

ROAD 31 WINE CO.

Spring 2018

Dear Truckers:

Greetings from Napa, where the truck is green, so are the hillsides, and the release of the 2016 Road 31 Pinot Noir Napa Valley is finally upon us.

Before I convince you that you need this wine in your cellar, I want to touch on a parlor trick that most of my winemaker brethren can perform: We remember, in vivid detail, individual wines and the settings where we tasted them. I'm not suggesting winemakers have superior memories (that would go to my golfer friends: "and on the third hole ..."). My point is that there is an unusually strong link – perhaps honed in those who pursue winemaking? – between memory and aroma: the first girlfriend's perfume, the scent of grease from Grandpa's workshop, the onshore breeze at the beach house of youth...

Science and anatomy likely back this up. The olfactory bulb sits just below – and shares pathways with – the two regions of the brain that are tied to memory. Thus, it isn't surprising that back when I was a 15-year-old busboy at a restaurant in Kansas, upon my first sip of '73 B.V. Latour (the wine that woke me up to wine), my brain etched such indelible grooves that I can still recall that Vivaldi was playing on the Muzac speakers overhead, and Steve, the Irish-born, cuss-like-a-sailor manager who snuck me the glass, had a stain of Béarnaise sauce on his sleeve.

I recall vividly the wine I shared with my future wife on our first date ('93 Chalone Estate Pinot Noir; it was apparently the right choice, in both wine and woman). I remember distinctly the '96 Dujac Morey Saint-Denis I was tasting when I decided I needed to make wine for myself, and that wine needed to be Pinot Noir (that bottle was shared with celebrated winemaker John Kongsgaard, and I remember his bottom desk drawer was cracked open, and I could see a file labeled simply "stuff to remember"). I even recollect my first taste of Two Buck Chuck (post-half-marathon in South Beach Miami ... we'll leave it at that).

Similarly for me, each Road 31 release is little trip back 18 months, to when the wine came off the vine, indexed by aromas. And what a particularly intense year and a half we have just had.

Of course we can't ignore the political: Eighteen months ago, as I was tasting unfermented grapes, Hillary was a foregone conclusion. Yet, by the time the wine finished malolactic, we had Tweetmaster Trump and the Swamp Drainers playing a set in the Oval Office. And now, as I swirl this finished wine in my glass, we discover Putin was apparently drawing mustaches on Hillary's campaign yard signs.

On my home front, while I was repeatedly sampling this wine in barrel during maturation, Daisy Dog and Frito Cat (a.k.a. "The Great One"; we'd had him since before we were married) both took their rightful places at the foot of the bed in the sky. God bless furry ones in heaven. Related, as I was doing blending trials on this wine at the dining room table last spring, I looked out the French doors and noticed an electrical cord snaking from beneath our picnic table cover. Investigating, I discovered that while my wife was truthful that she wasn't *feeding* the feral cat that had shown up in

~ over please



our yard, she had neglected to disclose that she had created a veritable kitty-condo for it under the picnic table, complete with electric heating pad. A few weeks later — surprise, surprise — a litter of kittens arrived, and now there are two kittens sleeping on the couch next to me as I write this.

Just after this wine went into bottle, we had a crazy fire in Napa, but as I sit tasting this wine now, I look out the window to see Mother Nature has painted the hillsides green. Between charred trees and brilliant carpets of wild grasses, the Napa Valley is particularly stunning; just more proof that Mother Nature holds all the cards.

And throughout all this turmoil of the past 18 months, the 2016 Pinot Noir has remained surprisingly consistent. This wine originated from vines that enjoyed the first significant rainfall after a four-year drought; it has structure and depth that reflect the health of those vines at harvest. This wine has always — from fermenter to barrel to bottle — been effusively aromatic: ripe red fruit with an accompanying hint of tea leaf and rose hips. It has also been both bright (it has ample acidity) and weighty (the mid-palate on this wine brings a depth of fruit that rivals the most unctuous wines I've ever crafted). Notes of vanilla and nutmeg, from barrel aging, round out the experience.

I believe this is one of those rare wines that show tremendously well upon release *and* have staying power. This is not unlike the 2014 and 2015 Road 31 Pinot Noirs (which, if I may be granted a moment of braggadocio, both just received 92 points from wine critic Jeb Dunnuck). But I think this 2016 may have even more longevity. From the moment it came into being, this wine seemed to know what it was going to be when it grew up; it will have a long, distinguished career indeed.

The enclosed card provides instructions for securing your allotment of this release online. The order window closes April 2nd, and I ship all orders at once during the week of April 9th (just in time for Tax Day) unless otherwise arranged. Though I work hard to allocate carefully, orders are ultimately filled on a first-come, first-served basis. And I definitely make no promises on availability once the window closes. I make one small batch of wine; when it is gone, it is gone.

This — the release — is the moment that makes my vocation so damn satisfying: when a wine that I have spent so much time with goes off to be opened and experienced by my Trucker friends across the country (and globe). I like to think my memories with the wine are infused within, and those form the foundation for — and link with — the memories that you will now add as you pop the cork. Wine is indeed a story in a glass; as always, I am honored to share this wine and its story with you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kent Fortner". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. The first name "Kent" is larger and more prominent than the last name "Fortner".

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