

ROAD 31 WINE CO.

grin-inducing pinot

Spring 2019

Dear Truckers:

Greetings from Napa, where this morning I am enjoying a glass of 2017 Road 31 Pinot Noir Napa Valley while eating breakfast and pondering climate change.

I realize that may seem an odd trio of activities, so let me explain.

While winemaking does indeed provide a perfectly good excuse to drink wine at all hours of the day, the truth is I don't usually indulge until I am at least at the cellar. But it is release time, and I had already procrastinated on writing this letter and needed to revisit the wine. Then last night, eighth-grade Owen surprised us with news that today is the due date for a math assignment (that he has known about for *two weeks*, mind you) to video himself solving an equation that was stumping even me — and I have a college degree in physics. He and I were up late last night battling imperfect fractions, cheap dry-erase markers, and the iPhone's autofocus, and I need a little more than hot tea this morning. And yes, Pinot is great with bacon.

More on the release in a moment, as I'm very excited about this wine (and just got a great review on it to boot) and can't wait to share it with you. You can also just jump to the bottom of this letter if you want to get your wine secured and move on with your day.

Climate change is also on the menu this morning because I get asked all the time: "How is climate change affecting wine?" To me, the 2017 vintage is a pointed answer to that question.

I like to think that we can all pretty much agree that climate change is real. Hell, when even the military and the oil companies are planning for it, it's kinda hard to ignore. And let me start with this blanket statement: With regard to climate change, we have way more important things to worry about than whether Carneros Pinot Noir retains aromas of kirsch in the bouquet.

As to the causes, severity and solutions of climate change, however, it seems there is room for some debate. There's general agreement that Napa Valley has warmed a couple degrees over the last half-century, but in reality, while change is global, the effects are very local. The southernmost end of Napa, where my fruit grows, looks to actually be cooling due to the marine layer sticking around a few extra minutes each morning. Ultimately, to me, technology and viticulture evolve pretty rapidly in comparison to climate, so wine-wise, I am confident I will continue to find a way to continue to get hints of kirsch to show up in my wine.

But one effect of climate change that is very real, right now — and the experts are in general consensus on this — is severe weather and natural disasters. The 2017 vintage is a poster child. We



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had, unequivocally, a phenomenal growing season, and I feel the wine I made from that vintage is a testament to that near-perfection. Yet, 2017 was also the year that fires surrounded Napa late in the harvest season.

It is these types of drastic events that most threaten wine. The severe droughts of the previous years, and the subsequent push of growth with heavy rain the following year, were challenges in and of themselves. These then created a conflagration in California in 2017. For those of us who had already put our wines to barrel when the 2017 fires hit, the impact was minimal. Resting deep in the caves, my wine had no idea there was fire overhead. But for the few who still had fruit on the vine, or fresh grapes in tank, there could be serious consequences. You don't want to harvest smoke-tainted fruit, and if you have wines in tank, but the electricity is off and the road is closed, it's awfully hard to properly shepherd yeasts as they do their job. That said, Napa is, at its core, an industrious collection of dynamic farmers. Everyone pulled together to protect the community and its wines. We persevered, but we are left wondering what the next severe event will be.

Yes, these are the kinds of thoughts you have while drinking Pinot with breakfast.

Ok, about this Pinot: Critic Jeb Dunnick, who is quickly becoming the authority on Napa wines, had this to say about the Road 2017 Pinot Noir Napa Valley: *"... supple, seamless, sexy and pure style. Kirsch, black raspberries, spice box, dried flowers and incense notes all emerge from this fresh, balanced, silky wine that's ideal for drinking over the coming 5-6 years. 93 points."*

While I usually hesitate to quote critics (drink what you like, I say), I think Jeb's descriptors are spot on, and I'll take a victory lap on this one.

On to the main event: if you too want to enjoy this wine — over breakfast or otherwise — the enclosed card provides instructions on how to log in and see and secure your allocation for your cellar. The order window will be open until March 31. And as always, while I try to allocate carefully, it's ultimately first come, first served; please don't dally. I only make the one wine and release it once per year. When it is gone, it is gone.

As always, your support makes my winemaking dream come true — thank you for that.

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



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