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Cork Verses Screw Cap Debate

By Ken Finnigan

For a very long time, cork was the preferred method to seal a bottle of wine. There has been much debate over the past few years as to what the best method is for sealing off a bottle, cork, plastic cork or screw caps.

Current estimates predict that roughly 6 percent of all wine bottled with a traditional cork will fall victim to TCA (2,4,6-Trichloroanisole), a bacteria that thrives in cork. Some of you might have even had a spoiled bottle of wine and not really noticed it. Even a very small amount of TCA in a bottle of wine can ruin it. Most become aware of TCA in quantities as small as 5 parts per trillion. When TCA is present in quantities high enough to be evident to a person, it comes across as 'musty' aromas and flavors. TCA in wine is not toxic, but the taste and aromas can be quite unsettling.

Another issue that seems to have people leaning away from traditional cork is the fact that cork can dry out and allow air to oxidize a bottle of wine. This can happen if a bottle is not stored correctly. Storing a bottle of wine on its side helps a cork remain moist and a moist cork expands better to seal the inside of the bottle. A dry cork shrinks allowing air to enter spoiling the wine.

Plastic corks have been created to help combat the problems being seen with real cork. Plastic does eliminate the problem of TCA, but plastic corks can have leaky seals which cause oxidation. Personally I have never had a problem with a leaky plastic cork, but it does happen. Another problem with plastic is that they can be very difficult to remove from a bottle compared to cork. Though this is not as detrimental as having a bottle of wine ruined with TCA, it can be very frustrating if you were looking forward to a lovely glass of Chardonnay and the plastic cork won't budge.

In an almost last ditch attempt at preventing wine from spoiling, some wine makers have resorted to screw caps for their bottles of wine. Not nearly as romantic as the popping sound a corked bottle makes, screw caps nonetheless are very effective in preventing wine from spoiling. Most Australian wines are no longer made with cork and have opted for this screw cap method because it's better at maintaining the taste of wine in the way the wine maker intended.

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Screw cap bottles of wine are becoming more and more popular, and yes, while they are not as aesthetically pleasing and continue to hold the connotation of a cheap bottle of wine, a greater number of higher quality wines are opting for the screw cap to prevent spoilage. So the next time you are served a bottle of wine with a screw cap, think twice before brushing it off as a cheap wine.

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What is Corked Wine?

By Neil Best

Keeping a wine bottle sealed is probably the most important factor when it comes to maintaining a good wine.

A cork is essential, as it keeps oxygen out of the wine bottle. If a bottle of wine is not airtight then it may become oxidized and undrinkable

Traditionally, the only corks worth considering were those actually made of cork. Recently, however, many wine experts have recognized that cork may actually cause more problems than it solves.

Cork, due to its malleable nature may have imperfections; these can result in the seal of the bottle not being as airtight as it could be and the wine being spoilt. In an attempt to avoid this problem, modern cork manufacturers may treat the cork with a chemical called TVA. Unfortunately, this chemical can cause the wine to taste and smell a little damp and musty.

Having said this, cork is able to expand to fully fill the neck of the bottle, which therefore, still makes it the preferred option for special wines that need to be stored, over a long period of time.

Plastic corks are becoming increasingly popular, of late. One of the main problems associated with traditional corks is that the wine becomes 'corked'. Plastic corks prevent this occurring. Great! I hear you say. However, there can be minor irritations with plastic corks. A plastic cork can sometimes be difficult to extract from the bottle and virtually impossible to fit back into a half drunk bottle.

Another recent development is the widespread use of screw-top bottles. Until recently, this type of seal was used for only the cheapest of wines. Wine producers across the globe are now recognizing the benefits that screw tops provide. This type of seal ensures that wine is kept fresh; there is no chance of the wine becoming 'corked' and the bottle can be easily resealed. In reality, the only reason that screw tops are not more popular is because of the ingrained snobbery associated with this method of sealing a bottle.

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No matter which type of cork you choose, it is important that you are able to recognize whether the wine has been properly sealed or not. A useful test is to see whether the top of the cork is level with the top of the bottle; if it isn't, then that particular bottle of wine is probably best avoided.

If a traditional cork breaks when you are removing it – don't panic! Use a corkscrew to attempt to 'dig out' the remaining cork. If this fails, simply push the remains of the cork down into the bottle. Contrary to popular belief, this will not destroy the wine's flavor. You may have to fish out a few bits of cork, but the taste of the wine should remain unaffected. However, you'd be wise to finish the whole bottle, under these circumstances!

When choosing your wine, base your decision on the wine itself and not the type of cork. Resist the temptation to be a cork snob; a screw top bottle may just give you a pleasant surprise

Since Neil Best first pondered the question, Who made the first wine anyway? (

<http://www.goodglug.com/wine-history-first-winemakers.php>

) he's been recording his findings at Good

Glug –www.goodglug.com. Find about your favorite wine regions, wine recipes, and speciality wines along with how it's made and how best to store it for maximum enjoyment



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