

# BARK TO BOTTLE

NEWSLETTER  
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## Evans backs quality cork

Photos: Courtesy of The Herald and Weekly Times



Leading Australian wine authority and Decanter 1997 International Man of the Year, Len Evans, has endorsed quality cork as the best closure for wine.

“Good wine deserves a good cork,” says Len Evans.

Commenting on the current debate about wine closures, Len Evans said there was still no man-made product that could match good quality natural cork as a wine closure.

“I like cork. I’ve always used cork for my own wines and I like the wines I buy to be sealed with cork.

“The new plastic stoppers worry me, not only for their own possibility of taint, but also from a maturation aspect.”

What has been lost in the current debate, according to Len Evans, is the fact that not all cork producers and cork products are the same.

“I spoke to Joaquim Amorim, first vice president of the Amorim Group, when he visited in September. He told me that companies such as Amorim recognise that there have been problems with TCA-affected cork and have invested huge amounts in trying to eliminate them,” Len Evans said.

“When Amorim asked me to help some months ago, I was happy to do so, not because I am an apologist for cork, but because I believe it is important to make people aware of what is being done to overcome the problems.”

According to Amorim’s technical manager of quality control, Mr José Leal Ferreira, who met with Len Evans during a recent visit to Australia, Amorim has less than half a percent of taint problems in premium table-wine corks and is striving for less than one tenth of one percent in the near future.

“Amorim continues to invest in new technologies with the ultimate objective of totally eliminating TCA and other contaminants. Our R&D budget is US\$6 million a year” he said.

Amorim’s commitment to quality applies to corks for premium wines and those developed for commercial wines such as the new Twin Top cork.

The lesson for winemakers, distributors and retailers alike, according to Len Evans, is to insist on good quality natural cork from a reputable supplier.

“As winemakers we want control to ensure our wines reach the consumer in peak condition, whenever they are to be drunk. By choosing good quality natural cork from a reputable supplier we can minimise the risk of spoilage while still allowing nature to work its magic.”

Len Evans raises his glass to good quality cork.

Season's  
Greetings



## Sparkling Time

Looking to add some sparkle to your life?

Then how about a timepiece that looks more like the top of a bottle of champagne than it does a watch.

'Sparkling Life' is the 12th watch in a special Christmas series produced by Swatch each year.

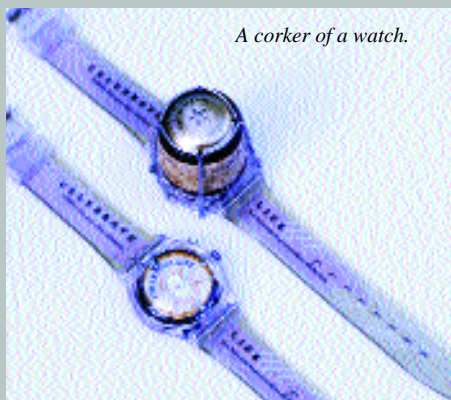
On top of the watch sits a champagne cork which is attached to the face with the traditional champagne cork wire. Once the cork is removed, a press of a button lights up the face of the watch revealing a glass of bubbling champagne.

The wrist band of the special edition watch carries the words 'celebrate life'.

Designers of the watch also created unique packaging, presenting it in a box that doubles as an ice cube tray.

Swatch's Christmas series started in 1987 with the legendary 'Bergsirussli' with its alpine flowers. Other famous models include 'Mozart' (1989), 'Hollywood Dream' (1990), 'Xmas by Xtian LaX' (1994) which was designed by French fashion designer Christian Lacroix, and 'Magic Spell' (1995).

Only 30,000 'Sparkling Life' watches have been produced for sale worldwide.



*A corker of a watch.*



*The Amorim Academy encourages research of wine and its environment.*

## Academy awards research

Winemakers, oenologists and consumers alike stand to benefit from French research that has won this year's Amorim Academy Grand Prix.

The prize, valued at 30,000 French Francs, goes to French scientist, Virginie Moine-Ledoux, for her work on the role of yeast proteins in the protein and tartaric stability of wines.

The award was presented on 14 November at the Palais des Congrès de Beaune by Academy president, Robert Tinlot, who is also honorary general manager of the International Office of Vineyards and Wine (OIV).

Robert Tinlot said that achieving clarity and stability in wines was a major concern for winemakers and oenologists.

"Dr Moine-Ledoux's work is a practical response to a common problem," he said.

Her work, combining biochemistry and oenology, has produced a very innovative

scientific approach to achieving protein and tartaric stability. It has also suggested practical applications that will allow professionals to test and verify the process.

The Amorim Academy Grand Prix, decided by a representative jury from the wine industry and scientific community, recognises a significant piece of research that contributes to the advancement of wine quality.

The prize is open to individual researchers or research teams around the world. Applications for next year's awards will open in May.

The Amorim Academy was founded in 1992 to encourage research that enhances understanding of wine and its environment, including research into effective seals and closures.

The Academy is currently working with the Department of Oenology at the University of Bordeaux on a three year program to evaluate the effects of cork stoppers on the proper conservation of wine. The research is due for completion in 1999.

### Drop us a line

For more information about cork and/or Amorim please drop a line to:

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## CORK - The Myths Exposed

### Myth:

*Cork trees are cut down to provide the raw material for corks.*

### Fact:

Cork trees are not cut down. The outer bark is stripped from the tree without harming it. In

fact, regular pruning and stripping improve the vigour of the cork tree.

Only 30 percent of a tree's bark is stripped at any time, after which a new sheath of bark is formed.

By law, each tree is stripped no more than once every nine years over an average lifespan of 170 years.



# The harvest

BARK TO BOTTLE

The harvest or 'stripping' of bark from the cork oak tree is a delicate operation that is critical to the on-going vitality of the tree.

Like all elements of cork forest management in Portugal, harvesting is strictly controlled.

A cork tree is not considered robust or mature enough for harvest until it is at least 70 centimetres in diameter or about 25 years old.

After the first harvest, the tree requires at

least nine years to regenerate its bark for a second stripping. This cycle continues on average for the next 150 years, during which time the tree will be stripped around 15 times. By law, trees may only be stripped of bark once every nine years.

Bark from the first two harvests (Virgin and Secondary cork) is used for a wide range of products—but is not regular or pliable enough for wine closures.

Only after the third harvest, when the tree is 43 years old, is the bark of sufficient quality for bottle stoppers.

Skilled workers strip the outer bark using special axes with 18 centimetre blades. Only

30 percent of the tree's bark is stripped at each harvest.

After stripping, the cork planks are stacked above ground and left to 'season' for about six months in the open air.

Harvesting occurs during summer (June to August in Portugal) because at this time of the year the tree is growing.

This means the bark can be removed from the trunk quite easily and ensures that a new outer skin quickly grows to protect the delicate inner bark.

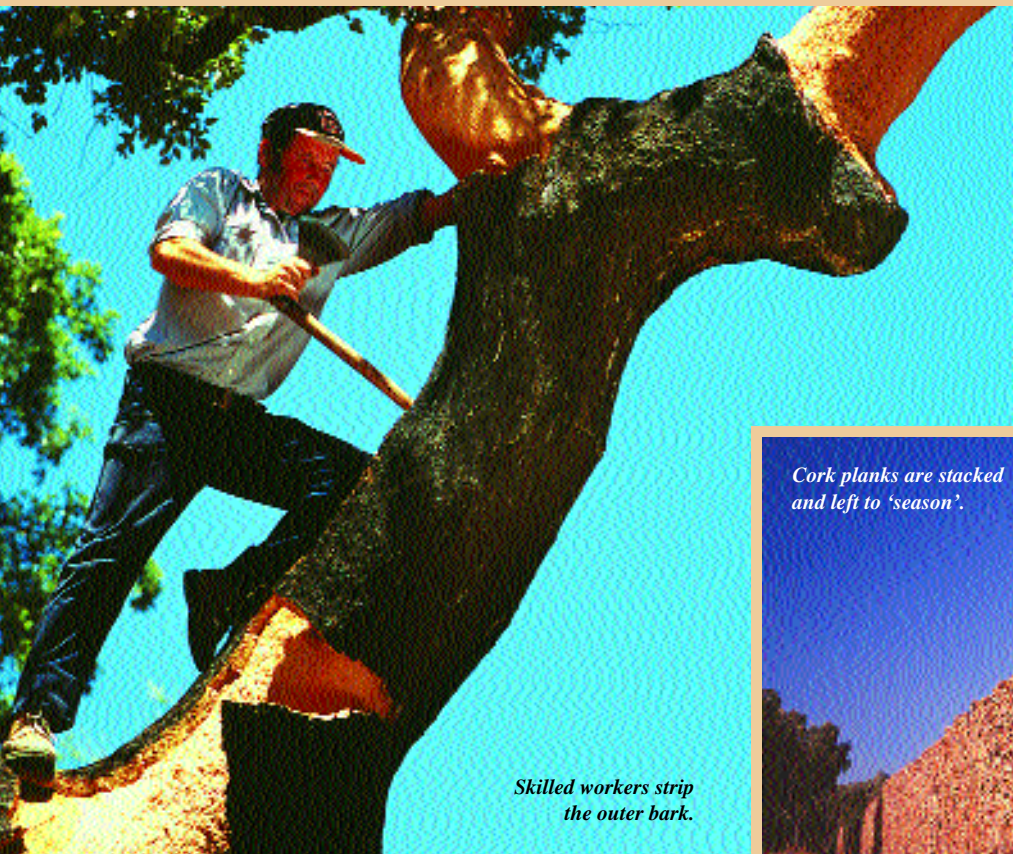
And so life returns to normal for another cycle.

The law requires a minimum level of husbandry between harvests to keep the tree in good health and ensure high quality cork production.

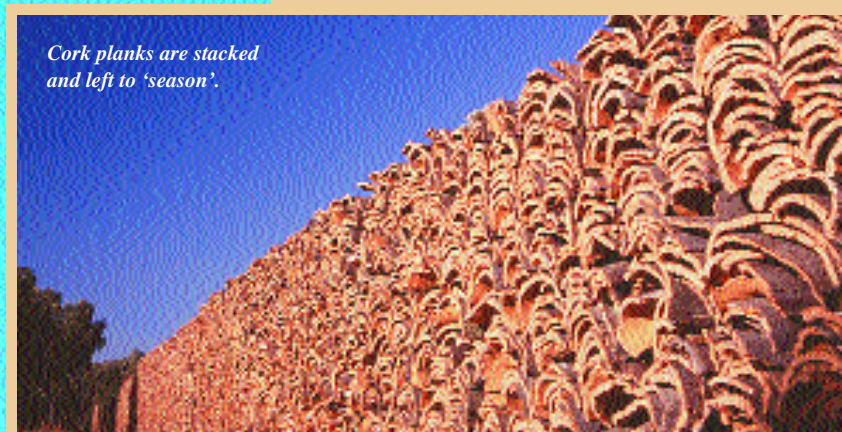
On average, a cork oak will yield 45 kilograms of bark per harvest. Twenty percent of this will be used to produce some 3,000 wine corks, while the rest is used in other applications.

The 1998 harvest, just completed, is expected to yield around 130,000 tonnes of high quality cork bark. While the volume is likely to be down slightly over 1997, the yield of bark suitable for wine corks is expected to be higher.

Portugal currently produces around 50 percent of the world's raw cork.



*Skilled workers strip the outer bark.*



*Cork planks are stacked and left to 'season'.*

# Even the best noses can be mistaken

Identifying and isolating wine faults is very difficult according to UK specialist Geoff Taylor of Corkwise, leading consulting and analytical chemists to the drinks industry.

"Wine faults are difficult to isolate and identify sensorically so it is hardly surprising that blaming cork is the easy option," he said.

"In our experience of analysing wine faults at Corkwise, actual instances of taint caused by cork are much lower than those reported."

This was brought home in an exercise to identify wine faults at the recent UK Restaurant Show. Wine experts were asked to identify the faults in four 'doctored' wines which were over-oaked, oxidised, TCA-tainted and contained high free sulphur dioxide.

No one correctly identified more than one of the four faults.

Twenty percent thought TCA was the fault in

the wines that were oxidised or had high free sulphur dioxide. And over half—55 percent—failed to spot the TCA in one of the wines.

Geoff Taylor's comments echo those of Professor Jean-Michel Riboulet, director of the Centre of Value and Quality Control in Oenology in Toulouse, France, during a recent visit to Australia.

Professor Riboulet said there were numerous ways a wine could be spoilt and have 'off' flavours. He said more education was needed to help people recognise different wine defects and flavours.



## In brief

### Ad campaign launched

October saw the launch of a major national advertising campaign for Amorim to promote the benefits of quality natural cork in Australia.

International advertising agency, McCann Erickson, developed the print and radio campaign.

The advertisements sparked immediate favourable comment from both the wine industry and the general public.

### Bravo Bass Phillip

Bass Phillip's 1997 Reserve Pinot Noir so impressed the judges of Le Concours des Vins du Victoria 1998 they created a special gold medal for best wine of the show.

In all, Bass Phillip wines collected five awards from the judging panel chaired by Michel Chapoutier.

Winemaker Phillip Jones was also the lucky winner of a beautiful crystal decanter and magnum of vintage port in the Amorim trade competition run during Wine Australia 98.

All Bass Phillip wines—including their award-winning pinot noir—are sealed with Amorim cork from Cork & Seals.

### Old bubbles surge to the top

A single bottle of 90 year-old champagne set a world record price of STG£2,420 (AUS\$6,500) at auction recently. The bottle was one of 24 bottles of Heidsieck & Co Goût Américain Vintage 1907, auctioned by Christies on 22 October, which fetched a total of STG£36,000 (AUS\$96,700).

The champagne was salvaged after 80 years under the Baltic Sea, corks still intact.

### TCA — it's everywhere

Further proof that TCA is a universal pollution problem.

The whiff of TCA in the air at two recent wine industry dinners was found to come, not from the wine, but from jugs of table water.

As a result, more than one winemaker has vowed to use rain water in the wine making process in future to avoid the risk of introducing TCA contamination through the water supply.

### Presidential presentation

The profound economic and cultural significance of cork in Portugal is evident in so many ways.

Two cork harvesters from the southern province of Alentejo recently visited the Presidential Palace in Lisbon with a piece of cork bark from this year's harvest for President, Dr Jorge Sampaio.

Responding to the gesture, the President welcomed the workers and accepted their symbolic gift in person.

# Amorim stands out at Wine Australia

The stylish, contemporary Amorim/Cork & Seals stand was a popular destination at Wine Australia 98, the southern hemisphere's premier wine exhibition, held in Melbourne on 22–27 October.

The stand attracted many of the expo's 30,000 consumer and trade visitors, including a sizeable contingent from the UK.

Amorim was the only cork supplier among the more than 500 exhibitors.

According to Mr José Leal Ferreira, Amorim's technical manager for quality control, who flew to Australia for the event, Amorim's participation in the exhibition and associated events was a measure of the company's commitment to serving the Australian wine industry.

### Technical advice at hand

Mr Leal Ferreira spoke to many Australian winemakers during Wine Australia. He

Photos: Courtesy of National Liquor News



Mr José Leal Ferreira at Wine Australia.



Cork punching demonstrations were a big attraction at Wine Australia.

explained the latest technological advances in cork processing and the stringent quality control measures employed by Amorim.

His graphic electronic presentation of cork's 'bark to bottle' process was seen on video by many visitors to the Amorim stand.

### Cork punching delights

Cork punching demonstrations by Dean Bannister, Victorian sales manager at Cork & Seals, were a great crowd pleaser over the six days.

The demonstrations were also televised by the top-rating Channel 9 morning show, 'Today'. Well-known personality, Monte Dwyer presented the national weather report from the Amorim stand and explained the 'bark to bottle' process.

### The natural choice

Consumers and trade visitors alike were fascinated by cork, especially its natural qualities and environmental benefits. Many requested samples of punched cork bark as souvenirs or for display at cellar doors and retail outlets.

Other favourites were posters of the 215 year old Whistler tree and a cork forest by moonlight.