



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

November 8, 2019

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

There was a fire. It started in the mountains, miles from the boy's home. It was nighttime. The smell of burning pines woke him, and he went out and looked north and saw it: an orange line between the gray scale of the mountains and the black sky. The wind was blowing. It tore leaves from the giant silver maple tree in the yard. The leaves piled around the base of the house, talking to each other and darting back and forth. The boy had two daughters and a wife. They were asleep in the house and he went in and woke them.

"Is our house going to burn?" the boy's daughters asked, looking up at him from their beds. It was dark in the house, dark in their room, and he could only see their moon faces and their shining eyes. The darkness caused him to hear their voices more clearly than he usually did. Children are always something new. That is what makes them incomparable. The boy sat on the sides of their beds, one at a time, and touched their faces. He thought things that he knew their minds would hear, then he stood up.

"This house will never burn," he said. "But you have to leave. Get the things you need and put them in a bag."

Mostly, his daughters brought stuffed animals. Some of them were the same stuffed animals he had as a kid. There was a family of bears all named Smoky and a little donkey with a red bridle and a bell around its neck that didn't have a name. There were dogs and rabbits, a walrus and a seal. When all the stuffed animals were packed, there was a little bit of room left for underwear and socks and a set of watercolor paints.

"I don't have paper," one of his daughters said. "Should I bring paper?"

"Paper is easy to find," his other daughter said.

"That's right," the boy said. "There's a lot of paper in the world."

Standing in the driveway, they could see that the fire had grown a great deal. The boy and his wife stood outside the car and allowed themselves to look at it for a moment. Then they kissed. They had been together for almost twenty years. They had slept on floors and made love in hotel rooms and eaten omelets naked and drunk thousands of bottles of wine and buried relatives and had children but he still felt they had a long way to go.

"I'll talk to you tomorrow," he said.

"OK," his wife said.

He watched the car pull out and drive off, the little station wagon packed with people and animals and stuffed animals, the dark road, the trees waving their arms, leaves blowing like a river across the ground.

The boy put the things he thought he would need to fight the fire on the back of his truck. He put shovels and a chainsaw and big barrels of water and buckets and extra gasoline for the truck and the saw. In the cab, he put the things he thought he would need for himself – bananas and whiskey and coffee, the letters of William Butler Yeats, a sleeping bag, a picture of his mother dressed as a flamenco dancer. Then he drove into the mountains.

The mountains were huge, and it had always seemed to the boy, went on forever. One of the great things about mountains is that they are unknowable – the boy had played in their snows and hiked them and cut their trees for firewood. He had slept in them and eaten some of their animals and befriended others but still, for all that, he did not feel that he would ever know or understand the mountains completely. This was a source of joy to the boy, for his favorite thing in the world was to learn something new.

"When there are no more things to learn in the world or when there are no animals with the will to learn those things, that is when the world will be dead," thought the boy.

And he was right, for it was knowledge and the quest for it that had given his people life, and if that life was taken away it would be taken not by fire or flood or buttheads waving guns, it would be taken by ignorance.

And so he drove into the mountains, where the fire was.

Everyone reading this letter will soon be drinking Cabernet. Both bottlings included here, the Alexander Valley and the Pyramid single vineyard, are from the 2015 vintage. The Cabernets of 2015 have turned out to be



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one of the great surprises of my winemaking career. Much like 2019, it was a hot, somewhat compressed vintage. At the time, I felt the grapes looked and tasted uneven – some were slightly puckered while others still tasted unready. Forced to choose between waiting to harvest and allowing things to raisin and picking early when some fruit might not be ready, I chose the latter. Tasting the wine in its youth, I found it tannic and even a bit sharp. Tasting those same wines now, I find them incredibly fresh and lively.

I have said time and time again that I love the 2012, 2013, and 2014 vintages but, frankly, I think the 2015 has aromatics and fruit those wines could benefit from. This realization has informed my picking decisions since: expect the 2017, 2018, and 2019 vintages to show a little less darkness and a little more brightness than some previous vintages. Here's hoping.

The **2015 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet** is 100 percent varietal and composed of 55 percent Pyramid fruit, 30 percent Red Winery, and 15 percent Stone. The influence of the Pyramid is pronounced: the 2015 is laced with its signature black fruit – blackberry, black cherry, currant. But, there are other, brighter, more nuanced aspects, too, especially in the aroma – crushed bramble from Stone and baking spice from Red Winery. That brightness and a slightly herbaceous character give this wine a freshness and vivacity that make it not just delicious but immediately and repeatedly pleasurable to consume. Some Cabernet starts out delicious but feels ponderous and over-heavy after half a glass. The 2015 Alexander Valley Estate continues to excite and demand attention. Drink now through 2030.

Every year, the Pyramid Vineyard Cabernet is a selection of the best lots from one of the most dramatic Cabernet vineyards in the county, a steep and exposed series of hills in the mountains between Chalk Hill and Knights Valley. The **2015 Pyramid Cabernet** comes from two blocks with slopes of up to 45 degrees, where the soil is broken volcanic material mixed with round rock from old riverbeds carried up through the hills by thousands of years of seismic activity. It's a dense purple wine with aromatics of fresh plum, baking chocolate, coffee, and a touch of that same wild bramble I get in the Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet. It spent about 20 months in French oak, most of it neutral. Drink now through 2035.

I am lucky enough to make Chardonnay every year from our Stone Vineyard on Chalk Hill Road. My parents planted the vineyard here in 1972, and it's the ranch I grew up on. This is a unique site – it lies at the junction of the Russian River and Alexander Valley and the wines from it, depending on the vintage, exhibit the signature character of each appellation to differing degrees. The **2017 Home Chardonnay** definitely shows the influence of the cool, Russian River climate: green apple, honeydew, wet slate. It was aged on the lees for six months, a process that has a tempering, softening effect on what is otherwise a very crisp and racy wine.

We're sending out two different vintages of our Estate Merlot in this shipment. Some of you are receiving the **2016 Alexander Valley Merlot**, some the **2017 Alexander Valley Merlot**. Both come from the same vineyard on Red Winery Road that my mom and dad planted in 1973, but these two vintages show a marked difference in character. The 2016 is dark all the way through – black cherry, plum, bittersweet chocolate. The 2017, on the other hand, is very floral and bright. The color is brilliant purple and the aromatics are dominated by violet. Both of these wines are delicious right now, but should age very well, too. With age, you can expect to see the immediately appealing fruit that both the 2016 and the 2017 show, to soften and recede slightly, allowing room for the tertiary aromatics that make old Bordeaux varietals so fascinating: tobacco, leather, graphite. These wines will only get more interesting in the next five years. They should be good to drink for at least the next ten.

That's all I've got for today, folks. If I told you how beautiful it is in Alexander Valley today, you probably wouldn't believe me. I'll tell you anyway: it's the most beautiful place on earth.

Thank you for your support.

-Jake