



BEGINNER CLOSURES

Content contributed by Jenny Parker, Imperial Beverage

Screw caps have been associated with cheap wines in the past and have had some serious perception hurdles. However, they are definitely on the rise with many winemakers in the U.S. and abroad. New Zealand is leading the wine industry with the majority of wineries converting from cork to cap. Wineries in Australia, Spain, South Africa, South America, Canada, the U.S. and France are all testing the capping trend as well.

Currently there are three ways to close a bottle of wine: natural cork, synthetic cork and screw caps.

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NATURAL CORKS

Natural cork closures have a centuries-long heritage; however, they allow for a bottle of wine to be “corked” as the saying goes. A “corked” bottle has a musty smell and taste, and can be a deceiving term in some ways. A “corked” bottle’s musty taste has little or nothing to do with the cork itself. Though not true in all cases, this most often stems from the sterilizing compound mixing with bacteria in the bottle or further, the wine as the bottle is filled. The compound that is produced is known as Trichloroanisole (TCA). TCA is an anisole derivative (a chemical compound) that occurs during the sanitization process when and if airborne bacteria or fungi undergo a chemical reaction with chlorinated phenolic cleaning compounds (usually bleach). In other words, TCA is a byproduct of a chemical reaction between cleaning bleaching compounds and bacteria. It is estimated that about 5-10% of wines available on merchants’ shelves are “corked”. A majority of the world’s corks are grown and harvested in Portugal.

SYNTHETIC CORKS

Synthetic corks, derived from plastic, appeared to be a viable alternative to traditional corks. However, their track record has been tarnished due to their inability to keep oxidation at bay for any real length of time, significantly decreasing the shelf life of a wine and short-changing the maturing process of select wines. On average they are warranted to prevent oxidation of the wine in the bottle for 2 years.

SCREW CAPS

Screw caps provide the best seal for bottled wines, and eliminate both the “corked” and oxidation problem. New Zealand is the leader in using screw-cap closures for its wines. While screw caps do diminish the drama and romance of bottle opening it is well worth the sacrifice to ensure an untainted wine that offers consistent aging, maintained flavor and freshness with optimum quality control.



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