THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

September 21, 2026

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

Friends –

Unless this is your first time reading one of these letters, you know they always begin with a ridiculous story. Sometimes those stories manage to include the word "wine," sometimes they don't. Regardless, not one of them is intended as an instruction manual for enjoying wine. I've chosen to believe you arrived here with that wisdom.

If my stories annoy you or make you yawn, but you want to know more about how these wines are made and what I think of them, please feel free to flip forward a few pages and you'll find my notes. If you just came here for a few bottles of Cabernet and would rather I hold the BS entirely, throw this letter as far as it will fly and get a corkscrew.

I'm including this preamble to introduce a slightly different format for the wine club letters. Good or bad, the stories I tell in these letters are meant to be self-contained – to begin and end in these pages. I could go on telling those stories forever – they're mostly about my mistakes and, believe it or not, there are still plenty of those left strewn across the years of my past, all the way from this morning to fifty years ago. All I have to do is pick one up and dust it off.

But there's a story I've wanted to tell for years that won't fit in a single letter. I've tried to make it, but it won't. It's from the late nineties, when, for a few years, I lived in a residential hotel in Los Angeles with my friend Jeremy and we were hired by my uncle Mordecai to recover a screenplay called *The Golden Ring*. I'm going to tell that story here, a piece at a time, in these letters.

It's going to take years to reach its conclusion and, in that time, I hope new readers and drinkers will come on board. For that reason, I'll post all past installments of *The Golden Ring* somewhere in the online hellscape, with links to it on our website, etc., so that newcomers (bless you) can get caught up on whatever you missed. That said, everything will happen here first and be posted somewhere else a few months later. Gotta remember who my friends are.

Thanks.

My uncle Mordecai lived in a trailer on the bluffs of Malibu. Jeremy and I used to go out there and drink wine and listen to him talk whenever we had gas money. Mordecai had an astonishing wine cellar that he kept in a pair of forty foot shipping containers he had buried in the bluff with an excavator. There was no electricity in the cellar, which was accessed via extension ladder, through a hole cut in one of the containers and covered with a storm drain lid. It terrified me to go down there – I still have nightmares – but I always wanted to go anyway. If you don't drink wine, don't start.

Sometimes I think about what it would be like to be a tuna fish – you're all fat and strong and beautiful, swimming along through the clean and vibrant sea – then you reach over and bite this anchovy and the next thing you know you're being reeled in, little by little. Struggle as you might, you'll never get away. That's what wine is like.

There was everything you can imagine down there – from vin santo to Plavac Mali to bottlings of Cos Estournel back to 1913. People seemed to revere my uncle, I don't know why, and they were always showing up with

wine for him. Sometimes a few bottles, sometimes a few cases, sometimes a pickup truck full of Cornas. Mordecai drank ten or twelve hours a day, sitting in an aluminum lawn chair, looking out at the sea, but couldn't keep up with it. It may be an exaggeration to say there were a hundred thousand bottles of wine down there, but it may not. Let's do the math – two shipping containers forty feet long and eight feet high, covered top to bottom on both walls with bottles of wine, stacked shoulder to shoulder. At sixteen bottles of wine per square foot, that's – let's see – not a hundred thousand.

Jeremy and I lived in a place called the Hollywood Hotel, which is also the name of a maybe sort of decent hotel that still exists, but which has nothing to do with the hotel we lived in. Where we lived was in Koreatown, on Western Avenue, around the corner from the Wiltern Theater, about five miles from Hollywood Boulevard.

I went back there last summer and, like much of Los Angeles, that part of town looks like a zombie bomb has been dropped on it – people walking around with their heads hanging below their knees, pigeons building nests in the broken parking meters, shopping carts full of rotting watermelons on the roof of the bail bonds office – but, in those days, it was just an ordinary down and out neighborhood, where the sirens wailed all night and you could pick up shifts loading in gear at the Wiltern or unloading produce in the underground garage of the Korean shopping center on the other side of Wiltshire.

Jeremy and I hated each other and shared everything – a car and a room with one double bed and a dog named Eli who, if I had to guess, was a mixture of bloodhound and cane corso. There will never be another like him. The car was a 1987 Buick GNX with a chop top, which would have been uncomfortable in a place with seasons, but wasn't an issue in Los Angeles. It suffered from a good deal of body roll and got seven miles to the gallon, but it was ungodly fast in a straight line, and was what we had, and we loved it. We parked it on the street, in front of the hotel, and came down one morning to find the back seat had been pulled out and left down the block at the bus stop, but we just left it there. There is no seatbelt law in California for dogs. I'm not saying that's right or wrong, I'm just saying we didn't consider it our purview. We put a couple of sleeping bags on the floorboard and that is where Eli rode. He was tall enough to see over the doors and loved to go for a ride and came with us wherever we went.

I'll add this cautionary note: you can't leave a giant dog alone in a hotel room, not without consequences. That's how we ended up at the Hollywood. Before that, we were at a place called Beverly Fields, which was five floors and had a broken elevator and so many cigarette burns in the carpet that it looked liked a map of Alpha Centauri, but which I will always remember as a sort of low-rent paradise because of how much nicer it was than the Hollywood. That's the way it is in residential hotels – everyone has been somewhere better and hopes to get back there, but everyone has also been somewhere worse, typically prison or their father's house, and hopes *not* to go back there. You're together in purgatory with very little but each other. You steal from your fellow residents and have inconsequential fist fights but also share cigarettes and the occasional sexual encounter on the fire escape. It's a life full of short-term story lines with no unifying arc. You're just there, together, running out the clock.

My uncle Mordecai said he used to work for the CIA and jumped out of a helicopter with a knife in his mouth in 1988 and landed on the roof of Manuel Noriega's house in Panama City. He said he could break down and reassemble any handgun manufactured before 1996 in less than forty-five seconds and could calculate drop and

side wind at three hundred yards to within five percent with nothing but a pinch of camel dung. He said he had reenacted Lawrence of Arabia's march from al-Wedj to Aqaba with Bruce Jenner as part of his training for Montreal 1976, had been a cliff diver in Wadi Shab with the handle "Blue Torch," killed a saltwater crocodile with a ballpoint pen, bowled two hundred twice, both times at sea, played high school soccer with Yasser Arafat and dated Madonna when she was a wedding singer.

You knew it couldn't all be true, but what complicated things was that you knew some of it *was*.

For example, we figured the part about Arafat had to be made up – what would Mordecai, a Jew from Pasadena have been doing in the Sakakini neighborhood of Cairo in the 1940's? How old was he, anyway? But then me and Jeremy were up late, sitting on the bed, drinking Malvasia and watching the history channel and there Mordecai was in the background of the Madrid Conference in 1991.

"Wait," Jeremy said. "Go back."

"It's TV," I said. "You can't go back."

"Damn it," Jeremy said. "I swear I just saw your uncle Mordecai in the background."

"What was he wearing?" I said.

"Black jacket and slacks," Jeremy said. "Transition lenses, Madras shirt, gold watch."

"Fat?" I said. "Hairy forearms?"

"Check," Jeremy said.

"Had to be him," I said.

"He looked dangerous," Jeremy said.

"Maybe if you're a hotdog," I said.

Sometime later, maybe hours, maybe weeks, I woke up to Eli barking and the phone ringing.

"Go for the big dog," I said.

"I need you to do something for me," Mordecai said.

"Who is it?" Jeremy said.

"For money?" I said.

"Come have a glass of wine and we'll talk about it," Mordecai said.

"I don't need wine," I said. "I need money."

"Is that Mordecai?" Jeremy said. "Let me talk to him."

"Everybody needs wine," Mordecai said. "Babies need wine. Wine is the water of life."

"Water is the water of life," I said. "And I already have that. What I need is money."

"Let me talk to him." Jeremy said. "He loves me. Let me talk to him."

He tried to grab the phone from me and I kicked him. Eli barked and jumped up on the bed between us.

"Hi, Mordecai!" Jeremy said. "What's up, dog?"

"Is that your moron friend, what's his name?" Mordecai said.

"That was the dog," I said. "I haven't seen that guy in weeks. There's no gas in the car. I can't get there to drink wine while we bargain. We'll just have to bargain here, now, on the phone."



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

"This is absolutely an in-person deal," Mordecai said. "Very high stakes. Borrow some money, mug somebody."

"I already borrowed all the money I can borrow," I said. "I keep the curtains closed and the TV down so that people won't know I'm here. I've got Eli crapping off the fire escape."

"I'll Western Union you ten dollars," Mordecai said.

"What am I going to do with ten dollars?" I said. "It costs ten dollars to start my car."

"Fifteen," Mordecai said. "That's my final offer."

"Make it twenty," I said.

"There'll be fifteen dollars for you at the Western Union on Wilshire by noon," Mordecai said and hung up.

"Did you get him to twenty?" Jeremy said.

"None of your business," I said.

"You're incompetent," Jeremy said. "I proceed with that in mind."

"Proceed where?" I said. "Proceed to what? You've got Cheeto crumbs stuck to your neck."

"I'm better than you," Jeremy said.

"So what if you are?" I said. "What does that prove? I'm the worst person I know. There is literally no one worse than me."

"I couldn't agree more heartily," Jeremy said.

"Except maybe you," I said.

Hawkes is the house Cabernet Sauvignon built, and the cornerstone is a wine we call the Alexander Valley Estate. It's always one hundred percent Cabernet Sauvignon and always comes from all three of our estate vineyards – Red Winery, Pyramid, and Stone – with the percentage of each changing from year to year.

In **2021**, over fifty percent of our **Alexander Valley Estate** comes from Pyramid, and it shows. This wine is a lot - a lot of fruit, a lot of tannin, and a lot of acid. And, while I think it's fair to say that it lacks the poise of the 2020, it has a certain EVERYTHING TURNED UP TO ELEVEN feel that's its own kind of balance. I get cocoa powder and black cherry and a hint of tamari on the nose; a tangy, broad palate full of dark fruit; and a tight, even gritty finish. It's just starting to open up. Give it time to breathe or, better yet, time in the cellar. Or if you share my lack of patience, give me a crispy, bone-in ribeye and drink it tonight. Drink through 2045.

I like tasting the **2021 Pyramid Cabernet** behind the 2021 Alexander Valley Estate - it reminds me what this vineyard is capable of. It's an astonishingly beautiful spot, a 115-acre ranch at the southern reach of the Alexander Valley, strewn with wildflowers and ancient oak trees, with views in every direction and some of the steepest, rockiest, prettiest vineyards you'll ever see. It's the sort of place that winemakers dream of getting to make Cabernet from, and I actually get to do it. I try to keep that in mind and to make wines that do justice to the beauty of the place.

As loud a wine as the 2021 Alexander Valley is, the 2021 Pyramid cuts through the mix. It's even darker than the 2021 Alexander Valley, and the fruit on the nose is both in keeping with the color and very pronounced



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

- blackberry, Santa Rosa plum, espresso. In good years and bad, the Pyramid always produces the heaviest, grittiest wine in our lineup. The 2021 is no exception. Drink a bottle a day between now and 2045.

The **2022 Estate Merlot** is a bright, red fruit-driven wine with high-tone, spicy aromatics. It smells like cherry compote and cinnamon and allspice. There's always a little herbaceousness here, too. I'm calling it thyme, this year, but I sometimes read it as menthol. Very slight. It seems like I'm less interested in new barrels all the time; the 2022 Merlot was aged exclusively in four and five-year-old French casks and there's very little oak influence on the wine. It's pure fruit. The palate is finely textured and delicate and the finish is clean and tangy. Drink it now, in 2035, or anywhere in between.

As I write this, we have already picked two lots of Chardonnay off of Stone and am contemplating a third. I love this vineyard, partly because it is capable of expressing so many different things, depending on how ripe the grapes are. It starts grassy and green apple and lemon-lime and goes all the way to mango and pineapple, as the season progresses and the brix rises. The first lot we picked was about 22.5 brix. We'll pull samples tomorrow and I'm guessing they're going to come in at right around 24. Hmm . . .

Meanwhile, the **2024 Home Chardonnay** smells like Meyer lemon and honeydew and leavening bread. It's at that beautiful stage of evolution in the bottle where you still get plenty of fresh fruit, but are starting to pick the tertiary aromatics of barrels aging, where it spent about six months on the lees. The finish is apple tart, toast and honey. Yumbo!

Thank you for your support.

-Jake