



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

September 20, 2021

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

Jeremy and I were on the beach when we noticed the hotel burning down behind us. It was called Rancho Something – five or six stories high, palm trees out front. We were drinking Tequila and taking the air, as they say in old books. I don't know what time it was. Night. Not the beginning or the end of it, but somewhere toward the middle.

“Huh,” Jeremy said, “I thought stucco was fire resistant,” Jeremy said.

“Guess not,” I said.

Things were exploding in various parts of the hotel. Televisions, maybe. Gas lines. There had been screaming, earlier, but it had largely stopped. I feel certain that neither death nor grave injury were involved. The fire had started slowly. Probably in the kitchen of the downstairs restaurant (excellent huevos rancheros, thin coffee). I'd seen smoke coming from the windows earlier, but had decided to disregard it.

“Whoa,” Jeremy said.

The palms in front of the hotel were going off. They seemed to ignite spontaneously: like giant matches being struck on an equally large pair of invisible jeans. Poof. A handful of emergency vehicles arrived. They assembled in the parking lot, spinning their lights and squirting little streams of water at the inferno. The water arced through the light of the flames and evaporated before it reached them. I thought of my passport, my credit cards, my little dental floss thingies. This is precisely why my wife advised me not to leave the house without her. I could hear her now:

Every time you go to Mexico, you end up in jail. Jeremy is a cancer on our marriage. What's that green stuff on your shirt?

“You want to take off?” Jeremy said, “I'm getting worried about my eyebrows.”

We walked down the beach, each of us in his separate thoughts. The blaze of the hotel became smaller and more abstract in the context of the night. It wasn't an incident that involved us anymore, it was just a spectacle. A thing that happened once, far away. I can't tell you how much of my life I've left behind in that way.

Maybe a half mile up the beach, we came up on a boat moored in shallow water. A fat guy stood on the deck, drinking a highball, smoking a cigar and watching the hotel burn.

“Let's swim out there,” Jeremy said.

“I don't want to get my shoes wet,” I said.

But Jeremy was already in the water. I waded in. Jeremy was swimming with the bottle of Tequila, splashing and puffing. I reached the boat and hovered in the water, looking up at the guy. I never know what to say to introduce myself.

“Ahoy there,” Jeremy shouted.

The guy looked down and saw us. He went to the side of the boat and threw a rope ladder over. We climbed aboard. The guy was waiting at the top of the ladder to shake our hands. It all seemed very much like a matter of course. Life on the sea, I guess.

“Ron Calypso,” he said. “Pleasure. Pleasure.”



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He looked like a walrus in Madras: adorable, but not to be crossed.

“We were hanging out on the beach and saw you standing on the deck,” I said.

“You looked rich,” Jeremy said.

“I am rich,” Ron said.

“Blam-oh!” Jeremy said.

He went up for a high five, but I declined.

“You boys drink wine?” Ron said.

“Does a fish fart bubbles?” Jeremy said.

Ron went down in the under part of the boat and came back with his arms full of bottles.

“Let me give you a hand with that,” Jeremy said.

“This here’s just a little Montrachet to get us lubed up for the real stuff,” Ron said.

We popped the bottle and Ron poured it into highball glasses and we clinked.

“Decent,” Jeremy said.

Ron told us how he’d made a bundle in the chicken parts for export business and retired in his twenties, then made another bundle as a treasure hunter.

“I’m a money maker, is what I am,” Ron said, opening another bottle. “Got it coming out my tuchus, don’t know where to put it. I used to blow it all on skyscrapers. Then I discovered Burgundy.”

It turned out he was, technically speaking, younger than either of us, which was a bit disconcerting. For a moment, I felt poor and healthy. But, as with most good nights, age quickly became irrelevant.

“So, Ron-oh,” Jeremy said, “what brings you down this way?”

“You ever heard of the Rose of Seville?” Ron said.

“Is that a sexual act?” Jeremy said. “If so: maybe.”

Turns out the Rose of Seville is a ruby the size of a watermelon that nobody has seen for three hundred and fifty years.

“Languishing in the hull of a Spanish Galleon sunk off the coast of La Paz in the great storm of 1679,” Ron said.

“No way,” Jeremy said.

“Way,” Ron said.

He went below again and came back with diving gear: a thick rubber suit and one of those goldfish bowls with the brass latches that goes over your head.

“I was headed there when I saw the hotel fire and decided to pull over and knock back a little red and take in the show. You boys care to join me?”

“Join you where?” I said.

“Bombs away,” Jeremy said.

We motored up the coast. Jeremy and Ron took turns driving and drinking wine. I was just drinking wine.



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Like the onset of food poisoning or the influence of some profound drug, I felt the sunrise out there, below the dark rim of the sea, preparing to undo us.

We dropped anchor in the breaking dawn. We were, by then, onto the wines of Vosne-Romanée.

“I wouldn’t ruin a decent milkshake with Saint Vivant,” Ron said, “but Richebourg? Now that’s a wine with huevos.”

He was wearing the suit now, holding the glass head covering under one arm and the highball glass of Richebourg with the other. He polished off the glass and handed it to me. We watched him put the helmet over his head and fasten the clasps. He said something to us, but we couldn’t hear him. His lips moved and the glass got foggy. That was all. Then he saluted and went over the side backwards.

Suddenly it was very quiet. Jeremy didn’t talk. It was a very nice boat and, even with the motor running, you could hear the sound of the water slapping the hull. Away off in the distance, there was land and, on that land, a civilization of some sort. A city. Little white boxes with people inside. And the water looked as clear and blue as the sky, but it must not have been, because it went on forever, as if there was nothing within or beneath it – not fish nor rock nor Ron Calypso, neither – just an empty color, a sound, the endlessly elastic membrane of time with my life suspended in it. Mexico.

This marks the first shipment of a handful of wines: the 2020 Home Chardonnay, 2017 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet, and the 2017 Stone Vineyard Cabernet.

God knows how many times I’ve sung the praises of the Chardonnay vineyard I grew up on. It is all the way down at the cool southern border of Alexander Valley and grows in the gravel of an ancient riverbed along a tributary of the Russian River. In the winter, it’s one of the coldest places in the county and, in the summer, the fog lies over the vineyard into the late morning, while the afternoons touch one hundred degrees. In terms of geography and climate, it lies between the warmth of the Alexander Valley and the cool of the Russian River Valley.

I love the crispness of this wine – the acid is always impressive and the fact that we forgo secondary fermentation leaves the naturally occurring green apple and key lime flavors of the raw fruit intact. But, the **2020 Home Chardonnay** is a great example of this vineyard’s potential to produce Chardonnay with richness and dimension. I get Meyer lemon curd and honey and bread dough on the nose and the finish has more roundness than you’ll usually find in white wine I like. This is still a racy, high-tone version of Chardonnay, but it’s dense and complicated and engrossing, too. Thanks to the vineyard for making my job easy.

Speaking of the vineyard I grew up on, the shipment you’re looking at likely includes a bottle or three of the 2017 Stone Vineyard Cabernet and 2017 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet. Tasting these wine makes me happy with my decision to begin bottling our reds a bit younger. Barrel age is critical to what we do, but it’s not as critical as the vineyard. Ultimately, I see it as my job to grow the best possible grapes I can and then make wine from them that represents the vineyards they come from.

Freshness in Cabernet is something I started to talk about a few years ago. It’s not an obviously important



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aspect of Cabernet Sauvignon – not the way tannin or texture or finish are – but I think it's just as important. Cabernet is a heavy, intense wine. It has potential like no other to be profound, but, if it lacks balance, it also has the potential to feel sodden and flabby. Freshness – in the form of acid and fresh fruit aroma and flavor – provides balance.

The **2017 Stone Vineyard Cabernet** has such generosity of fruit that its first impression is of a wine that is ready to be enjoyed right away. I get lots of blackberry and cassis, violets, plums and yums. But, beneath that and behind it, on the finish, there's a certain grittiness that's indicative of wine not ready to drink. The 2017 is at once very fruity and very dry. It's salty. The fruit here reminds me of the 2006 vintage from the same vineyard – as opulent, luxurious a Cabernet as we ever made. But the finish reminds of the 2005 – a wine that took nearly a decade to unfold. Drink now through 2035.

The **2017 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet** is one of the most fruit-forward editions of this wine we've ever produced. It has strong acid and tannin, but the nose and palate are already remarkably developed. I get violets, anise, cinnamon, black cherry in the aroma. Wow. A little Oolong tea. I don't believe I've ever said that about one of my own wines. It makes an interesting contrast to the 2017 Stone Vineyard Cabernet. It has a lot of same dark fruit but, overall, it's brighter and leaner. This wine wants food, preferably something red and grilled. Drink now through 2030.

We have produced every vintage of Merlot since 2002 from the same few acres in the foothills of the Mayacamas Mountains, planted forty-nine years ago by my dad, in 1973. I love what this vineyard does and, as a winemaker, I feel like it's my job to just stay out of the way and watch. Our Merlot will never achieve the tannic intensity of dense fruit of Cabernet Sauvignon. I wouldn't want it to. To me, Merlot is about elegance and balance and grace.

The **2018 Alexander Valley Merlot** shows fresh, dark fruit: blackberry and blueberry. I always get baking spice in this wine, too – nutmeg, cinnamon, allspice. Yeah, the 2018 is delicious right now, but I know from experience how well it will age. Drink a bottle or two now, but leave at least one in the cellar for ten years (yes, ten years) and prepare to be amazed.

Be good to each other and be good to yourselves.

Thank you for your support.

– Jake