

ROAD 31 WINE CO.

grain-inducing pinot

Dear Truckers (Fall 2014):

I was at Legoland when the earthquake hit.

Now, before you get visions of life-sized Lego Darth Vader reproductions cracking up and raining down black plastic interlocking toy bricks on small children, let me provide a little geographical background; Legoland is near San Diego, 500 miles south of the epicenter of the Napa earthquake. My sleep was already restless on that particular night of our family vacation; in the darkness, my cellphone lit up with a text from our neighbor back home: "are u guys ok?" As I lay there, I could think of not a single positive scenario that could generate such a message at 3:30 in the morning.

The 2014 harvest will forever be known as the earthquake harvest. Back to geography for a moment: The epicenter of the earthquake was 38.220°N 122.313°W, directly below the three vineyards that produce Road 31 Pinot Noir. After three years of drought, the ground had been packed hard, and the seismic upheaval opened up jagged, six-inch-wide cracks running dozens of feet. But beyond those cartoon-like representations of the quake, there was no damage in the vineyard. And my luck continued: I had no damage at the caves, nor to my wine. Others in the valley, however, fared not as well. Tanks cracked. Tall, orderly stacks of barrels were reduced to giant random piles of cracked, red-stained oak staves. Winemakers watched their year's work flow (literally) down the drain.

But truly, despite the losses, the valley was lucky: Had the temblor hit during the day, hundreds of cellar workers would have been crushed under barrels. As it was, we just had a lot of cleaning up to do. The real challenge was that harvest started full-bore just days after the quake, with a sizeable yield and a rather furious picking schedule. With so many tanks and barrels out of commission, it was quite the scramble to get it all in and done. Curse words were uttered. Red Bull was drunk.

Beyond the ground shaking, the 2014 vintage will also be noted for quality. With the drought, the vines are suffering just enough to focus all their energy on their offspring (berries). The resulting fermentations were dark, rich and complex. I'm anticipating an extremely tasty vintage. I'm also now really hoping for rain; four drought years would be one too many.

Longtime truckers know that this fall update ends with no actual offer of wine (I am sold out). For that, you'll have to wait for the spring release of the 2013, which is—I should interject—scrumptious. That said, if you are holding any 2012 in your cellar, Thanksgiving is the time to start liberating it.

And speaking of gratitude, I want to thank the many folks who sent wishes and inquiries our way after the quake. While my wine survived without incident, our house was not so lucky (two broken chimneys, a dozen cracked windows, and the lath and plaster took a beating). But—save for a cat that now spends even more time under the couch—the family was unscathed, and that's ultimately what matters. Heck, we had too many dishes anyway...

Here's to a stable holiday season for you and yours,

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



NAPA VALLEY