



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

February 11, 2014

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

Friends-

I could have been a fisherman. I could have been a fish. I could have been a raindrop, and then where would I be?

"Lake Baikal," Jeremy said, "it's a phenomenon called water gravity. Baikal is like the Death Star of lakes, man. It's where the rain tends. It's over five thousand feet deep. That's over a mile. Look it up."

"Are you smoking?" I said. "It sounds like you're smoking."

"Only cigars. Fine cigars. Look it up."

"Alright," I said. "I'll look it up."

I looked it up. There is no such thing as water gravity.

"Before the last Ice Age," Jeremy said, "it was common for fish to have legs. When confronted by the shore, they would just grow them right there in the shallows and then walk up on land and cruise over to wherever they wanted to go."

"Cruise?" I said.

"It hasn't rained in Los Angeles since the late thirties. Everybody here is basically a lizard. Did I tell you I'm changing my name to Wesley?"

"Yeah," I said, "you mentioned that."

"That's just the tip of the iceberg, man. I'm locked in. LA is already an ongoing apocalypse. We all know that. I'm talking about self-realization here. Disaster is our milieu, man. You know I met a guy who is two hundred years old last week?"

"Yeah," I said, "you mentioned that also."

"Well, I did man, and he looked exactly like Alysa Milano except for a little bit of dry skin at the edge of his scalp. You think the drought scares the people of LA? Is that what you think? Boff! We bite our thumbs at it, man."

"But the rest of the state is populated by trees and people with liquid blood," I said. "We're not all lizards."

"Yeah, well, we will be, man. We will be. It's called adaptation."

Almost everyone receiving this letter is also receiving a bottle of our **2009 Alexander Valley Cabernet**. This is the last shipment we will be making of the 2009 before we move on to the '10, and, in light of that fact, I have been caused to ponder the arc of our work with the three estate vineyards that constitute this wine. (For our AV Cab, the percentages change but the vineyards remain the same – Stone, planted in 1971, Red Winery, planted in 1973, and The Pyramid, planted in 1996.) We have made this wine now for eleven years and it has never been the same twice.

Frankly, I try not worry about that. Instead, I concentrate on making wine that is delicious and that represents the qualities I think are essential to great Cabernet: varietal clarity (it should taste like Cabernet, not just good red wine), regional clarity (it shouldn't just taste like cab, it should taste like cab from Alexander Valley) and ageability (Cabernet may be good young, but none of it is great young; that comes later and the wine has to have the bones to reach its full potential). We don't achieve these things every year, but they are always our aim.

The blend of the 2009 Alexander Valley Cabernet is 45% Pyramid, 30% Stone, and 25% Red Winery. It is 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. As I taste it now, it comes across as a combination of dark fruit and nice, firm tannin and acid. That dark fruit is just starting to take on the secondary flavor and character that comes with age: a little



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tobacco, a little leather. This wine will do nothing but improve for the next five years.

Many of you are also receiving a bottle of our **2010 Red Winery Cabernet**. I cannot say enough good things about this wine. In our last club shipment, I said that it reminded me of our 2003 Red Winery, which was true at the time, but also a statement I felt I might live to regret. Our 2003 Red Winery is one of the best wines I think we have ever made, and 2010 was a famously difficult vintage; even though I tasted similarities, it was hard to believe they were actually there. I now feel completely comfortable having drawn that comparison – I am amazed at how much I like this wine. Like the 2003 Red Winery, it is smooth and even and complete from beginning to end – it starts bright but easy and has full, long tannin that sustains through the mid-palate and finish but never makes it harsh. There is a ton of fresh fruit here – cherries, plums, blueberry – and all that is balanced by just the right amount of French oak spice. Drink now through 2020.

Some of you are receiving a few new wines. One of them is our **2010 Alexander Valley Merlot**. Again, 2010 was not an easy vintage, but I am continually impressed by how much I like these wines. If I remember correctly, it rained eighteen inches during the 2010 growing season, well more than it has done before or since and about three times as much as it rained in the entire year of 2013. This rain was perceived to have various ill effects, the most obvious of which was fall rot and low brix at harvest. I was more concerned with lack of intensity and concentration than I was with anything else.

None of these things has proven to be an issue with the 2010 Merlot. On the contrary, it is a surprisingly fruity and robust wine. I would describe our house style of Merlot as balanced and elegant, rather than fruity and powerful. The 2010 does not exactly fit that mold. It is bursting with dark fruit – blackberry, blueberry, black cherry. It is also slightly less tannic and acidic than recent vintages. All this adds up to a wine that will drink well relatively young. Drink now through 2020.

Also included here for some is our new **2013 Home Chardonnay**. The Home Chardonnay comes from our vineyard on Chalk Hill Road first planted by my mom and dad in 1971. It's a fabulous site for Chardonnay, and since we started making this wine in 2005, we have searched for the right technique to produce a Chardonnay that represents the exceptional character of the vineyard without including the things we don't like in most California Chardonnays.

I love the 2013 Home Chardonnay. It is made without any new barrels and did not undergo malolactic fermentation. The aroma is huge and complex – grapefruit, mango, lychee. More than ever before, the wine smells much the same in the bottle as it did in the tank; it has great freshness. There is a ton of citrus of all sorts here, from key lime to tangerine. The finish is tangy and flinty and refreshing. What a pleasure to drink, if I do say so.

It is a lucky time to be in this business, largely because the future looks so bright. 2012 and 2013 were both wonderful vintages and, proud as I am of what we are serving today, the prospect of their arrival is still exciting, even at the distance of two and three years.

To get a taste of this excitement, come by and sample the 2012 Single Vineyard Cabernets from the barrel, or just give us a call at one of the tasting rooms and ask about our Wine Club-only futures program. It is a great time of year to visit and we would love to see you.

Be well and thanks for your support. - Jake