

# BARK TO BOTTLE

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## Good news for cork

Two major comparative studies of wine closures have found cork to be the most consistent and reliable stopper under varying bottle storage conditions.

Researchers at the Geisenheim Research Institute in Germany and at the Excell Laboratory in France, found that natural cork and Amorim Twin Top® cork — one of Amorim's innovative 'technical' corks — were the best overall performers across a range of key attributes.

The research included tests for free sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), impermeability to air, elasticity, ease of extraction and visual quality.

In total, the studies compared natural, Twin Top® and composite corks against various synthetic stoppers, including a cork-based synthetic.

Bottles were stored upright and lying down at both high and low cellar temperatures, and assessed at periodic intervals between eight and 18 months.

The two separate studies, which were funded by the Amorim Group, were conducted by Drs Rainer Jung and Friedrich Zürn, from Geisenheim's Faculty of Scientific Studies for Winery Management, and by Dr Pascal Chatonnet, Dominique Labadie and Marie-Claire Gubbiotti from Excell Laboratory in France.

Amorim, the world's leading cork producer, says the findings, while welcome, do not affect its commitment to further improving cork quality to meet the needs of winemakers.

"The studies highlight the reliability of cork to perform well under different storage conditions," the head of Amorim's research and development department, Professor Miguel Cabral, said.

"Some of the synthetic stoppers performed as well as or better than natural and technical cork on some parameters, but their performance was not maintained under all



*Studies prove cork to be the most reliable stopper under different storage conditions.*

conditions or they performed badly on other parameters.

For example, the force required to extract some synthetic closures was twice the recommended standard. Others showed high losses of SO<sub>2</sub>, particularly over the long term, raising concern about oxidation.

"Cork, on the other hand, performed well on all parameters and under all tested conditions."

Amorim's communications and marketing manager, Francisco Brito Evangelista, said the results were clearly good news for cork,

however, Amorim would not relax its efforts to improve the technical performance of its products, particularly in relation to taint.

"These results confirm our belief that cork is the ideal closure for wine, but we remain absolutely committed to eliminating all faults and ensuring the highest possible standards in quality control," he said.

The results of the Excell Laboratory study were published in *Revue des Oenologues* (95, 7-13). A paper on the Geisenheim results has been published in *Revue Francaise d'Oenologie*, (183, 29-32).



# World cork congress

More than 950 delegates from all over the world attended the World Congress on Cork Oak and Cork in Lisbon, Portugal, in July.

The large number of attendees at the three days of meetings and events demonstrated the strong level of commitment on the part of the cork and wine industries to discuss common issues.

The congress served to highlight the economic, social and environmental importance of cork as well as the overall technical and scientific development of the industry.

Speakers at the congress focused on technological advances in the production of cork stoppers, quality control, sound silvicultural practices, research and development and the marketing of the international image of natural cork. They also highlighted the qualities of cork, particularly as a recyclable, renewable, biodegradable and sustainable resource.

Technological progress, innovation and quality control were the areas the congress recommended the industry target to succeed in an increasingly competitive environment. The cork industry was also told it must focus on client relations and integrate this process into all phases of its production and marketing.



*The use of technology in cork production was a major topic at the recent international cork congress.*



*Villiera Wines winemaker Jeff Grier — "Amorim is leading the way in responding to winemakers' problems."*

## Getting back to nature

One of the largest private wineries in South Africa, Villiera Wines has developed an enviable reputation for producing some of the finest wines in the renowned Western Cape.

Located 50km out of Cape Town, Villiera was purchased by the Grier family in 1983, after cousins Jeff and Simon graduated as oenologist and viticulturist respectively.

The Griers have increased the vineyard holdings to 300 hectares since that time and today hold ambitious plans for their products.

Over 100,000 cases are produced at Villiera each year for both domestic and export markets, and the business employs more than 80 permanent staff.

Light soils in the region mean vineyards traditionally have low yields, with Villiera producing an average of eight tonnes per hectare. However, the size of the total crop allows for a certain amount of selection and experimentation, which ensures an ongoing improvement in quality.

Villiera's main styles include sauvignon blanc, chenin blanc, cabernet sauvignon, merlot and bottle fermented sparkling wine.

Quality and innovation are highly valued within the company and these attributes helped Jeff Grier secure the prized 'Diners Club Winemaker of the Year' in 1997 and have seen Villiera Wines collect numerous South African wine industry awards.

Jeff Grier has worked extensively in France and other countries and this has contributed to a better understanding of winemaking techniques, including bottle fermented sparkling wine, which Villiera first produced in 1984.

Always keen to experiment, Villiera Wines pioneered the use of synthetic closures in South Africa in the mid-90s.

"Although I'm a believer in natural products,

I decided to use synthetic closures to overcome the problem of cork taint," Jeff Grier said.

"The use of alternative closures has led to cork suppliers making a major effort to reduce the problem," he added.

From 1996, Villiera started using synthetic closures for various markets, however their use never exceeded 40 per cent of total production.

In fact, due to quality improvements in natural cork, the use of synthetics has been restricted mainly to the United Kingdom as well as the local market where customers are given a choice.

"Synthetic closures also have their problems," Jeff Grier said.

"These include extraction difficulties and medium to long term maturation, which manifests itself in over developed wines after two to three years in the bottle.

"Besides these problems, there is also some consumer resistance."

The percentage of synthetic closures used by Villiera has diminished over the last two years, which to a certain extent has been due to the availability of Amorim's Twin Top® closure.

Jeff Grier says he is convinced that the work Amorim is doing on research and development will solve the problem of cork taint in the future.

"The quality of the cork coming out of Amorim is good and that is more than matched by their customer service," he said.

"Amorim is leading the way in responding to winemakers' problems."



# Strong harvest helps boost supply

An outstanding cork harvest in 2000 is good news for the world's winemakers.

Ideal growing conditions over the past few years, a high point in the nine-year cork production cycle and excellent weather during harvest have produced a better than expected yield in Portugal and Spain.

The 2000 harvest produced approximately 150,000 tonnes of cork in Portugal and 80,000 in Spain. This was considerably more than in previous years.

The result will help the cork industry meet the burgeoning global demand for wine closures. At the same time, the cork industry is taking steps to ensure supply keeps pace with long term demand.

Among these steps are the introduction of greater efficiencies in the cork production process, development of high quality 'technical' corks, greater productivity from North African forests and an ambitious cork oak reforestation program in Europe.

The development of 'technical' corks, like Amorim's innovative Twin Top® for still wine and SPARK® for champagne, enables the production of millions more cork stoppers from the same amount of raw material, without any sacrifice in quality.

Amorim expects to produce some 4.5 billion corks in 2001, of which one billion will be Twin Top® and more than 500 million champagne corks.

While, it is estimated, that the total area of cork oak plantations in the world grew by 23 percent in the last five decades, there are still large areas of land that could successfully produce cork.

In Portugal and Spain, the area under cork has grown considerably in the last decade and there are plans for further growth in years to come. According to figures released during the World Congress on Cork Oak and Cork, by 2015, Portugal will have increased its cork forest area from 725,000 hectares to 1,450,000; Spain, from 510,000 to 901,000; and Morocco from 198,000 to 541,000.

The Portuguese Government has already committed funds to plant 215,000 hectares of new trees and to recover 115,000 hectares of existing cork oak forests over the next five years.

There are also extensive cork oak forests in North Africa yet to reach their full yield potential. The cork industry is working with authorities in these countries to implement forest management techniques that will ensure their forests are highly productive.

As a result the production of raw material will increase as new plantations reach maturity.

However, the cork industry wants the European Union to take a leadership role in the campaign to protect and expand cork oak forests in other member countries.

It also wants cork producing countries to introduce legislation (or review existing legislation) to fully protect cork oak regions and plantations.



The Portuguese Government will plant 215,000 hectares of new cork oak trees.

## Cork oak plantations by country

*The total area of global cork oak plantations grew by 23 percent in the last decade. In Portugal and Spain, the area under cork is expected to double — to 2.4 million hectares — in the next 15 years, while extensive cork oak forests in North Africa are yet to reach their full potential.*



Country	1999 area (hectares)	2015 area (hectares)
Portugal	725,000	1,450,000
Spain	510,000	901,000
Algeria	460,000	na
Italy	225,000	na
Morocco	198,000	541,000
Tunisia	60,000	na
France	22,000	na
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,200,000</b>	<b>na</b>

Source: APCOR and World Congress on Cork Oak and Cork.



Get the facts on cork

[www.corkfacts.com](http://www.corkfacts.com)







# In brief

## UK Guides hit one million

Guides across the United Kingdom have responded to a challenge set last year, collecting more than one million corks in less than 12 months.

At the launch of the Amorim sponsored natural cork recycling program in November 1999, the Guides were set a target of recycling one million corks in the first year.

Strong interest in cork recycling and a desire to help the environment have led to an overwhelming response with the one million target passed well before the first anniversary of the program.



UK Guides have collected one million corks.

## Napa Valley Seminar

Amorim has continued its program of global industry briefings with Amorim Cork America staging a seminar at the Culinary Institute of America in St Helena on 15 November.

An audience of about 125 winemakers and industry representatives attended the seminar which was opened by Amorim & Irmãos executive vice president, António Affonso de Barros.

The main presentation was by Pascal Chatonnet from Excell Laboratory in France. He spoke about the use of different types of bottle closures and Brettanomyces contamination during wine ageing.

## Environmental commitment

Amorim's commitment to the environment and to minimising the environmental impact of cork production has been demonstrated once again, with Amorim II achieving ISO14001 accreditation. Part of the Amorim Group, Amorim II supplies cork to the Portuguese and Spanish markets.

This internationally recognised standard relates directly to environmental practices and highlights Amorim's dedication to achieving the highest standards in all areas of cork production.

## Cork quality accreditation

Seven companies within the Amorim Group have achieved accreditation from Bureau Veritas, the cork industry's

independent accreditation body.

Among the companies to gain this status are Amorim & Irmãos, Ponte de Sôr, Raro and Champcork. The remaining companies are currently undergoing the accreditation process.

## Amorim Academy awards

Christie's auction rooms in London was the setting for the presentation of the eighth Grand Prix of the Amorim Academy.

The prize, valued at 5000 Euros, was awarded to Dr Takotoshi Tominaga of the Faculty of Oenology at Bordeaux 2 for his doctoral thesis on aromatic compounds in sauvignon blanc, which had been unidentified until now.

Academy president, Robert Tinlot, said Dr Tominaga's paper made a significant theoretical and practical contribution to the subject.

The 'Coup de Coeur' prize was awarded to Jean-Pierre Got for his paper, 'The Glass of Wine in Dutch Painting of the Golden Age'.

## Champcork sells one billion

Champcork, the Amorim Group company that specialises in the production of champagne stoppers, has sold its one billionth champagne stopper.

The figure refers to champagne stoppers produced in the original way – comprising two cork discs and a body of agglomerate cork.

Over its 16 year history, Champcork has supplied some of the most prestigious champagne and sparkling wine producers in the world.

## Amorim backs WA2000



Cork punching demonstrations will be a feature of Amorim's involvement in Wine Australia 2000.

Amorim has taken out a major sponsorship of Australia's biggest wine expo, the biennial Wine Australia 2000.

An Amorim stand at Wine Australia 2000 will tell the cork story and focus on Amorim's state-of-the-art production techniques.

In addition, Amorim will stage seminars on

the two trade days (27 and 28 November) entitled 'Advances in Cork'. The keynote speaker will be the head of Amorim's research and development department, Professor Miguel Cabral.

An area called the Amorim Meeting Place will focus on cork and the environment, while Amorim Cork Australia will provide tours of its Twin Top® production facility.

## Bark to Bottle – the video



The Amorim video tells the cork production story.

The full story of cork — from the cork oak tree to the bottle — is now available on video. And it costs only \$A20 including postage and handling.

Shot in Portugal, the 13-minute VHS video tells the story of cork from the forest through to Amorim's state-of-the-art production plants. The video shows the various stages of production in Amorim's manufacturing facilities.

Also featured is a special item on the millennium harvest of the Whistler Tree, the world's oldest cork tree.

To order your copy send a cheque or money order for \$A20 to: Bark to Bottle Video, c/- Clifton Consulting Services, Level 6, 189 Flinders Lane, Melbourne VIC 3000, Australia.

## Festival time in South Africa

Amorim Cork South Africa has played a major role at the annual wine festival staged by leading Western Cape winery Villiera Wines.

Villiera stages the festival over two weeks at its cellar door and hosts some 600 clients from around the world.

This year's theme was 'the art of making wine and its associated products'.

Amorim was invited to present 'the art of making cork' which it did with a display and staff present throughout the event.

A questionnaire provided a unanimous endorsement of cork with 100 per cent of respondents citing natural cork as their preferred wine closure.

## Drop us a line

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