

@ THE WINERY

BARK IN A BOTTLE

Over the centuries a variety of ways have been used to protect wine from oxidation during its storage. In ancient times, a layer of olive oil was poured over wine being stored in amphorae (vase-shaped ceramic containers). As recently as the mid-17th century, oil-soaked rags were still stuffed in the necks of more conventionally shaped bottles.

Then cork started to be used - its natural elasticity and impermeability made it an ideal stopper for wine bottles and it quickly became the preferred closure.

Cork comes from the bark of *quercus suber* (Cork Oak), with most production coming from Portugal and Spain. Even today, 20 billion bottles of wine each year still use natural cork closures.

However there have always been problems with corks, the most prevalent being oxidation and cork taint, caused by the presence of the chemical *trichloroanisole* (TCA). This dulls a wine's characters and can give an unpleasant musty, 'mouldy newspaper' aroma. It is estimated that up to 10% of wines have cork taint.

For this reason producers started switching to screw caps, which were first trialled in Australia by Yalumba back in the mid 1970's.

Australia (and New Zealand) have now been using screw caps extensively for the

past 15 years or so and are the world leaders (yet again) in this advance in improving the quality of bottled wines. As you will have noticed, screw caps aren't just restricted to supermarket brands any more - even the super-premium brands are using them and there is no longer any negative buyer perception.

'It offers the perfect environment, providing consistency and not allowing oxygen to influence the wine', says Louisa Rose, Senior Winemaker at Yalumba.

Among the benefits are -

- No risk of cork taint
- No leaking bottles
- Wines retain their freshness far better (especially important for white wines)
- No need to lay the bottles down for cellaring
- No need to hunt around for a corkscrew

Naturally screw caps have some detractors (especially the French, who are fixated by tradition). For example, those of you who are red connoisseurs may have heard some people argue that red wines should still use corks because it allows them to 'breathe' in the bottle. However wine doesn't actually need to breathe in order to age - a wine under screwcap will age more steadily and predictably than it would if under a cork.

Warwick Adams

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