seem to pick **Chardonnay** before the second week of September.

While technically in the Alexander Valley, this vineyard lies at the very southern edge of the appellation, on a foggy tributary of the Russian River. The cool mornings supplied by fog are what keeps the acid up in the Chardonnay fruit, giving us the luxury of allowing it to hang while riper flavors like pineapple and mango develop alongside the citrus and green apple this vineyard delivers every year. That same acid – usually around 7 grams per liter – is also what keeps Hawkes Chardonnay so fresh and vibrant in the bottle. Every morning, when I open the door to our tank room and smell the air filled with the aroma of newly fermenting Chardonnay, I feel grateful to have a vineyard like this to work with.

This shipment marks the release of our **2014 Merlot**. 2014 was probably my favorite vintage of red wine I have ever been involved with. It's a bit surreal, after so many years of tasting and fawning over these wines to be actually releasing them.

The 2014 Merlot comes from a few acres on our Red Winery Vineyard, planted by my dad in 1973. It is 100% Merlot, aged for 18 months in French oak barrels. The signature virtue of the fruit from Red Winery is a bright beam of red cherry that shines through all the wines this vineyard produces. 2014 is a vintage of great, fine, layered tannin. That tannin supplies fascinating texture and depth, and it should give the best wines from 2014 the ability to cellar for a good, long time. I recommend doing that with this Merlot. The vineyard is only about two acres, we don't make much of it, and what little we make should be consumed in its prime. Drink 2020 – 2025.

There are two 2013 Cabernet Sauvignons available for this shipment:

The **2013 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet Sauvignon** is a combination of about twenty lots of Cab harvested from all three of our vineyards over the course of about six weeks beginning in mid-September and ending in late October. All these lots are fermented and barreled separately, then blended, piece by piece to create this wine. To be honest, winemakers don't have much to do by way of blending in a dream vintage like 2013. Every lot of Cabernet that went into this wine was excellent, and had I blended it in different proportions, the finished product would certainly have been different, but it might have been just as good. One great wine plus one great wine usually equals one great wine. Deep, huh?

All that said, what I like most about our best Cabernets is their great varietal character. I don't aim to make great red wine, I aim to make great Cabernet. Tannin and the tendency to improve with age are integral to what I associate with any Cabernet in that category, and they matter more to me than opulence and seamlessness in youth. I like dust. I like semi-sweet chocolate. I like a Cabernet that is better at ten years old than it is at five years old. I don't think the 2013's will disappoint on that score.

This is the last shipment of our **2013 Pyramid Vineyard Cabernet**. The Pyramid Vineyard is a sprawling, 120 acre ranch in the mountains between the southern edge of Alexander Valley and the northern edge of Knights Valley. We farm a total of about 24 acres of vineyard there in eight blocks, each with a soil type and exposure unique enough to make a number of remarkably different Cabernets from this one ranch every year. What every wine from Pyramid has in common is intense, purple color and dark, tannic fruit. That vineyard character, combined with the historically great vintage of 2013 has produced a wine that isn't just powerful, but is balanced and floral. The freshness of this wine is amazing. I think that's a good reason to at least try it today. I also think it's going to improve in the bottle for at least another five years.



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We conclude our Summer Nights concerts at our tasting room in Alexander Valley on September 16th, but you're welcome here anytime. It looks like harvest will wrap up early this year, and October should be a nice, mellow month here in the valley. I hope you'll come see us.

Meanwhile, don't drive faster than you can see.

Thank you for your support.

– Jake