

THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

September 22, 2025

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

"Would you say we're moving forward or backwards?" Jeremy said.

"You mean, like, at this moment?" I said.

We were sitting in traffic on the 210. The pace of the 210 used to bother me, but that was before I familiarized myself with the 310 and the 410 and the 810 and 510 and 110 and 7 and 6 and 910. After that, I realized the 210 isn't so bad. I thought maybe there was more traffic on the even-numbered highways than on the odd-numbered highways, but, after trying the 101, the 405, the 15, the I-5, the 55, the 15, and the 71, I can report that they are no better. I've met some old-timers who say there didn't used to be traffic at night in Los Angeles, but I receive such histories as allegorical more than factual. Freeways in the age of dragons. Right. The LA freeway at night looks like the cardiovascular system of a robot big enough to bounce Godzilla on his knee, like powerplant bleeding to death in the desert, like -

"I mean as a species," Jeremy said.

"I'm not sure I'm qualified to answer that question," I said.

"What if I break it into categories?" Jeremy said.

"Like animal, vegetable, mineral?" I said.

"I was thinking more like fast food, television, pornography," Jeremy said. "But, whatever works."

"I think it's pretty widely accepted that both hamburgers and pornography are in a period of decline," I said. "Whereas I'd say we're still in the golden era of television. Tail end, maybe, but still in the window."

"You see *The Wire*?" Jeremy said.

"Yes," I said.

"*Mind Hunter*?"

"Yes,"

"*Fat Racks On Mars*?"

"In terms of minerals," I said, "it's a little tougher call. Take your rare earths –"

"Deeply invested," said Jeremy. "Pushed all the chips to the middle of the Dysprosium."

"Perfect example," I said, "Dysprosium wasn't discovered until 1886 and wasn't isolated until the development of ion exchange techniques in the 1950's, but the mineral itself is primordial, which is to say that it preexists the earth in its current configuration."

"I'm with Buffett," Jeremy said. "Invest and hold. Plus, that way I don't have to follow the market."

"So," I said, "from the perspective of a human or a nuclear reactor, you could say we've progressed. But from the perspective of the mineral itself, I imagine life was better in the Hadean Era."

"*Fat Racks on Mars* was a good one," Jeremy said. "You kind of wonder how they manage to get it done in the space suits. But I guess all narrative involves suspension of disbelief."

"From that same perspective," I said. "The eventual absorption of the earth by the sun, the collapse of the galaxy itself, could be seen as progress."

"Is there a song about hanging out at the center of the earth?" Jeremy said. "If there isn't, there should be. Is David Lee Roth still alive? Mind handing me the Cheetos? Is there anything to drink back there?"



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"No beverages," I said. "Flamin' Hot Limón or Cheesy Jalapeño?"

"When in doubt," Jeremy said, "cheese."

I reached in the back seat and brought up the bag of Cheetos and opened them. The aroma of pulverized imitation cheese filled the car.

Have you ever had the experience of being in the car for so long that you forget why you're there? It happens to me all the time. I'll bet there's a guy in Los Angeles who got in his car in the early fifties and is still in it, stuck in traffic in Pasadena.

"The whole *Fat Racks* franchise is extremely well done," Jeremy said. "I'd compare it most closely to, like, *The Fast And The Furious*, which, I realize, is technically a series of movies but has that nice TV feel to it. The title *Fast and Furious* is a bit misleading, is my only complaint."

"Measuring progress in the world of plants is even more dubious," I said. "Personally, I tend to think of the development of life on earth as having an early period characterized by an explosive proliferation of species, followed by a long period of decline in biodiversity. But –"

"Same basic themes," Jeremy said, "transgression, remorse, redemption. Even some talent crossover in the double-digit sequels, I believe."

"There are just as many plant species in existence today as there ever have been," I said. "Yes, species are continually passing into extinction, but an equal number of species are evolving into existence. The circle of life."

"I guess I overlooked beverages," Jeremy said. "It's sad to think of cavemen without beer, but I guess that's the way it was. Caveman just has such a beer vibe, you know what I'm saying?"

Jeremy reached over and stuffed his hand in the bag and then in his mouth. Little bits of Cheeto fell down the front of his shirt.

"It begs the question," I said. "Is there such a thing as progress?"

"My mouth is so dry I think my tongue is turning inside out," Jeremy said. "Look at my tongue."

He stuck out his tongue. I didn't look.

"Hoeth ha hook hormo who you?" Jeremy said.

"It looks orange," I said

"Where would you say we are in the evolution of the beverage?" Jeremy said. "And what does the advent of the Buzz Ball portend for man's search for meaning?"

"We're a little more than nine thousand years old with alcohol," I said. "The first known instance of alcoholic beverages was discovered in the neolithic Chinese village of Jiahu."

"Say that again," Jeremy said.

"Jiahu," I said.

"It's got a ring to it," Jeremy said.

"Wine didn't come along until about a thousand years later," I said. "That was in the country of Georgia."

"Wait," Jeremy said. "Georgia is a country now? If you see a convenience store, let me know."

"Still," I said. "Eight thousand years is nothing to sneeze at – from Shulaveris Gora to Chassagne-Montrachet.

One marvels at the staying power of wine."

"From Slivovitz to Marvin Gaye," Jeremy said.

"Slivovitz is brandy," I said.

"Wait," Jeremy said. "That's a liquor store right there. Take the wheel."

Jeremy opened the door and got out of the car and I watched him run through the grass on the shoulder and go through a hole in the chain link fence. I took the steering wheel with my left hand and moved my left foot over to the brake. You don't really need the accelerator in Los Angeles. A few minutes later he came back with a couple of paper bags. He set one on the roof of the car and stuck his hand in the mouth of the other and, presumably, opened whatever was inside and took a drink.

"Care to join me?" he said.

"What about the car?" I said.

"Just turn it off," he said. "It's good for the gas mileage. We can always push it if we come to a hill."

I turned the car off and got out. It was a surprisingly pleasant evening. You couldn't see the stars, but, if you let yourself go, you could imagine them. The other drivers on the freeway looked on in envy as I took a hit from the bottle and passed it across the roof of the car to Jeremy.

"It may be more reasonable," I said, "to stop thinking about where we are in the arc of human existence and just enjoy being part of it."

"What about *Fat Racks On The Moon*?" Jeremy said. "Does that sound like a derivative or you think it's got legs?"

This shipment includes our **2023 Home Chardonnay**. It comes, as usual, from the ranch I grew up on, all the way at the southern tip of the Alexander Valley, on a tributary of the Russian River. I was just down there this morning, tasting Chardonnay from this gnarly, old vineyard. The temperature will eventually reach 85 degrees today but, at 7am, the bottomland along the creek was socked-in. It's an uncharacteristically cool climate for Alexander Valley, and our Chardonnay always reflects that fact – even in ripe, full vintages, there's always a racy, acidic edge to this wine.

The 2023 smells like honeydew and lemon curd and wet slate. It was fermented in stainless steel and aged in neutral oak French barrels and did not undergo malolactic fermentation. Texturally, it feels like Chablis, which is to say focused and crisp, rather than broad and smooth. Does it make sense to describe this as a very linear wine? The acid is mouth-watering. Pairings that jump to mind: poached shrimp, frisée and citrus salad, new Manchego, evening light in the limbs of an oak tree.

This is the second shipment of our **2020 Pyramid Cabernet**. I love this wine. It's the last of the 2020's I have up my sleeve and man, am I going to miss them. But I say the same thing every time we roll over vintages. I just like Cabernet with some years under its belt. And that's the way I tend to make it – with aging in mind.

The thing I'll remember about the 2020 Cabernet vintage, in general, is its remarkable texture. I guess what I'm talking about is mostly tannic structure, but it's more than that. It's about the balance of fruit with acid and

tannin and how that makes the wine feel when you drink it. There have been some vintages I loved that started out pretty jagged – the 2015, for example, which, when young, smelled like fruit, tasted like fruit, and finished like gravel. It eventually smoothed out and became some of my proudest work – one of the many surprises in my winemaking career.

I have had no such worry with the 2020 vintage. These Cabernets have always been remarkably smooth and balanced on the palate, even the Pyramid, which is capable of intensity unto roughness. These days, at nearly five-years-old, the 2020 Pyramid might not be ready to curl up and lie in your lap, but it's definitely ready to play nice.

My tasting notes from a few months ago read: What a monster of a wine. The vineyard hardly knows how to do anything else. Super tannic, abounding in dark fruit of all stripes – Elephant Heart plums, currants, blackberries.

Either I'm in a better mood today, which seems unlikely, or this wine has done some softening up. It's plenty tannic and still has pronounced acid on the finish, but the mid-palate is a lot more broad and generous than I last remember. Starting to open up nicely and, right at that dynamic point in its evolution where it changes over the course of an evening, preferably one that involves grilled porterhouse. Drink now through 2040.

The thing I love most about our Merlot, and what 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.

I am drinking our **2020 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet** two or three times a day right now. It's not as powerful and tannic as the vintages on either side of it, but man, is it graceful and easy to drink. The nose is as forward and interesting as it's ever been – black cherry, cocoa, a touch of cinnamon and nutmeg. I know it's blasphemous to say a Cabernet smells like raspberry but, by God, this one does (a little).

Wait a second, all this balanced loveliness is giving Red Winery.

The 2020 Estate, like every vintage before it, is one hundred percent Cabernet Sauvignon, blended from all three of our estate vineyards. That part stays the same; what changes is the proportion of the blend accounted for by each vineyard. In 2020, Red Winery accounts for about half the total. Thus the red fruit, baking spice, high-tone aromatics and the long, beautiful texture. Drink now through 2040.

With that, my friends, I leave you. But I hope to see you soon.

Thank you for your support.

- Jake