

ROAD 31 WINE CO.

grin-inducing pinot

Fall 2009

Dear Truckers:

I think on the 8th day, after that day on the couch, God celebrated Thanksgiving.

And why not? It's simply the perfect holiday. Late November means that harvest is over; at least the heavy lifting. The weather and leaves have turned; put away that inflatable-but-constantly-deflating kiddie swimming pool and put a match to the kindling in the fireplace. For me, my birthday has always recently passed (this year the big...gulp...4-0). And then, when you think the month just couldn't get any better, Thanksgiving arrives: family, friends, food, and Pinot Noir in abundance ... and all on a Thursday? Nirvana.

With the holiday's approach also comes a reminder for me to pen the annual fall letter. As with previous years, this is merely an update and a thank-you; I'm afraid I have no wine left in stock to offer until the next spring release. If you are only in this for the wine, that's fine, and you can just ignore the musings that follow. (The fact that you are receiving this letter confirms that you are indeed on the March mailing/offering list.)

But, many of you ask for a harvest update, and I like to provide it while the memory is fresh. Indeed, I just got the last of the red wine stains cleaned off the very white dog. Some years I feel I can sum up the harvest with one or two words, but I believe this year demands a vignette.

It's 5:30 a.m. on Saturday, September 12, and the grapes are ripe at Stanly Ranch Vineyards. My dog and I pull up in the green truck to the white ranch office. Waiting for me is Paul, a talented and peripatetic photographer from southern California who has volunteered to come help pick grapes for no compensation other than a lunch of cheeseburgers and Pinot Noir. It's chilly, it's dark, but Paul has a grin on his face. He and I check in with the vineyard manager from Stanly, and the three of us properly caffeinate ourselves for the task ahead. We then stand out on the back deck, looking over the vineyard that we're to pick today, and spend the next half hour awed by a rare and fantastic lightning show over San Francisco Bay.

It was that kind of harvest. After a wonderfully even growing season—2009 is the third year of drought in northern California—crush was dynamic. We had cold days; we had hot days. We had crazy wind at times. Other mornings, the dew and fog brought overwhelming silence. It poured rain for about three days, but what followed was two weeks of let's-lunch-outside-and-lunch-a-long-time weather. It was exhilarating. It was grin-inducing. And the resulting wine? Also grin-inducing. Also exhilarating.

So, I look forward immensely to sharing with you that energetic 2009 wine in a couple of years, after the barrels have properly slumbered in the caves. But in the meantime, the 2008 deserves some attention; it is recently put to bottle and is shaping up nicely for the March release. I'll attempt to give that wine its descriptive justice when I pen the release letter in March, but for now, suffice to say that it has more faces than a Picasso.

Before I implore you to open your 2007 Road 31—the current release—with Thanksgiving dinner, allow me the indulgence of a brief personal update. With the passing of a 40th birthday comes the inevitable evaluation of life, and I thought I'd share with you the official, bipartisan report. I've got a blockbuster wine released, a seriously intriguing wine on deck, and the new addition to the wine batting order is a likely candidate for rookie of the year. It turns out that our old house is sided entirely with redwood, which means we can safely wait another year to fix the peeling paint. My wife is even more beautiful at 40 than she was at 30 when I met her. Our son, age four and five-sixths, has officially discovered Star Wars (although we fast-forward through some Darth Vader parts). You should see our red-headed daughter dance (although, approaching age two, she has also suddenly developed an opinion). Not only is the dog freshly bathed, but the cats seem to have finally



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accepted the new, cheaper cat litter. In the end—after serious contemplation and deliberation—the only thing I could think to request for my 40th birthday was ... new socks. Things are fine indeed.

And one key part of things being so glorious is that you, the Truckers, are so supportive of my enological efforts. Your support makes my dream possible. Thank you.

Now back to Thanksgiving. Hopefully, if you purchased last March, you have some of the 2007 Pinot Noir still resting in your cellar. Upon release, I billed that wine as a “liquid stimulus package.” But just like our government’s attempts at rescue, that wine’s role last spring was simply to ease the blow of some tough times. It is only now, when the stimulus has had time to develop, that we’ll see its full effects and benefits. To abandon this iffy analogy for a moment: start drinking that 2007 if you haven’t already, because it is tasting fantastic, particularly now that it has achieved a few months of bottle age. The 2007 vintage was a gift from the heavens, and as I mentioned at the start of this letter, Thanksgiving seems like the ultimate heavenly holiday.

From me and mine, to you and yours, may your holidays be filled with mirth. And if perchance that mirth includes a trip down “the Road” at Thanksgiving or another holiday feast, I am honored that my truck and I can be celebrating with you.

Best,

Kent Fortner
Proprietor/Truck-Owner/Road-Warrior



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