

Patience Gould

All thanks to Rosa

Summer is a-coming...well we thought it was back in May, but June and July promised absolutely nothing and now it's August and very, very hot. It was even hotter though – in the early-to-mid 40 degrees Centigrade to be precise – when I visited Amorim last month.

It was too hot in fact, even for a picnic! We were going to have one in the cork orchards where harvesting was well and truly underway, but the lure of an air-conditioned restaurant was too strong.

The prime, leading cork producers in Portugal were in ebullient mood and clearly used to the heat; but then over the past four years they've been well and truly thrust into it, thanks to that yukky organism TCA. Wine producers fed-up with their wines being "corked" turned to the likes of plastic stoppers, and those producing the "coloured alternatives" rushed to supply.

A tad too soon it would seem. Thirty seven wrecked corkscrews later and I can testify to a few teething problems, let alone latter-day problems with the wines themselves. Am just imagining how I would have felt at boarding school – at least with cork you could gently shove it back into a bottle.

With some of these plastic stoppers it's difficult enough to get them out, let alone push them in – well in short it would have been bally frustrating.

So while the plastic alternatives were being adopted left right and centre, and causing a furore of their own in the meantime, screwcaps entered the "stopping" fray. We'd have loved these at boarding school – oh sooo easy. You might be wondering at this point how we managed to buy

alcohol at school and in school uniform, well suffice to say – and for the benefit of the local shopkeepers – we had a very high turnover of staff and accordingly lots of leaving do's! But I digress.

While all these alternative stoppers were coming on to the market, Amorim went into R&D overdrive, and learning more about TCA was the target. The company as I've mentioned is in good heart and it's all thanks to Rosa. No she's not some marketing wunderkind – it's a revolutionary (literally) process which applies controlled steam to cork and literally blasts out the TCA.

On-going tests by key organisations around the world have confirmed its effectiveness. So it's a happy ending to the story...except it isn't.

The problem with this TCA is that it is omnipresent, and that means in wineries too. While Amorim can do everything to ensure that it's been steam-blasted out of their corks at their end, once they are delivered to a customer, they are out of the

producer's control. Imagine the scenario. Corks delivered to a winery in hermetically sealed bags. Bags are then opened and left to be dealt with the following day. It's the perfect opportunity for TCA to swing into action. What's unfair though is that it will be the cork and Amorim who will get the blame regardless.

Sitting out last weekend, my next door neighbours arrived with a bottle of sparkling rosé acquired during

their recent sojourn in Provence. "We had it every evening, and we've got one bottle left," one intoned excitedly. How very nice, the perfect preprandial. Having done the honours, opened and poured the wine and got through the ritual and hoopla it was time for a glug. Yuk! The wine was off, bad...worse still, 50% of the throng thought it was fine. In spite of my offering a well-chilled bottle of Mateus Rosé I had to hand, there were no takers. "Much too sweet for me," murmured one; "But it isn't now!" I insisted, thinking that even if it was it was still hugely preferable to what was currently in my glass.

Without the slightest hint of exaggeration the will-power I had to summon not to chuck the contents of said glass straight into the nearest flower bed was colossal. As a result I've never made a glass of wine last so long. However, good neighbours need to be nurtured.

When they'd gone I gratefully shot to my fridge and opened the aforementioned bottle of Mateus. Perfection: my equilibrium restored I could then ponder on Amorim's other problem: that most people, even some sommeliers and other trade professionals do not know, or recognise a bad wine, whether it is "corked" or simply badly made. To this end Amorim has a roadshow underway in the UK, which is helping to educate those who should know better!

No wonder the company's in ebullient mood.

Are you missing out? Come September 22nd we are staging DI Vodka Shots, an event for buyers in both the take home and on-trade. A group of top vodka producers from Russia, the Ukraine and Eastern Europe will be on hand for tastings, and cocktail demonstrations at the Collection Bar, South Kensington, London.

Contact:

Daisy Jones djones@wilmington.co.uk

For full details go to www.drinksint.com

