

ROAD 31 WINE CO.

grin-inducing pinot

Dear Truckers (Fall 2023):

Greetings from a post-harvest break at Monticello. Yup, I'm currently hanging at Thomas Jefferson's former digs up here in the hills above Charlottesville, Virginia. Found a hardwood picnic table on the west lawn of the famous domed house and am enjoying a remarkably well-constructed chocolate chip cookie from the café while I write this harvest update. It's sunny, with spectacular fall foliage as far as the eye can see. I now understand why T.J. pined for this place every time he was stuck in the mire in D.C. (the cookies here really are quite good).

I am proud to say I got here via bicycle, over a few days, from Williamsburg. It was madly colorful falling leaves and crazy-good sunshine all along the ride; there is nothing quite like warm autumn days in the Commonwealth. I like to think the Wine Gods and the Virginia Goddesses convened for drinks and a game of cornhole, got to chatting, and decided that ol' Kent deserved a good break.

To wit: Not 24 hours after putting my last wines to barrel, I was at William & Mary visiting son Owen (who started there as a freshman this year — one kid launched!), and I realized I had a few days I could ride. This was a much-needed excursion after a nail-biting (but fantastic) harvest.

Most my winemaking brethren back in Napa are still trying to finish picking, particularly Cabernet. This has been a shoot-the-moon vintage. It truly could be the best quality vintage in decades, but it all depends on the impending rains and tough pick-date choices. The wetness of the spring, lateness of bud break, and a long, long cool growing season provided record hang time (record time to produce flavor). But because the harvest has pushed so late, we've had showers, or worse, in the forecast for months. It became (and remains, for the Cab-heads) a risk/reward decision: Pick safely before the rains but miss out on possible glory or push for enological ecstasy and risk the agony of disastrous, soul- and bank-crushing defeat.

I chose the latter and was rewarded handsomely. We had a couple spits of rain, but nothing material, until my fruit finally attained perfect ripeness the second week of October, a full four to six long weeks beyond typical. This is the latest I have ever picked in 25-plus years of making Pinot. There is a familiar and comfortable cadence and cycle to harvest after all these years, and pushing into the shorter and cooler days of October delivered an odd form of harvest jet-lag. But once I had the fruit off the vine, I woke up giddy every morning knowing I have something super special in the caves.

Long-term Truckers already know that the fall harvest update does not offer up any wine (I sell out every spring— even had to short my own mother this year). But know that I also have a most worthy vintage (2022) that just went to bottle; if you are receiving this letter, you'll see an offering/allocation of that wine next spring when it is ready.

I'm gonna sign off. There is a presentation about Monticello's vineyards about to start (Jefferson was once described as "America's first distinguished viticulturalist"). I'll be clickety-clacketing around in cycling shoes with a slight hitch in my git-along from a sore rump that is sure to draw stares — but I think T.J. would still welcome me.

Kent

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

P.S. Besides Monticello, my favorite stop on this ride was a roadside history marker just outside of Williamsburg that read: "Site of the First English Thanksgiving in Virginia in the year 1610." So, this is where my favorite holiday began! With that in mind, I hope Road 31 finds its way to your holiday table. Pinot does make the bird taste better.



NAPA VALLEY