



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

November 13, 2015

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

Friends -

“Time is a fascist conceit,” said Jeremy.

“Did you get fired again?” I said.

“Irrelevant,” Jeremy said. “Consider the bear, often referred to as the Oppenheim of the mammal family. News flash – a hibernator!”

“I always thought dolphins were the like, really smart things,” I said.

“Dolphins hibernate, too.” said Jeremy.

“I don’t think so.”

“Look it up,” said Jeremy. “Another entry under the heading *Arguments In Favor Of Avoiding The Interminable Psychic Gulag That is Winter: The Green Angle.*”

We were sitting at a beachfront bar in Venice, California. Out on the far west horizon, above the blue sparkle of the ocean, I thought I could see a cloud, but I wasn’t sure. It was in the mid-seventies, sunny. Jeremy was wearing a shearling coat and a pair of those boots with the leather uppers and rubber shoes that we used to call “dorks.” As in, *hey, Stan, nice dorks.*

“What’s green about laziness?”

“Not laziness,” Jeremy replied, “hibernation. Think about it: no driving, no cooking, no heating. Hibernation’s got the carbon footprint of a gnat. Check this out.”

He handed me a well-worn slip of paper. It looked like the kind of thing you find in your wallet and can’t remember how it got there. Written on it was:

pickles (bread and butter AND dill)

Through pillows

barrel of ~~Seagrams~~ ~~Fanqueray~~ Peach Schnapps Old Forester

solid cable package (good college football coverage, etc.)

± 17 cases Ritz crackers

“What is this?” I said.

“Hibernator’s survival guide,” said Jeremy, throwing some peanuts in his mouth.

“I think you mean throw pillows,” I said.

Jeremy drained his beer and stood up.

“I’d love to chat,” he said, “but I have a date with evolution.”

I noticed he looked much heavier than the last time I’d seen him. Much. His stomach had been hidden under the shearling, but the last few beers, then standing up, had caused it poke out from between the top of his pants and the bottom of his jacket.

“You been bulking up?” I asked.

“All part of the plan, buddy,” he said, clapping me on the shoulder. “Sayonara until April, amigo.”

“Make sure to hydrate,” I said.

I watched him walk away, hitching up his jeans. The odor of low-cost deodorant and cheese puffs was left in his wake. I looked around, somewhat self-consciously, at the other bar patrons. I was expecting them to stare at Jeremy as he pushed out the double doors, to look back at me and wonder what sort of man drinks beer with that sort of man. But this was Los Angeles – nothing shocked anymore.

A few minutes later, I finished my own drink and went out and got in my truck and headed north, leaving



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the sunshine and smog of paradise behind. The difficulties of life in winter (it's cold, it's dark, it's hard not to drown in bacon grease and whiskey) are simply an amplification of the difficulties of life itself. Discomfort and temptation are eternal. And the question posed is this: is it worth it?

Hours later, when the sun had gone down and the stars of night had risen in the clear skies of the north, when I crossed the bridge over the river and looked out on the valley where I was born, bathed in the blue light of the cosmos, when the yellow rectangle of hope that is the window of my children's bedroom came into view at a distance of many miles, I knew I could answer that question: yes.

Everyone holding this letter has received a few bottles of our 2012 Cabernets as a reward for reading it. It already feels a bit redundant to sing the praises of this great vintage, but having just finished the 2015 harvest, a vintage that was more difficult than 2012 in every respect, I feel inclined to do so anyway.

2012 was the beginning of a run of three great vintages for California Cabernet. The springs and falls were mild, summers were warm, and all three harvests were completed with little or no interruption by rain. In the end, though, describing the weather only goes so far in terms of describing the vintage. What matters, of course, is what's in the bottle.

So, what is a great vintage of California Cabernet like? In the context of Cabernets from across the globe, mostly defined by us and France, California stands out as producing dark, fruit-forward wines, as compared to the more subdued and tannic wines of Bordeaux. Our house style here at Hawkes is not one I would describe as ripe and fruity in the context of California, but it is certainly ripe in terms of how it compares to the vast majority of Bordeaux.

Still, ripeness is a near constant here in California. Yes, there are a few notable exceptions, like the wet and cool 2011, but one of the things that has long caused Northern California to be seen as the promised land for Cabernet is this area's ability to get a very late-ripening grape ready to harvest before the rain. Winemakers talk a lot about the importance of hang time – leaving the grapes on the vine for as long as possible with the idea that it helps develop depth of flavor. To me, saying that grapes got “a lot of hang time” is usually just another way of saying they got really ripe.

But the quality of a vintage isn't measured in ripeness, it's measured in complexity and depth and nuance. It's measured in balance. In California, that means a combination of ripe, well-developed fruit character AND great acid and tannic structure. What's missing from most California Cabernet isn't the first part, it's the second – structure (that's acid and tannin). 2012 has both incredible fruit and incredible structure. That's what makes it a great vintage.

What brings all this to mind is the task of sitting down and writing tasting notes about these wines that include advice on when to drink them. I always thought it went without saying – but I think I better mention it – the notes I write on these wines are *my* observations about them and the recommendations about when to drink them represent *my* preferences as a wine drinker. I don't view my opinions on these wines as any more important than yours. In fact, in the case of the bottles you just received, my opinion barely matters at all. You're the one who gets to drink the wine; you should please yourself!

A couple examples of people who are brilliant and sensitive souls who disagree about the right time to open bottles of wine are me and my dad. I like everything old. I would much rather drink our earliest vintages (or somebody else's) than anything from the last five years. I'm fascinated by how wines respond to age – which flavors and aromas fall away, which remain, which develop. Enjoying wine for me is as much about the thoughts it provokes as the way it tastes. My dad on the other hand drinks our leftover barrel samples with dinner. I can't speak for him but I will anyway: he's farmed these vineyards for more than forty years, and for him, I think the most compelling aspect of our wines is the place and time they represent. For example, walking the hill block of our Red Winery Vineyard in early October, 2012, tasting some of the best grapes he had ever grown.



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So, when I taste our 2012 Cabernets, I taste wines that will be still be fascinating and intense a decade from now. When my dad tastes those wines, he wants another glass. Regardless of where you fall in terms of your aging preferences, the best advice I can give you is to open at least one bottle of these wines, taste it, and form your own opinions. Yes, I will like our 2012 Cabernets better in another few years, but they are great to drink right now, too. That's the beauty of a great vintage – it shines every step of the way. As a guy I used to make wine with often said, "good wine is always good."

Here are the wine notes for the fourth quarter wine club shipment:

The **2014 Home Chardonnay** comes from our vineyard on Chalk Hill Road, first planted in 1972. It's a fabulous site for Chardonnay, and since we started making this wine in 2005, we have honed a technique to produce Chardonnay that represents the exceptional character of the vineyard, leaving out the things we don't like in most California versions of this varietal. Our Chardonnay is made without any new barrels or malolactic fermentation. Although defined foremost by its freshness - bright, crisp, and fruit-driven - the 2014 carries a bit more heft than past vintages. The aroma is huge and complex, ranging from honey to grapefruit to mango. There's a ton of citrus of all sorts here, from key lime to tangerine. The finish is tangy and flinty and refreshing.

The summer was long and mild and the fall was unusually dry - conditions that allowed our **2012 Merlot** plenty of time to hang on the vine and develop incredible depth of flavor without threat of rain. This wine is a pure expression of fruit: a single vineyard, one-hundred-percent Merlot from our Red Winery Vineyard. We used a very light touch with new oak in 2012, 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.

2012 is the first of the drought vintages – a dry summer followed by a dry fall, followed by the best Cabernets we have ever made. The Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet is a blend of fruit from all three of our vineyards: Red Winery, Pyramid, and Stone. The **2012 Alexander Valley Estate Cab** is composed of about two dozen lots of Cabernet harvested throughout the month of October. Each lot is crushed, fermented, and aged separately, then blended, barrel by barrel. 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; it's ripe but delicate. Like many of my favorite Cabernets, there's something paradoxical about it – very powerful, but very delicate as well. The 2012 will show its beauty now, marked 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 now through 2030.

And for our **Magnum Club** members, a 1.5L of the **2005 Alexander Valley Estate Cab**: one hundred percent Cabernet Sauvignon from all three of our estate vineyards. Aged in barrel for 22 months, forty percent new French oak. This wine still has lots of fruit - cherries, plums, currants. 2005 was a very fruit forward vintage, but what makes this particular Cabernet so remarkable is how expressive it remains after so many years in the bottle. That's a testament to good tannic structure and a good balance of acid to fruit character. These days, the 2005 is a fruity, robust stunner with silky tannin and great secondary aromas and flavors from leather to baking spice. It will hold for another five years, especially in large format, but it's hard to see it getting any better.



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That's it for now. Maybe it's too early to say happy holidays, but the cold air has me ready for a wood fire and a glass of Cabernet. Enjoy the beauty of the season, stay warm, and drink well. - Jake