

Title:

Corks or screw caps - The closing argument

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Summary:

It is now very rare to find the total use of natural cork to stop wine bottles with the Rioja region of Spain being the most obvious exception. Increasingly, for a wide variety of reasons, the use of plastic stoppers and screw caps is becoming widespread. Why is this so, and what are the pros and cons of each method, and what should we be looking for when considering the alternatives? This really is a topic of hot debate in the world of wine at the moment. By tasting wines using the different methods of stopping, you can join this debate fully with your own opinions, thereby reinforcing the subjectivity of wine appreciation.

Keywords:

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Article Body:

It is now very rare to find the total use of natural cork to stop wine bottles with the Rioja region of Spain being the most obvious exception. Increasingly, for a wide variety of reasons, the use of plastic stoppers and screw caps is becoming widespread. Why is this so, and what are the pros and cons of each method, and what should we be looking for when considering the alternatives? This really is a topic of hot debate in the world of wine at the moment. By tasting wines using the different methods of stopping, you can join this debate fully with your own opinions, thereby reinforcing the subjectivity of wine appreciation.

Most consumers still prefer natural cork and think of it as the most classy and professional way to package and stop wine. They would argue that the popping of a cork is part of the romance of wine appreciation, but it is true that the incidence of cork taint is on the increase. This occurs when a bad cork infects the wine with a mouldy, musty smell and flavour. Indeed it is believed that somewhere approaching one in twenty bottle are so affected, and whilst the worse ones are relatively easy to spot, those affected slightly do not become apparent until opened and nearly drunk. Never suffer a corked wine, always send it back or return it to the vendor. Cork producers are working hard to improve the consistency in quality with constantly improving results. It is important to

remember that wines bottled using natural cork do generally age well, because the cork allows for a tiny exchange of air within the bottle, resulting in a gradual, small amount of oxidation.

Plastic stoppers prevent this cork taint and indeed some are made to look like natural cork, but they can be difficult to get off the corkscrew and even harder to get back into the unfinished bottle. Probably the most important issue with plastic stoppers is that we do not know how the wine reacts to the plastic. It is this doubt that has prompted producers to move over to screw caps, which were traditionally used to stop cheaper wines. Now more and more premium wine is stopped this way with the Australians and New World producers leading the way, although some progressive Europeans are joining the trend.

Screw caps eliminate cork taint, allow effective resealing and were first used to seal those wines considered to be susceptible to cork taint, such as Riesling or Sauvignon Blanc. Whilst red wines can benefit from cork sealing in terms of taste, screw caps are much easier to use. As for the future screw caps seem to be in the ascendancy at the moment, but as cork producers begin to tackle the problem of taint effectively there might be a revival in its uptake.