



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

February 22, 2013

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

Friends –

It's been a difficult winter here. Cold. Just cold as Hades. A lot of the plants gave up and crawled back in the ground. I got up the other morning, sometime between midnight and dawn, and found a flock of crows frozen up in the fig tree. There's no insulation in our old house, and I had been drinking quite a bit of Old Number Seven and jumping rope to stave off the bite. I admit my mind doesn't always function as well as it might after a night of this behavior, but defects in my character can't erase the things I've seen. I stood there like a man caught in the midst of his own dream, looking up at those poor black birds, my breath clouding in the nothingness we call air. Beyond this morbid scene, much closer than usual, stood the dome of the stars. It was a masterwork in ice, sparkling and brightly lit, close enough to touch. There was no darkness separating one star from another, just a wash of pale purple created by the shining of countless extra celestial bodies cast in supporting roles – too near to be invisible and yet too far away to be individually distinguished. It reminded me of the press of humanity, only much better looking. There was poetry there, waiting to be broken off in frozen chunks.

"Honey," I called to the house, "come see these birds, come see these stars. The world is frozen. The air is frozen. I'll get a ladder. I'm going to light a cigarette on the Pleiades. Or else lick it. Put that in the family scrapbook. Hah."

I was halfway up the ladder when I heard the sound of a shotgun wracking from the bedroom window.

"Honey?" I said.

"Get off the ladder and back in the house, or you'll be picking bird shot out of your butt until Easter," my wife said.

"But, honey," I said.

"Don't 'but honey' me. You want to play Chicken Little, you can at least put on some pants."

"Er," I said, looking down, "on my way."

As I said, it's been a tough winter.

It is not often that I express excitement about a Chardonnay, but I think the release of our 2012 Home warrants a little fanfare. It comes from our Home Ranch on Chalk Hill Road, originally planted in 1972, a spectacular site for white grapes, the potential of which demands constant innovation. For the past few years, I have been thinking that our Chardonnays might benefit from being harvested at slightly lower sugar – 23.3 brix, say, as opposed to 23.7 brix – and left in neutral barrels for closer to six months rather than a year. I wanted a wine that would show more freshness and brightness of fruit and still retain that flinty, mineral-tinged edge I feel defines our style. These changes, in combination with a stellar growing season, have made a Chardonnay I believe will consistently amaze the people who taste it – Chardonnay fans and critics alike. You often hear about a wine's aroma "jumping out the glass." Well, this wine actually lives up to the cliché – the nose is a burst of lemons, grapefruits, apricots, and pineapple. The palate is long and lean and tangy. Wow.



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(For a real treat, try a bottle of the **2012 Home Chardonnay** alongside a bottle of the newly released 2010 Gravel Bar. The Gravel Bar is older, rounder, and richer in texture, and the nose is much sweeter and more tropical. The finish is where the two Chardonnays come together, in a bright beam of refreshing acid.)

Also new to this shipment is the **2009 Red Winery Cabernet**. For the past six months, I have been so busy working on harvesting the 2012s and blending the 2011s that I have had little time to go back and reflect on the wines currently on offer. Fermenting and blending Cabernet is probably the most fun I have at this job, but there is unique pleasure in tasting those same wines after they start rounding into form. If you've spent as much time as I have lately with young, tannic Cabernet, it's almost a relief.

Tasting the 2009 Red Winery alongside the 2011 (currently in barrel) reminds me of what I love about this vineyard. At sixteen months old, the Red Winery has a delicate, feminine quality with lots of high-toned red fruit aromatics (strawberries, red cherry). The smell is lovely, bright and clean. But the mid-palate and finish come across as almost thin, more akin to what we typically associate with finished Pinot Noir, not Cabernet. Wine from the same vineyard with two more years of age is transformed. Layers of fruit and spice and long tannin have emerged to bridge the gap of the mid palate, and the finish is long and full of red fruit and hints of vanilla. All this said, what I like most about the 2009 Red Winery is the potential it shows for further aging. It's delicious now, but it has the tannin, acid, and clean, clear fruit to develop into something magical. Plan on waiting until at least 2014 to drink it at its best.

Also included in this shipment are a few bottles of the **2008 Alexander Valley Cabernet**. This wine is a 100% Cabernet blended from all three of our estate vineyards. When I see the year 2008 on the bottle, I cannot help but recall what a heartbreaking season that was – a hard frost in the spring burned the new grape buds so badly that the crop was about half its normal size. 2008 was our lowest yield in 40 years of farming Cabernet in Alexander Valley. Yet what was bad for yield was good for quality. The 2008 shows lots of dark, plummy fruit, but without the jammy, cooked tertiary flavors that often accompany that level of ripeness. What we aim for in this wine every year is balance, and the 2008 is classic example of that – deep, purple color, ripe fruit, and a tannic backbone that is almost stubborn. To really make this wine shine, drink it with food. Drink now through 2018.

Lastly, some of you will be receiving a bottle of our **2008 Alexander Valley Merlot**. This is our seventh vintage of Merlot, each made exclusively from our Red Winery Road Vineyard. At this point, the character of the Red Winery Vineyard defines our house style of Merlot. The wines from this vineyard always show more spice and more bright, red fruit than either the Stone or Pyramid Vineyards, both of which make brawny, highly tannic wines. I have said before that Red Winery draws its power from balance rather than brute strength. The 2008 shows cherries, dusty cocoa, and nutmeg in the aroma, and a long palate with a touch of black pepper at the end. In five years, the 2008 Merlot will still be drinking well and, by then, will be showing all the strange and captivating aromas of fresh cigars and baking spice that only exist as suggestions in it now. To get an idea of what I'm talking about, ask to taste a back vintage next time you're in the tasting room.

Thank you for your support.

- Jake