



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

November 11, 2024

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

“Eric The Red had a fleet of longships and six pack abs,” Jeremy said.

“The longships I knew about,” I said. “But I didn’t know there was documentation on the abs.”

“It’s all in the sagas,” Jeremy said. “Viking life was exceptionally rad. Even Viking babies were ripped. Viking dogs were the most badass dogs ever. Old Viking men were buff until the day they died.”

“At like, thirty-five?” I said.

“You looked like a leaky water balloon at thirty-five,” Jeremy said. “I was there.”

“You look like Marlon Brando’s corpse,” I said.

“That doesn’t matter,” Jeremy said. “I have a Viking state of mind.”

“So,” I said. “You’re mentally buff?”

“Exactly,” Jeremy said. “I could pillage you right now, if I so choose.”

“Go ahead,” I said. “Try it. Pillage me.”

We stood up and started pushing each other. Of course, I could have thrown Jeremy on the ground right away if I wanted to, but I was being nice.

The door to the patio opened and Alexandra, Jeremy’s wife, poked her head out.

“You’re yelling again,” she said.

“Sorry,” Jeremy said.

“Sit down,” Alexandra said.

We sat down.

“I don’t want to come out here again,” Alexandra said.

She pulled her head back inside and the door closed.

“You fold like a deck of cards,” I said.

“She’ll apologize later,” Jeremy said.

“You’ll apologize,” I said. “Give me some more wine.”

“Get it yourself,” Jeremy said.

We were sitting in his backyard in the San Fernando Valley. The only view was straight overhead and the sky was an odd, sick-looking color. I reached over and filled my cup with wine. We were drinking out of these pewter mugs. They looked kind of cool, but they made the wine taste funny.

“Ask her if you can use the car,” I said. “I’m hungry.”

“You ask her,” Jeremy said.

“She’s not my wife,” I said.

“Keep that in mind,” Jeremy said.

“Or what?” I said.

“I’m going to start walking everywhere, anyway,” Jeremy said. “That’s the Viking way.”

He stood up and held on to the back of his chair to keep from falling over.

“You sure?” I said.



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“Onward,” Jeremy said.

I got up and we went out the gate and onto the street and started east. What’s that song about walking in LA? Oh, yeah, it’s called *Walking In LA*.

“How do you feel about Szechuan?” Jeremy said.

“It doesn’t sound very Viking,” I said.

“Eric The Red would have loved numbing spice,” Jeremy said. “He would have rubbed it on his body before battle.”

“Kinky,” I said.

“I hope we meet somebody I can barter you to,” Jeremy said. “I’d give you up for a decent flashlight. Hell, I’d settle for just the batteries.”

“I’d have to pay to have it taken away,” I said. “We should have brought more wine.”

“That’s true,” Jeremy said. “Vikings never did anything without wine. Rookie mistake.”

My mouth was dry. I hate a dry mouth. I hate headaches, too. And overdone steak. And air freshener. And Kid Rock. And residual sugar in red wine. And baggage claim. And tests of the emergency broadcast system. Do they still do that?

Eventually, the city spread out a little and the buildings went from being three stories to two stories to falling down. All the spaces between the buildings remained covered with concrete but the concrete was degraded enough that weeds grew through the cracks. There were even small, tortured trees coming out of the various abandoned parking lots and concrete abutments of collapsed bridges, the roadways of which lay broken in the bottom of things that were once – what – rivers?

I started to feel a little more at home. I mean, it’s not like Los Angeles where I’m from. It’s nice. But it was good to see some weeds and other signs of life. There started to be more people on the street, too. Residents of Los Angeles avoid putting their feet on the ground at all costs, so I guess these people were just too poor to avoid it. But it didn’t seem like it bothered them that much. A lot of them were missing teeth, but they were smiling. Don’t worry, I’m not here to pen another anti-dentist screed. I value oral hygiene. And I’m not going to advance the theory of an inverse correlation between technological advancement and human happiness, I’m just going to open the question of whether or not we’d all be happier with a little more filth and a little less order in our lives.

“Hey,” I started saying to people. “Hi. How you doing? Hey there.”

To which they responded with things like:

“Hey, man. Good. How are you? You want a hotdog?”

“Why are you saying hello to people?” Jeremy said.

“Is that wrong?” I said.

“People will never respect you if you’re nice to them,” Jeremy said.

“Eric the Red didn’t say hello?” I said.

“Not unless people submitted to his rule,” Jeremy said. “No submission, no hello.”



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"And if they didn't submit," I said. "Then he, like, cut off their heads?"

"Not always," Jeremy said. "Sometimes he just pillaged them or whatever. He needed to keep some people around to be his subjects."

Across the way, there were some guys cooking over a fire of broken pallets.

"I could really use a hotdog," I said.

"It's like traveling with a child," Jeremy said. "I'm always telling you not to spoil your appetite."

"I'm not sure it's possible to spoil my appetite," I said. "It seems pretty spoil-proof."

"What the hell?" Jeremy said.

"What?" I said.

"It's getting dark," Jeremy said.

"Does that surprise you?" I said.

"It must have something to do with the change in longitude," Jeremy said. "It reminds me of how Leif Erikson must have felt when he discovered the New World, hundreds of years before that Italian guy got here."

"I'm not sure it's accurate to say that anybody discovered the New World," I said. "Do we still call it that?"

"If I had a sword," Jeremy said, "I would totally cut your head off right now."

"Yeah right," I said. "I'd run through you."

"Try it," Jeremy said.

The sun raged red and relented and was replaced by the first indigo hues of night. The neon sign of a bar appeared up ahead. Arne's. What kind of name is Arne? We let it draw us through the dark and then, without agreeing to do so, both stopped beneath it and looked up.

"I love the way neon sounds," I said.

"I think we may have to bivouac here for the night," Jeremy said.

"Is that Viking for whiskey?" I said.

We pushed through the doors of the bar and sat down and ordered drinks. We finished them and ordered another round and then another. Then maybe a few more.

"Is it just me," I said, "Or does it smell like hotdogs in here?"

I signaled to the bartender and he came over and I addressed the hotdog aroma.

"That's Wolf," the bartender said. "He cooks out back. No set menu. It's more of a prix fixe thing."

"Totally," I said. "All the best chefs work on inspiration."

We ordered another round of drinks for the walk and headed out the back door. There was this skinny little fellow in suspenders and no shirt cooking over a gutted washing machine.

"Top of the evening to you, sir," Jeremy said, putting his hand on his chest and then sweeping it through the air like a neurodivergent opera singer. "We come in search of a guy named Wolf."

"I'm Wolf," the guy said. He straightened his hat and we saw that it had horns.

"Hard have we traveled, and long," Jeremy said, "now we must nourish our souls with merriment and our



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bodies in meat.”

“Um,” Wolf said.

“What’s that you’re cooking?” I said.

“I’m not sure,” Wolf said. “A guy comes around every morning selling ground meat off the back of his bike. If it smells ok, I’ll buy some.”

“I’ll take two with hot sauce and whatever my friend here wants,” I said.

We watched him pack the ground meat onto a couple of skewers and put them over the fire.

“So, Wolf,” I said, “You from around here?”

“Not technically,” he said. “I was born in Finland, but I grew up in San Bernardino.”

He poked at the fire.

“Is that why you wear that hat?” I said.

“Not really,” Wolf said. “I started wearing it as a joke and it kind of stuck, you know?”

“Fate has led us to a fellow Viking man,” said Jeremy.

“You guys are Vikings?” Wolf said.

“I am,” Jeremy said. “He’s just a guy.”

When the meat was done, I took out my wallet and paid Wolf.

“Mine tastes like squirrel,” Jeremy said. “What does yours taste like?”

“I couldn’t say,” I said. “The sauce is a bonus, though.”

“Hey, guys,” Wolf said.

When I looked up, Wolf pointed a pistol at us.

“Is that thing real?” I said.

It was very small.

“Want to find out?” Wolf said.

“Not particularly,” I said.

“I’m going to need your wallets,” Wolf said.

“What?” Jeremy said.

“Now,” Wolf said.

“You don’t have to yell,” I said.

We took out our wallets and handed them to him.

“Now, get lost,” Wolf said.

“But, we’re already lost,” I said.

“Well, get lost somewhere else,” Wolf said.

We backed away from him and then turned and walked out to the street.

“Gosh darn it, I didn’t even finish my mystery meat,” I said to Jeremy. “What happened back there?”

“You backed down,” Jeremy said. “That’s what happened.”



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"You're the Viking," I said. "Why didn't you pillage him or something?"

"I didn't want to make you uncomfortable," Jeremy said.

"That would be totally fine with me," I said. "I was born ready to pillage."

"You were born ready to pick up garbage on the side of the freeway."

"My legs hurt," I said. "Why don't you call for a ride?"

"It wouldn't do any good," Jeremy said.

"No," I said.

I don't know how long it took us to get back to Jeremy's. When we arrived, the lights were out. We tried the front door and it was locked, so we went around to the patio, but those doors were locked, too. We stood there, looking at our reflections in the glass.

"Have I ever told you, you look like Christopher Lloyd?" Jeremy said.

"You look like Randy Quaid," I said.

"You look like Paul Giamatti," Jeremy said.

"You look like Linda Ronstadt," I said.

"Linda Ronstadt is hot," Jeremy said.

"That's not what I meant," I said.

I walked over to where we were sitting earlier and found the mostly full bottle of wine we had been drinking. I sat down and poured some into my pewter cup and drank it and looked up at the opaque sky.

"Not a bad view, actually," I said.

"If you close your eyes," Jeremy said, "you can see the stars."

"It's going to get cold, though," I said.

"Viking man –" Jeremy said.

"Yeah," I said. "I know."

I love the balance and poise of the 2020 Cabernets in general and the **2020 Red Winery** bottling may be the best example we have of this vintage's strengths. This is a site that always produces a version of Cabernet that is more delicate and graceful than most examples of the varietal from California, where we tend to put a premium on power at the expense of elegance. This is surprisingly smooth and easy to drink right now. The 2020 Red Winery tastes readier today than the 2019 from the same vineyard. It's pure black cherry and blueberry and cassis on the nose and black fruit on the palate. Behind that, there is a touch of the signature baking spice I always get from Red Winery. The finish reminds me a little of the 2003, which I can still taste from the last time I drank it, seven years ago. Drink now through 2035.

The **2020 Alexander Valley Estate** is drinking very well right now. Like the Red Winery, it's defined more by balance than by power. The tannins already feel very well-integrated and the texture is long and even and pleasing, but I think those same tannins and the notably dry, savory profile of the 2020 will also make it age well. It's cleaner and fruitier than Bordeaux, but it definitely has more in common with its Left Bank brethren



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than most vintages of Cabernet we have produced over the last few decades. What a wine does in the glass isn't a perfect indication of what it will do in the cellar, but it is often a good clue; leave the 2020 Estate in your glass for a few minutes and notice how it blossoms, particularly the aroma, which shows baking spice and cassis and cocoa. Easy, elegant and delicious. Drink now through 2040.

I've never known a wine to age at a completely even and predictable rate – sometimes they seem to stay frozen in time for a year, only to change dramatically over the course of the next few months. Our **2019 Pyramid** is a good example of this phenomenon. When we first released it and I wrote the tasting notes, I remarked on how young it seemed. Now, some six months later, it is surprisingly different. The texture is still grippy and fresh, but the aroma bursts from the glass now – blueberry, crushed bramble, coffee, cherry compote, bay laurel. This wine is going to age for a long, long time. Drink one bottle now, save two for later, like a decade later.

Our **2021 Merlot** comes from a block in our Red Winery Vineyard planted by my dad in 1973. In making this wine, it's my aim to produce something that differentiates itself from the Cabernet Sauvignon we produce, by being as clear and direct an embodiment of the varietal characteristics of Merlot as possible. Where Cabernet is heavy and tannic, Merlot is perfumed and spicy. Where Cabernet is dense, Merlot is high-toned and delicate. So: The most immediately remarkable thing about the 2021 vintage is the aromatics – this is a wine you can smell from across the room as soon as the cork is pulled. It's also a surprisingly dark wine. I had it open next to our 2020 Estate Cabernet last night and I think the 2021 Merlot may have edged out the Cabernet in the color department (not something I can remember ever having seen before). It smells like black cherry and violets and plums and white pepper and the palate is soft at the beginning and firm at the end. The 2021 is a pleasure right now, but I think you're missing something if you don't put a few bottles away and wait five years. Too much to ask?

I just harvested the first bit of **Home Chardonnay** earlier this week and was reminded of just how much I love the wines from this small, old block of Chardonnay my dad planted decades ago. The aromatics during fermentation are crazy and delicious and varied – mango, banana, lemongrass, citrus blossom. My approach to shepherding the wine through aging and into the bottle is largely designed to preserve those aromatics. The **2022** is as fine an example of Chardonnay as we've ever produced. It spent six months in neutral, French oak barrels, resting on the lees, and was bottled without going through malolactic fermentation – a fresh, clean, pure version of Chardonnay.

Much of the time, tasting the wines we've made is a reminder of what we could have done better. Today, it's a reminder of how lucky we are to be here, farming the same land our family has been working for more than fifty years. We wouldn't be here without you, our patrons.

Thank you for your support.

- Jake