

# ROAD 31 WINE CO.

*grain-inducing pinot*

Fall 2010

Dear Truckers:

Today is my birthday. It started out rather early. Our two-year-old daughter apparently didn't read the memo on daylight saving, so she and I spent the 4 a.m. hour under the covers with a whisper-reading of "Where the Sidewalk Ends." I tell ya, every birthday should start by reciting poetry to a pretty girl who is sharing your pillow.

After some breakfast and a few gifts (socks!), my lovely wife took the kids to school. I crossed the street to the park for the daily game of fetch with Daisy the Wunderdog (sometimes I wonder just who is exercising whom). Now I find myself at my desk, pondering my next move. I suspect you, too, have experienced a birthday on a slow weekday: half-work, half-holiday.

I've decided I will pen my annual fall letter to you, the valued Truckers. After all, I enjoy crafting this note almost as much as I love crafting the wine itself. Let's be honest, it's hard to call any of it "work" in the first place.

Most of you who have followed these annual missives know that my birthday represents the spiritual end of the crazy harvest season. And this year, it was even zanier than usual. Some might remember my descriptions of the peculiarities of the 2008 season—frost, fires, but a perfect harvest—and the 2010 season was equally nutty, albeit for very different reasons.

We started 2010 with LOTS of water coming down. This is a good thing for us crop-growing, pool-filling, snow-and-water-skiing, garden-crazed Californians. We needed the precipitation, and we officially ended the three-year drought. In March, the hue of green around here could give the Emerald City a run for its money. The only down side of all that moisture was a threat of rot in the vineyards ... that, and the rivers ran so fierce that fly-fishing season was delayed for a few weeks.

Though we avoided frost, we had the coolest growing season that anyone can remember. Even the old-timers in the valley were shaking their heads. If this is "climate change," then it definitely isn't global *warming* around here. The vines just inched along all summer, and in late August, when we would typically be zeroing in on a harvest date, we still had the down comforters on the beds and were wondering if the fruit would ever ripen.

We had one crazy heat strike in September where we went from 74 degrees one morning to well over 100 degrees for two days, then back down to 74. I think everyone I knew had a heat stroke, sunburn, and then a cold. And, to be honest, a lot of fruit, particularly white grapes, did too. It's just hard to adjust that quickly from fleece to bathing suit and back again without some exposure issues. I was worried about my own fruit, but there's a good bit of natural sunscreen in red grapes. In the end, all that the heat did on my Pinot Noir was dry up potential botrytis (rot) from the wet spring — just what the doctor ordered.



NAPA VALLEY

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We then went back to being cool and stayed that way. I believe 2010 is now officially the longest growing season on record. I shortened my fingernails stressing over a threatening rainstorm in mid-September—which would have meant botrytis all over again—but the downpour never materialized.

We finally started picking in late September—three weeks late—and I picked my last vineyard on October 1st, which represents the first time I've ever picked in that month. (Full disclosure: I could have picked on September 30<sup>th</sup>, but I held off in part just so I could write that sentence.)

Since it was a year unlike any other, there was no recipe for winemaking. I really enjoyed the challenge. It was like an episode of "Iron Chef." And, I could not be more pleased, so far, with what is now in barrel. There was/is a big debate around the valley about whether 2010 is the best—or the worst—vintage we have ever had. I'm definitely leaning toward the former.

Hmmmm...I just realized I've written nearly a whole page about the weather.

New topic, then: Crack open your 2008's, as they have achieved glory. Raise the glass and toast the crazy harvests: past, present and future. Seriously, the 2008 has opened up very, very, very nicely and might ultimately be more fantastic in its youth than as a long-lived wine. I'm now inclined towards the "drink it before you get hit by a bus" cellaring advice on that wine.

As for the 2009, it is now in bottle and awaiting release in March. It rocks. Truly. I think that's all I need to say about that. You will see.

Those of you who are new to the Truckers list might be surprised to find that I'm going to close out this letter without offering you any wine. But, as usual, the spring release sold me out, and I'm just writing a note so we can all keep in touch. I hope that is not too disappointing. If you are getting this letter, it means you'll be getting the mailer/offering of the 2009 this upcoming spring.

I'll close out with one of our daughter's favorite poems, "Early Bird," from Shel Silverstein's book this morning:

*Oh, if you are a bird, be an early bird  
And catch the worm for your breakfast plate.  
If you're a bird, be an early early bird—  
But if you're a worm, sleep late.*

As always, if Road 31 finds its way onto your Thanksgiving and/or holiday table, I'm honored to be along for the ride. Cheers,

Kent Fortner  
Proprietor/Truck-Owner/Road-Warrior



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