

ROAD 31 WINE CO.

grin-inducing pinot

Fall 2008 Letter

Dear Trucker:

Greetings from “The Road,” where the wine is red, and the truck is still green.

First of all, to be clear, this is NOT an allocation/release letter. As always, the release is in the spring. Until then, I am sold out. If you are getting this letter, be assured you are on the offering list for then.

But, I generally like to reach out in the fall, to say hello and check in. Moreover, I’m amazed at how many people have heeded my suggestion *not* to open their 2006 Pinot Noir until the holidays. Well, this note is to now inform you—no order you—to release the hounds, light the fuse, and get out the corkscrew. The 2006, while still youthful, is tasting fantastic. A few weeks back, I sampled it with the sommelier at Gary Danko, one of the best restaurants in San Francisco (if not the country). He took a sip, grinned, and bought a case on the spot. I figure if he’s that excited, I shouldn’t be holding you all back. Tell the Thanksgiving bird that you’ve found it a date for dinner.

The vintage that just ended was one of the wackiest on record, though I define “wacky” in a positive way. If you remember, much of California was on fire this summer. Fascinatingly, the wines from Mendocino are retaining some of those smoky aromatics in the fermenter. But wines like mine, from the southern/cooler reaches of the North Bay, avoided that peculiarity of flavor. We did, however, have a smoky haze that covered Carneros during some of the hottest days, and you truly couldn’t ask for a better bit of sunscreen. Really hot days cause flavor to go out the window—which is why Pinot does best in coastal areas—and the few degrees’ relief provided by the haze were welcomed indeed. With an early bud break and the cooler/hazy weather, it could be called a nearly perfect year. If it didn’t cause hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes, I’d suggest we might want a smoke cover every summer.

After the air cleared, it was a tough decision whether to pick before a quick heat strike that arrived late August. I chose “no deal” and am glad I did. The wine that came from the later pick is truly unctuous in barrel. Had I picked earlier, I think the resulting vino would have had a few too many knees and elbows. I’m eager to see how this 2008 comes along after malolactic, but so far, the results are very, very strong.

Spiritually, I had a great crew of harvest helpers this year. In addition to the usual wine-industry friends, we had a mergers-and-acquisitions lawyer from London, an American Express executive from New York, a guy from Yahoo! who is responsible for your search results, and a Navy test pilot who has a one-in-twelve shot at the astronaut program. The conversations, at 4:30 in the morning, while standing over picking bins sorting out leaves, were fantastic. Thanks to you all.

As a preview of the spring release, I should provide a quick note about the 2007, which is now safely in bottle. It is, I believe, the best wine I’ve ever made. (Of course, we’ll see how the 2008 turns out.) For those of you who have been following the progress, 2007 was truly a vintage from the heavens. I had the understandable fear, as a mere mortal, that I was going to screw it all up in the cellar. At the risk of hubris, I believe I pulled off a celestial triumph after all. Look for that offering in March.

On a serious note, economic times are tough out there. Many restaurants—which are my lifeblood for showcasing Road 31—are seeing horrible turnouts on weekend nights, and many may not survive. While I’m reluctant to broadcast a “go out and shop” message, I’d urge you to consider including your favorite eateries in your budget. They are a key seam in the fabric of our society and culture.



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Even if dining out is not in your budget, I would submit that so long as you are surrounded by friends and family and can pull a good bottle out of the cellar for dinner, then the current malaise may not qualify as a true “crisis.” Furthermore, if the bottle you pull out of the cellar happens to be Road 31, well, I’m honored to be there myself in a liquid form of friendship.

Though the name change from Green Truck to Road 31 has gotten me a little hate mail, things are fantastic here. Our three-year-old son’s knowledge of dinosaurs has now officially exceeded my own, our eight-month-old daughter actually likes vegetables, and my wife tinted her hair a beautiful red to match our daughter’s (thus eliminating the “where’d your baby’s red hair come from” question). Add to that a new horn on the truck and some great wine in barrel, and I feel truly blessed.

My grandmother—the original owner of the truck, whose homestead is on Road 31—turns 90 in February, and I leave you with an analogy inspired by her. I once planted a vegetable garden, complete with corn, and called my grandma to ask her how one knows when the corn is ripe for picking. Her response: “When the raccoons get it.” Thus the call to action: Get to your wine, and your family and friends, before the raccoons do. Best wishes for the holidays, and here’s to a fresh start in 2009.

Kent Fortner
Proprietor/Truck-Owner/Road-Warrior



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