

# ROAD 31 WINE CO.

*grin-inducing pinot*

Spring 2013

Dear Truckers:

I write this aboard a flight from SFO to JFK, having just been jostled from a rather blissful sleep by the panicked, iron grip of my flight-fearing wife. Janet declares that I am afflicted with some sort of airplane narcolepsy, and it's true: there's something about the drone of the engines, the rarified air, and even the obligatory turbulence. I've been known to fall asleep before takeoff and awaken only after we've touched back down. I even awoke once to find I'd climbed on the wrong airplane, fallen asleep, missed the announcements, and was landing in the wrong city ... but that is a story for another time.

Today we are on the correct flight to NYC to see a dear friend get married, and the turbulence that somehow rocks me to sleep instead rocks my wife's world. Janet is always on high alert while flying, and after gripping and awakening me, she comforts herself by looking at the map and figuring that we're over the Rocky Mountains ... standard unsettled air. I—from my vantage point at the window—realize that we're actually over Kansas. And being a native son of that state, I can assure you with 100% confidence that it has no turbulence-creating geological features. But I just quietly nod my head in comforting agreement, as the explanation seems to settle my beloved wife. These types of lies are allowed—even encouraged—in marriage, no?

I do find, however, that I too am feeling a bit unsettled as I crack my laptop to take a first stab at this year's release letter. It's not the plane flight that is disconcerting me (though I do find that—despite having studied physics in college—I still look at the bouncing metal of the airplane wing and think flight seems like some form of miracle). It's not that we're going to New York City, which, for a California-living kid from Kansas, is like a cash-sucking expedition to an exotic foreign country. Nor is it that we just left both kids and all the animals back home with my mother (we'll see who wins that scrum). No, I'm unsettled because it is time to release the 2011 Pinot Noir, which was a crazy vintage to craft and now a crazy one to release.

If you've followed the development of the 2011, it was the year when rain hit during harvest. At first, it seemed the apocalypse had arrived. But then came the rapture: while the rotted, bursting, evil clusters were culled and damned to small trenches in the earth, the surviving clusters soaked up the subsequent two weeks of glorious sunshine before they were picked and delivered in immaculate condition to the pearly gates of the winery. The result is a stunning wine. Robert Parker's Wine Advocate actually tasted the 2011 just a couple weeks ago, and this was the result: *"Road 31's 2011 Pinot Noir impresses for its delicate, understated personality. Crushed flowers, sweet tobacco, menthol and dried cherries all take shape in the glass as this highly attractive, mid-weight wine shows off its considerable appeal. This is an absolutely gorgeous wine, especially in the context of a vintage that was full of challenges."*

(Over...)



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(...continued)

OK, I normally urge people to tune out critics and simply drink what they like, but my ego is up for sharing glowing compliments like that. And while making great wine is always immensely pleasing, making stellar wine in a tough year is, well ... a rush. I'm so incredibly proud of this wine.

Here's the thing: the Darwinistic twist to the viticulture in this vintage means that there is just so little to go around. I've pulled back some of the wine I typically earmark for restaurants, but allocating to the truckers is still tough. To get back to my airplane theme, I "overbook" the allocations a bit (much like airline seats are overbooked). While the truckers are a loyal and responsive bunch, there are always those who have moved without a forwarding address, sworn off alcohol, decided to buy a boat with their excess cash, died, or some other foolish thing. So, I always offer a bit more wine to the truckers than I actually have, and I've gotten pretty good at that calculation over the years. But with this 2011, which came in at about two-thirds the normal yield, and with the economy flexing its muscles a bit, I'm in a bit of unsettled space on how to calculate things this time around.

So, let me say this up front: I apologize if your allocation is smaller than expected. I tried to hold the line for the loyal truckers where I could. And more important, while I make every effort to allocate carefully and hold your allocations, ultimately it is *first come, first served* on purchasing your allocation. No need to run to your computer this moment—your wine is sure to be there for the first week or so of the offering. But if you wait until later in (or after) the allocation window, I can make no promises. Having more supply than demand is a good problem to have, but it is still a problem.

The enclosed card provides instructions for securing your allotment via the Web. The order window closes March 29. I ship all the orders at the same time during the week of April 8 unless otherwise requested.

Well, I started this letter while I was in the air en route to the Big Apple, but now, as I write the final paragraphs, we're back safe and sound in the home of the Little Grapes. I'm happy to report that our plane(s) remained airborne. And the kids and my mother survived, although we did get one "emergency" call when the DVD remote proved too vexing.

And now, with a slight sigh of relief and anxiety, I lick the envelope (and hit send) on this letter. Life is settling back down indeed. I look forward to sharing this miraculous 2011 Pinot Noir with you all. Thank you, as always, for your support of my dream.

Kent Fortner  
(Winecrafter/Truck-Owner/King of the Road)



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