



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

November 10, 2017

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

Friends –

“I’ve still got it,” Jeremy said.

“Got what?” I said.

“I could escape from Alcatraz. No problem.”

“Yah,” I said. “Uh huh.”

Was that the subject of conversation? I couldn’t remember.

“Sea-At-All ring a bell? Puget Sound?” Jeremy said. “I was reared in that briny bosom.”

“Briny bosom?” I said. “For Christ’s sake. What are you doing?”

He was unlacing his shoes. They were – I don’t know what you call them – fancy men’s shoes, the kind with the itty-bitty laces. This was in the lobby bar of The Huntington, which is named for the robber baron Collis P. Huntington and is a hotel for rich people. Back when Jeremy and I worked for our money, we used to stand out on the sidewalk drinking Ten High and leering through the windows at the waitresses. Now here we sat at the bar, tipping back fifteen dollar glasses of gin like grown-ups, by which I mean zombies.

“Look!” Jeremy said.

His feet were white and had the imprint of his socks on them. They looked like you could give them a sunburn with a flashlight.

“What am I looking for, specifically?” I said.

Jeremy put his finger between his toes.

“Don’t do that in here,” I said.

“Webbing,” Jeremy said. “See, webbing!”

There was no webbing.

“My uncle Marlin was the first man to swim around the Horn of Africa.”

“That’s a made-up name,” I said. “You just made that up right now.”

“No, I didn’t,” Jeremy said.

“Remember when you said you could ‘throw down like Dominique Wilkins?’”

“I can,” Jeremy said.

“You can’t,” I said. “And you don’t have a cousin named Ramsey Hopper.”

“Relevance, your honor?”

The best thing about any place in San Francisco is the view. In the bar of The Huntington, there was none. Pushing through the doors was like being born, or like salvation. What I mean is that I knew what it was to be alive again. As much as I love bars, I’m always relieved to leave them, as though I’ve slipped the noose of destiny. Which for a few hours, is true. Need I mention that Jeremy was still talking?

“It’s in the blood,” he said. “Mine has the ability to process oxygen at a rate two hundred and fifty percent more efficiently than that of the average endurance athlete. Yup. It’s got the texture of three-bean chili. Good luck getting that stuff in a syringe. My uncle Marlin used to sell his on the black market to horse trainers.”

“Yuck,” I said.

“It’s a heartless profession,” Jeremy said.



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Everywhere was downhill from where we stood. The metaphorical value of that statement is incidental. Walking was effortless. Eventually, we stood on the shore of the bay. Well, not right on the shore. There were some buildings in the way. It was that area just east of Fisherman's Wharf, where there is still a section of the city left over from the 19th Century: low wooden buildings, boats, unpleasant smells. In the wee hours of the morning, I have seen it teeming with the city fathers of yore, old and white-bearded now, clad in cable knit sweaters and tiny bathing suits, smoking pipes and jumping in the bay to test their mettle. They were at the center of a collapsing star. San Francisco. The West. What has become of you? Standing there outside the South End Rowing club, I felt an uncomfortable kinship with the dead. Luxury is a slippery slope with an abyss at the bottom.

"I'll need a pilot," Jeremy said.

He was out on the dock on the far side of the club, engaged in another, more extensive disrobement. Jeremy has the body of an empty banana peel, but he carries it with such pride and self-assurance that it looks almost normal.

"For fallen!" he shouted, vaulting into the darkness.

Well, I thought, *he's dead*.

There are rocks down there. Rocks and pieces of old boats and broken bottles. Bodies.

I ran to the rail. No, Jeremy wasn't dead. It pains me to say this: I have come to believe he will never die.

There was a rack on the dock with half a dozen of those sardine-shaped row boats on it. There were oars, too. I wasn't sure if they were like, real, or just for decoration. I dragged one down and tapped on it like a watermelon. What sound was I hoping to hear? Does a desirable watermelon sound hollow or thick?

It was not difficult to spot Jeremy. His back looked like a reflection of the moon floating on the black water of the bay. I rowed up beside him. How cold is the water of San Francisco Bay, you ask? Cold enough that it hurts when you dip your hand in it for a moment.

"That's it!" I said to Jeremy. "Stroke, stroke."

Is that what you're supposed to say? He was barely moving. The sound of his breathing was alarming. I hoped he couldn't hear himself. It would be bad for morale.

"How far have I got left?" Jeremy said.

I looked up at the light of Alcatraz Island far across the bay. That distance could not have seemed more impossible to fathom if Jeremy and I were insects and Alcatraz was the planet Mars.

"You're practically there," I said. "No problem."

I might as well end this story here, in the water. It continues, of course. Jeremy did eventually reach Alcatraz, me with him. An oil tanker, a sailboat, and the musician Paul Westerberg, formerly of the Chicago band, The Replacements, all figure in. But reaching the island wasn't the end, either. Nor was our subsequent return to the mainland or our shared revelation, headed north across the Golden Gate Bridge, that there's a fortune to be made in the hydroponic cultivation of specialty mushrooms.

"You know what maitakes – Hen of the Woods, in other words – are worth?" Jeremy was saying by then. He was wrapped in a wool blanket given to him by Westerberg, drinking beer from a pewter stein. "Are you aware of the value of enokis on the open market? Lion's mane? Hedgehog?"

"It's worth it for the names alone," I said.

"Chanterelles are going for upwards of thirty dollars a pound," Jeremy said. "That's more than gold!"



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“Well-” I said.

“It’s a bonanza! It’s wide open!”

Where does it end? Does it?

Clean teeth, a nice couch, the respect of your peers – the myriad burdens of financial stability can feel impossible to bear at times. But they aren’t. The key to life is an absolute, unwavering commitment to self-destruction. With that, and the right friends, no amount of success is too great to be overcome. In the end, we all get what we’re looking for; it’s just a matter of time.

This is always an interesting time of year for me to write wine notes, because the harvest is so fresh in my mind. I’ll begin with our **2015 Home Chardonnay**.

The vintage included in your club package, although quite different from this recent one, presented many of the same challenges and gifts. As with all our wines, the strength of our Chardonnay springs from its source, in this case, the vineyard on Chalk Hill Road where I grew up. It’s a fantastic sight for Chardonnay – the soil is sand and gravel and volcanic ash, and the climate is warmer than Russian River and cooler than the rest of Alexander Valley. From experience, I know the potential of the vineyard is huge. In the right year, at the right time, our freshly fermenting Chardonnay will contain a vast spectrum of aromas and flavors from lychee fruit and mango on the tropical end to cut grass and wet stones evocative of the cool nights the vineyard enjoys.

The main challenge, as I see it, is to simply harvest it at the right time. If I am being honest, when I smell and taste our Chardonnay in the tank or the barrel or the glass, I always feel both elated and disappointed. When Chardonnay is ripe, or nearly ripe, the flavors evolve very quickly. Every day, some new aroma or flavor appears while another fades. No matter how much I like it, I always feel I could have done better. That will have to wait for next year.

Meanwhile, I’m certainly proud of what we’ve put in the mail. In winemaking, my goal is to represent a certain time and place as clearly as possible; no new oak, no secondary fermentation, just a little ranch off Chalk Hill Road in the second week of September 2015.

The **2014 Alexander Valley Merlot** is, as usual, 100% varietal and sourced exclusively from our Red Winery Vineyard, planted by my dad in 1973. It is aged in French oak casks, a few of them new, most of them old. Of all the great drought vintages – 2012, 2013, and 2014 – I have long said I like 2014 best of all. As I write this, I feel that the 2014 may be the best I’ve ever been a part of making. The fruit components and acid are beautifully balanced here, and the signature dusty cocoa tannin that is present in all our 2014 Cabernets, lies just beneath the surface, giving this Merlot a grip and intensity it doesn’t usually achieve.

My frank advice on when to drink this wine is to do it as often as possible. I believe it will age interestingly for a decade, but I think it shows well enough now that you are doing neither the wine or yourself a disservice by opening a bottle today to knock back with a burnt rare steak.

The same is not true of the **2014 Red Winery Cabernet**. Although my wine club manager screams every time she hears me say it, I think this wine could use a year or two of age. This Cabernet is definitely the most mild-mannered of the four we produce every year and yes, there is plenty of generous black cherry and chocolate character already. But as I’ve mentioned, there is something magical in the tannins of 2014. It gives all the Cabernet from this vintage a certain density and grit that promises amazing results with a little time in the cellar. It’s not an improvement in flavor or aroma that I’d be after in aging the 2014 Cabernets, but an improvement in texture – the sensual dimension, the feeling of the wine in your mouth, the body of it. I’ll stop now. I recommend drinking the 2014 Red Winery Cabernet sometime between 2019 and World War Three.

Everybody besides me thinks 2013 is the greatest vintage in the history of the region. Though I may prefer



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the 2014, it's a close call. Our **2013 Alexander Valley Estate Cab** is a big, tannic, juicy brawler of a wine. It is 100% Cabernet, blended from a number of small lots sourced from across our three estate vineyards. It was aged in French oak for about eighteen months, about 30% new. Past vintages have spent more time in the barrel but, I felt it was critical to get the 2013 in the bottle and preserve its wonderful freshness and intensity of fruit. Tasting it now, I think it was the right decision. If you want to make people happy, including yourself, open a bottle of this wine.

Those of you on our Holiday Magnum List have received a 1.5 liter bottle of our **2011 Alexander Valley Cabernet**. 2011 was a long, cool growing season and this Cabernet has a delicacy and finesse that recalls the vintage vividly. Whereas our Cabernets are usually dominated by dark fruits and tertiary aromatics, I find the 2011 to show more brightness and red fruit – red cherry, even a touch of raspberry and dried rose petals. This delicacy and bright acidity make the 2011 uniquely suited to pair with all sorts of holiday fare, from Thanksgiving turkey to Christmas ham.

I hope you enjoy these wines, and I hope to see you soon. Be well.

– Jake