

THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

March 7, 2025

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

"What are you doing?" I said.

Jeremy was kneeling in the bottom of the boat, talking to himself.

"I'm consulting my sacred self," Jeremy said.

"You have a sacred self?" I said.

"We all do," Jeremy said. "You should look yours up."

"Maybe later," I said. "You want to maybe ask yours for a stiff east wind?"

"It's regarded as bad form to make demands upon the sacred self," Jeremy said.

"No exceptions for extenuating circumstances?" I said.

Jeremy got up and brushed off his pants. We stood looking out at the wide, blind sea. How far can you see across the ocean on a clear day? Twenty miles? Thirty? Not a boat, not a drifting piece of kelp, not a bird in the sky.

"This is no big deal," Jeremy said.

We had left the day before out of Miller's Boat launch in Tomales Bay, run the mouth on a flat blue sea, motored west along Six Mile Beach, dropped our crab pots in sight of the point, and started drinking a selection of whites, predominantly from the Loire, but with a few California jobs to keep things interesting. One bottle led to another, and when we woke up, it was too foggy to know if we had drifted off the point or if we just couldn't see it. At any rate, we were lost.

"I told you to take the tiller," I said.

"You're not the captain," Jeremy said.

"Start the motor," I said.

The motor was a 1972 twenty horsepower Johnson. Jeremy pulled on the cord a half dozen times and nothing happened.

"Stand aside," I said.

I pulled on the cord, then pulled it again and felt something break and it went slack in my hand.

I looked at Jeremy.

"You're the worst captain ever," he said. "Top of the worst."

"You're top of the worst," I said.

"Nope," Jeremy said. "That is a position occupied by you."

Hours passed. It got dark. It was impossible to tell if we were moving.

"I have the overwhelming feeling of being screwed," I said.

"Not me," Jeremy said. "I just had a word with my sacred self and they say the whole thing is under control."

"I'm considering drowning you in your sleep," I said.

"Who's sleeping?" Jeremy said. "I'm having the time of my life."

He took up another bottle of wine and pulled the cork and drank.

"I'm a party animal," he said. "That's the kind of animal I am. If you were an animal, you'd be a sleepy bear."

"Give me that bottle," I said.

He passed the bottle and I drank.

"I'm still going to drown you," I said.

"I'm shaking," Jeremy said.

Eventually, we both did go to sleep. I'm pretty sure Jeremy went to sleep before I did. That's my official position. But it's a little hard to remember. When we woke up, the sky was clear as a bell and it was daylight.

"What direction do you think we're floating?" Jeremy said.

"I feel like we're moving away from the sun," I said. "So, like, east, I guess."

We opened a bottle of Marsanne Roussanne. Decent, but a little flabby, I thought. A dark gray line had appeared on the eastern horizon and seemed to be growing.

"Stop gulping," Jeremy said.

"I'll gulp if I want," I said.

"If we run out of wine," Jeremy said, "I'm going to have no choice but to go Donner Party on you."

"It's my wine," I said. "You're only drinking my generosity."

"Boat wine is community property," Jeremy said, drinking.

"Says who?" I said.

"It's a matter of maritime law," Jeremy said. "Look it up."

By late afternoon, the wind had come up and the gray line on the eastern horizon had reached across the sky and become the beginning of a storm. It had started to drizzle.

"There's the east wind you wanted," Jeremy said.

"I didn't ask for rain," I said.

"Beggars can't be choosers," Jeremy said.

Soon it was raining, then raining hard, then we were filling the empty bottles with water from the bottom of the boat and dumping them overboard. The swell had grown to the point that it looked like steep hills – the boat was sucked up one side of the hill and then raced down the other. The wind and rain were deafening. We knelt in the boat, holding onto the gunnels.

"I think I'm ready to talk to my sacred self," I said.

It had started to get dark again.

"Go for it," Jeremy said.

"How do I start?" I said. "How do I like, get in touch?"

"Just talk," Jeremy said. "They're always listening."

"Um," I shouted. "Hey there! It's me, Jake!"

I waited to feel something in response, maybe hear something in my head.

"I don't think it's working," I said to Jeremy.

"Sure it is!" Jeremy said, "you've got to just keep going!"

"I guess you could call me a procrastinator!" I yelled. "Or, like, a chronic underachiever, maybe! People used to tell me I had potential all the time, which I resented! I took it to mean that they thought I hadn't amounted to much! It was like they were saying: if you want to be something other than a sack of crap, we think you can do it!"

The wind kicked a little bit of chop over the gunnel and splashed me in the face.

"The thing is," I shouted, "people don't tell me I have potential anymore. And you want to know the truth? I miss it!"

There was the sound of thunder crashing, and the sky lit up blue.

"So, like," I shouted, "this is what I called to share with you: If there is any way you can help me out here, I promise to turn things around! I promise to be more patient with my mother!"

"Good one!" Jeremy said.

"If I start to take out the garbage," I shouted, "I promise not to get discouraged and leave it on the front stoop for tomorrow! I know that's lazy! Not to mention, it's an unfair temptation to racoons!"

"Thoughtful!" Jeremy said.

"I promise to be more flexible in terms of the movies I'm prepared to watch!" I said.

"I promise not to be so particular about avocados!" I said. "So what if they've got brown spots?! They're luxury! They're a fricking luxury!"

"And I promise not to drink too much!" I said. "The next time I see a bottle of wine, I'm going to go in the other room and do some sit ups! I'm really going to cut down!"

Thunder sounded and the sky lit and, for an instant, the black sea became visible and we looked down the face of a swell twenty feet high and saw the prow of our little skiff pointed toward the trough and then it was dark again and there was just the rain and the rush of the wind and then we felt the nose of the skiff hit the trough and bury in the water and the swell come up behind it and then we were in the air, with the boat going ass over tea kettle and us with it.

The first time I drowned was in Mexico and I don't remember that either – one moment I was trying to breathe water, the next I was sitting on the beach, throwing up tequila. It was the same this time around, except without the tequila. My memory goes from being under water to lying on the beach at dawn. I sat up and looked around. Down the beach, I saw a body and realized it had to be Jeremy. I stood and walked to where he was and looked down at him. I'd appreciate it if you didn't repeat this, but when I realized Jeremy wasn't dead, I felt kind of relieved. I nudged him with my toe and opened his eyes and sat up.

"What did I miss?" he said.

"I don't know," I said. "Whatever it was, I missed it, too."

I held out my hand and pulled him to his feet.

We were headed up the beach when I looked down and saw a bottle of wine. I reached down and picked it

up.

"Chassagne Montrachet," I said.

"Vintage?" Jeremy said,

"2022," I said.

Jeremy whistled.

"You got a church key?" Jeremy said.

I patted myself down.

"Negative," I said.

"Just our luck," Jeremy said.

"That's alright," I said, "I really didn't need any."

"You worried your sacred self is going to see?" Jeremy said.

"I'm turning over a new leaf," I said. "Is there something wrong with that?"

"Not at all," Jeremy said.

"Besides," I said. "I've been meaning to get into probiotic kombucha for a while now."

"Right," Jeremy said.

We reached the top of the beach and land stretched out in front of us, flat and empty except for a single tree.

"Look familiar?" Jeremy said.

"Spain?" I said.

"I was thinking Monterey," Jeremy said.

We started out across the plain.

"I've seen a trick," I said, "where you bang the punt on a tree and it forces out the cork."

"I thought you were turning over a new leaf," Jeremy said.

"I am," I said. "As soon as we get back home."

This marks the first shipment of our **2020 Stone Cabernet.** It's not my job to contain my excitement about this wine, so I'm not going to. I love the 2020 vintages of Cabernet, more than anything, for their texture – they have dense, mouth-filling tannin without feeling either astringent or heavy – long, even, and smooth. The Stone is maybe the best example of this; it manages to be incredibly dense without crossing into heaviness. It also has impressively vivid aromatics – violets, marionberry, blackberry tart, a touch of menthol. Dry and fruity at the same time. It was drinkable straight from the barrel, but unlike me, its best years are ahead of it. Drink now through 2040.

The **2020 Alexander Valley Cabernet** 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 than most vintages of Cabernet we have produced over the last few decades. What a wine does in the glass isn't a perfect indica-



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tion 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.

Every vintage of Hawkes Merlot has come from the same two-acre block of vines my dad planted in 1973. It's at the toe of the Mayacamas Mountains, on the edge of the sea of the vineyard that is Alexander Valley. If I told you that this wine was made from the hill above where it is planted, which is actually the block our Red Winery Cabernet comes from, you might think that explains some of its magic. But in fact, the site is fairly physically unremarkable – close to flat, with tight-grained soil, warm but not crazy hot.

When we started fermenting and bottling Merlot, back in 2002, we experimented with producing small amounts of it from two other sites, as well as the block on Red Winery. My money was on grapes harvested from a beautiful spot at the top of the hill at our Stone Vineyard. I lost. In the five or so years we produced Merlot from multiple sites, thinking we might blend them with the Merlot from Red Winery or bottle them in its stead, we never did.

The thing I love most about our Merlot, and that I think grabs our customers' attention, is its aromatics. This is never a brooding, closed wine, as Cabernet can be in its youth. The **2021 Estate Merlot** is one of those wines you smell from across the room when the cork is pulled – plum and blackberry and violets and white pepper. It was aged for about eighteen months in old French oak, and the influence of the barrels is minimal, leaving the fruit clear and pure. Soft at the beginning and firm at the end. Drink now through 2030.

Hawkes Chardonnay has always been a sort of anti-California Chardonnay: lean and bright instead of oaky and buttery. But like our other wines, I think our Chardonnay is defined more by vineyard than by style. There may be more magic in this little patch of gravel down by the creek on Chalk Hill Road than in any other place I have come across in my lifetime of growing grapes and making wine. The **2022 Home Chardonnay** is denser and more intense than most of our previous efforts, but the signature of explosive aromatics and racy acidity remain intact. I get Meyer lemon, orange blossom, lychee, and rising bread. Eat your heart out, Meursault.

That little bottle of orange stuff hidden in the bottom of your shipment is barrel aged habanero salsa. If you like it, the recipe is simple: 300 lbs of fresh habaneros, vinegar and salt to taste. I hope you enjoy it.

Thank you for your support.

-Jake