

## Post-quake news from Chile contd

28 Feb 2010 by Jancis Robinson

**3 Mar 2010** *The images below have just been sent by José Manuel Ortega on his arrival at his O Fournier winery in Maule. I have interspersed most of them with Derek Mossman Knapp's extremely moving account of his experiences of the earthquake. As you can see, one of O Fournier's vineyards, La Higuera, lost a whole 10 metres to the local river. A nearby adobe house was ruined, as was the old winery (see the very end of this article) and what was reputedly a particularly beautiful 19th-century guesthouse was severely damaged.*

**2 Mar 2010** See \* below for a report from Derek Mossman Knapp of Garage Wine Co in Alto Maipo, one of the [MOVI](#) group of small producers.

See [here](#) for how to donate the Chilean earthquake appeal.

Perhaps like me you are concerned about the after-effects of the recent earthquake in Chile and in particular what effect it has had on the country's wine people and places.

José Manuel Ortega of O Fournier in Maule emailed me: 'I left Santiago to go to Madrid just a few hours before the earthquake. I tried to go back last night but the airport is damaged severely.'

'What my people tell me is that the situation is horrible. The houses next to the winery we rent are torn down. Our guest house is pretty much ruined. We had 15 barrels that fell and some bottles broke. Empty vats fell as well. The lab is totally broken. There is no water and no electricity. But the most important thing is that our people are ok. I have to get there to help. I am flying to BAires this morning, then to Mendoza and then by car to Maule. It takes a seven-hour drive where it took three before. We are two weeks from beginning of harvest but we will not be denied. We will fight back.'

Michael Cox, director of Wines of Chile in the UK, reports: 'I have heard that although there do not appear to be any major personal casualties in the wine business, many wineries, especially in Maule (Cauquenes) and parts of Colchagua valley have suffered damage, some serious. It will take some time for things to get back to normal in these regions. I am still receiving messages either via email or Facebook but I hope to have more information by tomorrow (Monday).'

'As a country Chile is responding well it appears and is well geared up to dealing with the difficulties posed. Earthquake-resistant building regulations in Chile will mean that damage will be minimised in many areas, notably in Santiago, but the force was extreme.'

***\*Derek Mossman Knapp writes on behalf of all the Chilean wineries affected by the earthquake:***

### **Some first impressions Santiago & Alto Maipo**

Wine is not a very earthquake-proof business. It's liquid and however it is stored it's messy when the earth shakes at 8.8. Legs on stainless steel tanks buckle, barrels stacked on racks in barrel rooms teeter, and crash and literally bounce. Glass bottles make a big bloody mess. The deep crimson colour all over the floor makes everything all the more surreal.

### **Day 1: Saturday - 3:30 am Santiago**

The windows rattled, the earth moaned, then Santiago shook hard. We grabbed the kids and rushed out of the house crashing against the walls unable to stand up during the quake. We spent the better part of two real minutes holding on to the door-frame and the kids; now without electricity.

My wife's Chilean earthquake reflexes soon kicked in and we swiftly filled the tub with water (now brown) found the torches/flashlights, turned off the gas and cleaned up the broken glass. Afterward, I sat outside in the car listening to the

radio and realised Santiago hadn't received the worst of it; Maule had. The epicentre was close to Cauquenes. We make an old-vine Carignan from there and have many friends in the business with old adobe cellars and homes. Then the hillside of San Cristobal behind our house slid and a dust cloud hung over the neighbourhood.

Power was restored at dawn. Highway overpasses and clover-leaves down all around Santiago were the first images on the TV. Internet came back mid- morning and twitter connected me to others. The phones were useless.

7 is a big shake, but Santiago for the most part fast became a bubble of 'normality'. On Saturday authorities asked people who were okay to stay at home. Having watched the first images of the roads on the news, I saw that it clearly wasn't wise to go out in the car and be the first to discover the heaved pavement and/or a fallen overpass.

So we swam with the children in the neighbour's pool. The pool was substantially emptied by the quake. My three year old's toes didn't touch the surface as he tried to dip his feet. Freezers had thawed in the night without power so the menu was 'Angus beef before it spoils'. All the while we knew friends were having a brutal time of it. Our little lunch party next to the pool was odd and somehow distorted. We were trying to be normal for the children. The earth continued to shake in aftershocks. Our minds were in the Maule and Concepción with friends. No word from anyone. Authorities asked all to refrain from using the telephone unless absolutely necessary. We managed to e-mail dozens of friends and spoke to a few who'd heard from others.

At nightfall, doors were left open (so as not to jam in the event of...). The kids didn't want to sleep.

### **Day 2: Sunday - Pirque - Alto Maipo**

Yesterday Sunday I worked with the staff of William Fèvre Chile, in the Alto Maipo saving barrels one by one. If Saturday was odd, Sunday was surreal. The fumes of the propane forklift in the confined cellar made my head spin. There was no power, no fan, no ventilation, just more aftershocks - 3s and 4s now.

En route south there was little traffic and lots of big cracks in the roads. Gas stations had lines for gas of 50-60 cars, and people were lined up everywhere to buy *pan amasado* (country bread) on the road-side. In Pirque approaching the bodega a corn silo leaned over like that tower in Pisa. Driving in, one could smell the first waft of winery hundreds of metres from the cellar door. Most of the William Fèvre staff had already spent Saturday cleaning up.

The first hand had arrived at dawn passing by the cellar on his bicycle when he heard what he thought was water running. Two tanks were damaged (he would find another later) so he performed a modified Australian trick, emptying from the leaking tank into an empty one with hose and gravity. When the two tanks evened out, half in half, he changed the hoses again and saved half of the remaining half into yet another tank. Effectively he saved three quarters of not one but two tanks of Grand Cuvée 2008 before the sun had come up and without power. He's 21 and his name is Cristián. (The rest of Saturday was spent cleaning up broken tanks, moving the contents of the stainless with buckled legs and mopping up two more.)

Today, Sunday, it was time for the barrel room. Dozens of barrels had toppled down onto others breaking barrel heads and joints and with bungs popping all over.

With the help of two very skilled forklift drivers and a dozen dedicated winery hands, we started bringing the teetering barrels down to the ground and organising them by lot in the main reception area. Work went on and on for hours. We were making a dent and saving dozens of barriques. We were all on an adrenaline rush. At some point the air quality got worse but no one noticed. At one point I was so dizzy I walked outside into the breeze to see the managing director Gonzalo Pino storming up in his pickup with drinks and bread. Then we all sat around enjoying Bilz (awful Chilean cream soda) from the stemware from the tasting room and slowly, in a kind of tired communion, we found our way to smiles and then humour-- odd yet somehow cathartic.

### **Day 3: Monday - San Juan - Alto Maipo**

Today I managed to get gas and am heading back out to Pirque. There is a lot more work to be done. An irrigation canal has been seriously damaged by a slide. We'll be walking along the banks of the Maipo inspecting and clearing rocks out before it can be reopened.

We've heard from more people in the south. Many people are missing including several hands in Caliboro. All over Chile more than 700 have died, mostly from the various tsunamis, but many others under falling adobe bricks of old, country homes. It is a small number. Chile was very well prepared. Consider for a minute that this quake was the fifth biggest earthquake in recorded history.

En route news arrives from Viña Rukumilla, one of our partners in MOVI, of the passing of José Pizarro, their winery's first-hand and maestro extraordinaire since the building of the cellar. Suddenly I must slow for a rather BIG bump between two sections of pavement on the 5 Sur.

What we lived through in Chile over the weekend was a very big bump. It cannot be measured in lost litres, nor by insurance adjusters, nor even by mister Richter himself. Hundreds of people living earnest and vibrant lives just days ago: preparing for harvest, vacationing on the sea coast, and doing so many other things, are no longer with us tonight. My humblest thoughts and prayers are with their families. I can only begin to imagine what all of them have have been through but, tomorrow, early, the Cristiáns and the Josés will be hard at work rebuilding – perhaps one of the most naturally spectacular countries on earth. A seismic country of quakes and volcanoes with crazy geography, far away, that most only know for its fruits and wines.

Chile will rebuild what mother nature broke this past Saturday. We'll do it whilst we change governments and whilst Chilean soldiers continue to head up the mission in Haiti. We shall rebuild, where and what is necessary, industry by industry, town by town, roof by roof, and barrel by barrel. You can help us because Chile is a country of traders. They say we have more free trade agreements than any other nation on earth. Let's see. Chilean products travel all over the world and most likely they are on the shelf just down the street from where you are now. What we need most right now is your business, so we can rebuild and yes, bounce back.

See [here](#) for how to donate the Chilean earthquake appeal.