



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

November 11, 2016

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

Friends -

“What would you say is the meaning of life?” I said to Jeremy.

We were barbecuing, down at his place in LA. His wife had just given birth to their first child. She sat out by the pool, holding the baby against her breast. She was wearing one of those white dust masks you saw a lot in airports back when we all thought we were about to get bird pneumonia or whatever it was. You can't be too careful I guess. Jeremy was in protect mode, too. He was wearing full-length pants and a little apron that said, “PROUD NEW DAD!” I couldn't tell for sure, but I'm not even sure he was fat anymore. It was all a little depressing.

My wife was not wearing a mask or an apron. She was singing Father John Misty's *I'm Writing a Novel* and drinking Hamm's from a Mason jar. One of us, at least, was still alive, unburdened by the doubts that cripple adulthood. My heart surged with gratitude for her, but I let it pass without saying anything. One never knows what a proper display of affection is, these days. My wife is a minimalist in that department. I followed her lead.

“Sex,” Jeremy said, moving the hotdogs around on the barbecue. “I'd say it'd have to be sex.”

“Really?” I said.

“Is that wrong?” Jeremy said. “Is it money? Darn it. It was on the tip of my tongue to say money and I chickened out. Always go with your first instinct – I remember that from the SATs.”

“I don't know,” I said. “I thought it might be something like fatherhood or preserving the wonders of the natural world for generations to come.”

“Yeah,” Jeremy said, “that, too.”

Time meandered on in its usual, pleasant manner – full of sunshine and helicopters and gin – a typical Los Angeles day. As the sun went down, I watched my wife recite the lyrics to Biggie Smalls' masterpiece, *Hypnotize*, while drinking something pink from a vintage cocktail coupe. Who else, I thought, has this combination of trashiness and cultivation?

“Hey,” I said to her, trying to sound casual, “you've still got it, honey.”

“Stand back,” she said.

“Come on,” I said, and I held up my hand, as if to embrace her.

Her hand went in her purse. There's pepper spray in there. I didn't have to see it to know.

“I'm backing off,” I said, raising my hands.

I know this behavior by my wife seems extreme. But, if you knew the things I've done, you'd understand. I began eschewing tonic water, vermouth, anything I felt confused the directness we all admire so much in gin. My tongue felt like a fish.

“Hey,” I said to Jeremy, “remember when we went bow hunting in Griffith Park? You still do that?”

“I don't hunt in LA much, anymore,” Jeremy said. “The wildlife here is pretty savvy. I mostly satisfy my yen for living close to the land by drinking smoothies and driving a Volvo.”

“Remember that time we went to collect the money Jack Nicholson owed my cousin, Leonard?”

“Jack's a hard man,” Jeremy said, bouncing the baby, “I don't care if he did marry Ally McBeal.”

“I had him,” I said, making claws. “I had him in my grip!”

“I don't think so,” Jeremy said.

“Remember that time we struck gold in the Claremont hills?” I said.

“That wasn't gold,” Jeremy said.

“We were this close,” I said.

“To what?” Jeremy said.

“Leave me alone,” I think I said. “Stop criticizing me! I'm working on an idea!”

Then I had a dream. In the dream, I was a robot. When I walked down the street, it was like people didn't



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even see me. I had no idea what my purpose was, what I had been built for. I kept expecting to be deployed in some way – maybe I was a garden bot, maybe I was an elite weapon of destruction, maybe I had been programmed extensively in the art of pleasure. I never found out. I just walked around all day, waiting for directions, then went back to my apartment, plugged in my USB chord, drew the shutters on my eyes, and waited for the heat sensors on my skin to register the dawn.

When I opened my eyes, it wasn't dawn, but the color of LA at night: orange, I guess. I was lying in a chaise longue. I raised myself to standing, went around the pool, in the back door, found my wife in Jeremy's house, and lay down by her side. She snored happily. Then, without warning, without waking even, she said: "I love you."

Was she in the midst of a dream herself, speaking to someone else? I didn't know. Dear reader, I still don't. What if not knowing, *definitely not knowing*, is enough? What if it's better, even, than knowing? For if we knew where we were going, what then? Is it better to live with direction or live in wonder?

Give me wonder.

(Ah, that turned out to be a sort of happy one.)

Most everyone reading this has received bottles of both our 2012 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet and our 2013 Stone Cabernet. These wines are both lovely, in my completely unbiased opinion, and very different:

The **2012 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet** constitutes our last shipment from this great vintage. It's one hundred percent Cabernet Sauvignon, and is a combination of fruit from all three of our estate vineyards. After bottling a given wine, I usually leave it alone, don't taste it, put it out of my head for as long as possible. At that point, the fate of the wine is sealed and I prefer not to agonize about what I might have done differently (as is my tendency). But, in preparation for writing these notes, I tasted the 2012 AV a number of times over the course of a few weeks. And I was struck by how lively, bright and acidic it is in comparison to our single vineyards from both 2012 and 2013. It reminds me more than I ever thought it would of our earlier vintages, most notably of 2004, a vintage that took years to reach its full potential. That wine – the 2004 – started life full of red and black cherry, floral enticing on the nose, but piercingly acidic with a mouthfeel like granite. About ten years in, it was fabulous. The fruit came out and blossomed and the varietal character of aged Cabernet – tobacco, leather, a touch of smoked meat – was there to balance and elevate it. I expect the same from the 2012. Whatever easy, attractive fruit character a wine shows in its youth, that lushness must be balanced by acid and tannin for the wine to age well. I anticipate great things from the 2012 in the cellar.

Speaking of lush, I just tasted our newly-released **2013 Stone Vineyard Cabernet** for the first time in quite a while. Wowee. 2013 was a warm, ripe vintage, just the sort of vintage in which this vineyard thrives. I grew up on this ranch, which is at the very southern edge of Alexander Valley, in a place that is on the cool side for Cabernet. My dad planted it in 1972, when there were perhaps half a dozen other Cabernet vineyards in Alexander Valley, none of which had yet produced wine. Forty-four years later, the gravitational center of Alexander Valley Cabernet has turned out to be in the south. National powerhouses Jordan and Silver Oak have settled less than a mile from where I write this letter, as have an increasing number of Parker darlings like Verité. Who knew?

The 2013 Stone is as dark as any vintage we've produced from this site, with a heavy, intense blackberry character on the nose and the palate. I'm not just talking about the berries either; there is always something quintessentially brambly about this wine, a combination of ripe berry aromas and a freshness that's evocative of the plants themselves – the summer day smell of crushed green leaves mixing with the baked, concentrated smell of black fruit. It's plenty tannic, too. If you're going to drink this wine now, let it breathe. It will happily last a decade in the cellar.

Those of you in the Flight Club are also receiving a bottle or two of our **2013 Merlot** and our **2015 Chardonnay**. While those are obviously very different, I think of both of these wines as being defined by their



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wonderful aromatics. I wrote recently about how much I cherish good aromatics in wine, and besides treating them delicately, I'd be lying if I said I understood much about how to produce them. Like everything else important in wine, I chalk great aromatics up to vineyard site, not craftiness in the cellar.

With that in mind, it is hard to imagine a better site to grow Chardonnay than the ranch I grew up on. It's sixty-three acres in total, about forty in vineyard and about five of that in Chardonnay. The Chardonnay is in the lowest, coldest part of the field, growing in gravel and loam right next to a tributary of the Russian River. The climate and soil produce a combination of the tropical character typical of warm Alexander Valley Chardonnay – mangoes, guavas, pineapples, and the colder, greener Russian River expression: key limes, Meyer lemon, Granny Smith apples. Our Chardonnay is made the same way every year: fermented in stainless steel, then aged on the lees in neutral barrels for six months to a year. The vineyard speaks for itself in this wine.

Our 2013 Merlot is a wine I'm already missing before it's gone. Too much of the time, Merlot in California is produced as a pale shadow of Cabernet - like Cabernet in every way possible, only with less tannin, less color, and less bite. By comparison, I encourage our Merlot to be different from our Cabernet. It comes from a two-acre block on our Red Winery Road Vineyard, a site that produces ripe, fully-mature Merlot at low brix, resulting in a delicate, aromatically expressive wine impossible to confuse with Cabernet. The 2013 is especially bright on the nose right now. It smells like raspberries and rose petals and allspice. Although it spent eighteen months in French barriques, there's very little oak evident at this point. It's all fresh, bright fruit. Drink now through 2026.

In closing, I'd like to mention an event we're hosting. We're having a holiday party here at the tasting room in Jimtown. It's on Saturday, December 10th, and will run from noon to 5pm. It's a casual affair – we'll serve comfort food, pop the cork on some big, old bottles of wine, and stand around complaining about our families. If you'd like to join us, please register to attend right away - <http://www.hawkeswine.com/events>.

Happy drinking, and thank you for your support. – Jake