



# THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

September 13, 2014

## A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

“Natural disasters are the glue of wine country society.” I don’t know who said that. Maybe nobody.

I experienced last month’s earthquake from a mobile home park in Windsor. It’s a relatively modern development built on the footprint of the water slide complex. There are still some of the giant old blue pipes lying around at the margins of the park with dogs living in them. It’s a sort of on-going culture war between the dogs who belong to the residents of the park and the ones who have made their homes in the ruin of the water slides. There’s a metaphor for my own life in that dynamic, but I prefer not to contemplate it too closely. “The ship of marriage sails over troughs and crests alike.” I don’t know who said that either. Suffice to say my marriage is not sailing over a crest.

I love television. I’m tired of denying it. I’m not talking about *Ice Road Truckers* or *Log Cabin Home Buyers*. I’m talking about the good stuff – *Halt and Catch Fire*, *True Detective* – the Shakespeare of our time. I would rather watch these things all day instead of working, but that’s not feasible. I need money for cold cereal. So I’ve given up sleep. I took the leap about a month ago. My wife kicked me out the house within a week. I’m sure there was a warning or two before the axe came down, but I was very absorbed with the fate of Rob Stark, God rest his soul. My wife is only five foot three, but she totes a 12-gauge with adjustable chokes and is not to be trifled with. So here I am. It’s amazing what some people throw away. I could be talking about my family, I guess, but what I’m actually addressing is the incredible availability of home electronics at the local thrift shop. I picked up a sixty-four inch Sony with surround sound for \$18 on the way over to the park. It weighs nearly four hundred pounds, so I had to cut a hole in the side of my trailer to get it inside, but that’s hardly the point. What is the point? The point is that everything in the physical world is disposable. The muse is what endures. That’s the principle under which I was operating.

Then the earthquake. I was re-watching *Deadwood*, third season, the fight between Dan and the Captain (perhaps the greatest fight scene between fat guys in television history), wearing my collector’s edition Muppets robe with a bowl of Wheaties balanced on my stomach when the world began to shake. Milk spilled on my robe. The set rocked from side to side, closer and closer to the edge of the table where it sat.

“No!” I screamed. I actually began to stand.

Too late, the set pitched forward and fell to the floor. The blue light of sparks flickered beneath it then died. The night filled with the sound of howling dogs. I walked outside. Many of the park’s residents were already there, including my neighbor, a guy named Roy Garcia. The power had been lost in the quake. It seemed the world had never been so dark. I saw by the light of many cell phones that Roy was also wearing a robe. When I first moved in, he informed me that he was born a Bulgarian count and had been Margrit Mondavi’s lover in the summer of ‘73. Since then, things had presumably fallen off a bit.

“You alright?” I said.

“I lived through phylloxera,” Roy said, “this is nothing.”

“I lost my set,” I said.

“Tragic,” Roy said. “I’ve got mine bolted to the RV frame. It’s common sense. What in the name of Nostradamus are those things?”

He pointed at the sky.

“I think those are the stars,” I said.

For some reason, the thought of my family entered my mind. I’m not admitting to concern, just a sort of oblique discomfort at the thought of my children trapped beneath rubble. It took me about five minutes to get the trailer unhitched. The highway was empty save for the periodic flash and wail of emergency vehicles. I drove with the windows down; the air was like a new discovery. Among a variety of other thoughts, it occurred to me that there are actually tiny bits of water suspended in mid-air, all around us. It’s what we call humidity. Perhaps it bares no mentioning here, but it seems possible that others might have lost track of this fact as well. Much of life’s magic is so ubiquitous that we forget it’s there.

My house looked completely unharmed. My wife stood in the front yard at three in the morning, beating a rug with a two-by-four. She is a tireless homemaker. I felt frightened, as usual, to see her, but also glad.

“Honey,” I said, stepping out of the truck, “thank God you’re alright.”

“What are you doing here?” she said.

“The earthquake,” I said, “I had a revelation. I thought of you and the kids. I want to rejoin the fold, Honey.”

I took a step forward, holding out my hands.

“Keep your distance,” my wife said, “that robe smells like Limburger.”



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“Right,” I said, stopping.

“We’ll have to go through a probationary period of you sleeping in the yard. There’s some straw out by the chicken coop if you get cold.”

“Thank you,” I said.

I walked down the driveway to take my place with the other livestock. Even the chickens, God’s lowliest of creatures, held some wonder for me as I snuggled into the straw beside them. If half the wonders of this world did not exist, who would believe they ever could? I don’t mean to suggest that life can compare to television – I have not lost my mind entirely – but it is not so bad. I said that.

This Wine Club shipment announces the last of our 2010 Single Vineyard Cabernets and the introduction of our 2011 Merlot. Taken together, these two vintages constitute as great a contrast of styles as you will find in the history of our winery. The 2010 reds tend toward a very ripe, dark spectrum of aromas and flavors, while the 2011’s are much brighter and more floral. Both vintages produced remarkable wines that should make for interesting comparative tastings for years to come.

Most will receive a couple of bottles of our 2010 Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon. The 2010 is 100% Cabernet Sauvignon – a blend of fruit from all three of our estate vineyards. About half the grapes came from our Pyramid Ranch, a mountain vineyard at the south-eastern corner of the Alexander Valley appellation. Year in, year out, the Pyramid produces very dark, intense, plum-driven Cabernet and the mark of that intensity in the 2010 Alexander Valley blend is indelible. Still, for all the darkness and ripeness from Pyramid, the inclusion of the Stone and Red Winery Vineyards in the blend give the 2010 a touch of elegance it would otherwise lack. Balance is the guiding principle behind the decisions we make regarding this wine, from the picking, to the barrel program, to the final blend. Drink now through 2020.

This is the only shipment and last call for the 2010 Stone Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon. True to its name, the Stone Vineyard’s soil is almost entirely rock, and, as a result the wines it produces tend to be very tannic and tightly wound. The 2010 shows a good deal of that characteristic tannin, but it is also a bit more ripe and lush than usual. It shows great variety both on the nose and palate. The aromas are of cassis, black licorice, bramble, smoke, and cocoa bean. The flavors are all dark fruit: blackberry, mission fig, black cherry. Drink now through 2020.

Some of you will also receive the first shipment our 2011 Merlot. 2011 was a relatively cool vintage and is typified by red wines with a delicate, fresh, high-tone character usually reserved for varieties like Pinot Noir or Sangiovese rather than Cabernet and Merlot. Our 2011 Merlot is, as usual, 100% varietal and comes exclusively from our Red Winery Vineyard, planted by my dad in 1973. The nose is extremely expressive and bright – crushed red cherry, raspberry, and baking spices come to mind. The palate shows a touch of blueberry in addition to these red fruits, and the finish is tart and a bit tannic. The 2011 is delicate, but it will still benefit from at least a few years in the cellar. Drink 2016 through 2022.

The 2013 Chardonnay is included in some shipments as well. This wine always comes from the same small vineyard at my parents’ house on Chalk Hill Road, and we just harvested the 2014 last week. Frankly, I like our Chardonnay so much that there is very little I change about it year to year, and very little I would change about it if I could. The vineyard is at the border of Alexander Valley and Russian River Valley and grows in deep sand and loam along a tributary of the Russian River. I think it is as good a site for Chardonnay as there is in this country and the approach we take to making the wine is indicative of the respect I have for the vineyard. Our Chardonnay is fermented in a stainless steel tank and sent to age in old, completely neutral French oak barrels. It is left on the lees and stirred once a week, a technique designed to give it a bit of extra textural depth and to heighten the distinct mineral character the wines from this vineyard are born with. We made about eight hundred cases of the 2013, all for Wine Club members.

The next time I write this letter, we will be on the other side of harvest. It looks like another great vintage – knock wood. In the meantime, I hope you make time to come see us while the sun is still shining. The final Summer Nights event of the season will be on Saturday, October 4th, with music on the patio and a pig roasting on an open fire out near the garden. If you need an excuse to make the trip, use our newly released 2013 Rosé – a blend of Malbec and Cabernet Franc from Red Winery. We made about 80 cases, and it will be gone before you know it. So, come join us for a glass of rosé and a plate food – I’m buying!

Be well and thanks for the support. – Jake