

THE BUYER

CONNECTING THE PREMIUM ON-TRADE

The Buyer's Closures Debate

In association with Vinventions:

V I N V E N T I O N S

Complete Closure Solutions



Setting the Scene

It does not matter what the quality or the price of a bottle of wine you are making or selling, someone somewhere will have to decide what type of closure goes in the top of it.

That's easier said than done. The choice and complexity of the range of different types of closures to put in to a wine bottle gets more complicated - and sophisticated - by the year.

It's no longer just a case of deciding whether you're a cork or a screwcap type of business, there is now a vast choice in between, some better understood than others.

But which one to choose? How do you cut through the marketing pitch of the various closure businesses to know which closure truly is the best one for you and your needs? If they are all ultimately claiming to be able to do much of the same thing, namely protect and help with the wine's development in the bottle, why is it worth spending that much more on an untried closure?

One thing is for sure, whichever type of closure you do eventually use, there will be those on the other side of the closure debate trying to convince you to use another variety.

Now getting in to the scientific nitty-gritty of how each different type of closure works, and why, is probably beyond the interest level of the majority people in the wine trade. What wine professionals want to know, particularly those selling wine in retail shops, wine bars or restaurants, is how reliable any type of closure is and how expensive is it to use.

But when you consider on average +5% of all bottles show some sort of closure fault, it really should be a considerable factor in deciding which types of closure to put your money behind, and which wines to stock and sell.

Figures coming from various international wine competitions put cork taint, volatile acidity, oxidation and/or reduction as the major causes of wine faults today. The largest of the four faults is cork taint at nearly 2% and the remaining around 1.5% each. These may seem like relatively small numbers, but if you put the math to it, it can be quite expensive.

For example, at a 300,000-case US winery (that's 3.6 million bottles), if 2% have some kind

of fault, then you're losing 72,000 bottles of bad wine. At \$14 per bottle, that's \$1,008,000 in lost sales per year and it cost you another \$1,367,000 to retain the customer with a replacement bottle and the costs to the distributor. That's a potential \$2,376,000 per year because of closure fault.

But what do key wine buyers, distributors and sommeliers really think about the closures in the bottles of wine on their lists? Ultimately, how important is it when it comes to stocking that particular wine or producer?

What determines the type of closure a buyer will prefer to use? Is it dictated by style, by price point or just personal preference, or, ahem, prejudice.

Closures is big business. Not just for the companies making them, but for the big retail chains and individual outlets selling them.

The Opportunity

To find out how important closures are in the daily cut and thrust of the wine industry, The Buyer brought together a wide range of buyers and influencers from different parts of the wine supply chain. Including producers and distributors, through to leading sommeliers, and independent wine merchants.

All were invited to take part in an open debate and share their views and experiences with our debate partner, closure specialists Vinventions. Key members of the Vinventions team were on hand to not only take part in the debate, but were keen to listen and learn from the direct feedback from important UK buyers as it looks to build up its presence in the British market.

The debate also included a fascinating comparative tasting, conducted by Vinventions, of the same wine but with a different type of oxygen transfer rate through the closure, in this case Nomacorc's Select Green range. You can read in this report what differences, if any, there were in how a wine tastes and performs depending on the level of oxygen ingress the closure has allowed into the bottle.

The Panel

The Buyer would like to thank the following panel for their time and support and for sharing their insights for this fascinating closures debate. They included:



Doug Wregg

Doug Wregg, sales, marketing and buying director at Les Cave de Pyrene, which works directly with growers and winemakers in its role as both a distributor to restaurants and bars, but also helps source wines for the wine bar chain it has a stake in including Terroirs, Soif and Toast.



Phoebe LeMesseurier

Phoebe LeMesseurier, marketing manager at Alliance Wine, who has spent many years working with a number of leading Australian wine producers including D'Arenberg.



Elliot Awin

Elliot Awin, commercial manager at Awin Barratt Siegel Wine Agencies, which both imports and distributes bottled wines from around the world, but is also involved in winemaking and bulk shipping wines to be bottled in market.



Valentin Radosav

Valentin Radosav, head sommelier at Michelin-starred Gymkhana restaurant in Mayfair, London, who has previously worked at Purnell's in Birmingham and on luxury cruise ships.



Ben Stephenson

Ben Stephenson, owner of Hangditch, the award-winning independent wine merchant business in the heart of Manchester.



Douglas Blyde

Douglas Blyde, wine consultant, sommelier and drinks editor on The Evening Standard.

The panel also included from Vinventions:



Don Huffman

US winemaker and also wine quality and education manager for Vinventions. Don was taking a break from his wine judging responsibilities at the London Wine Challenge to join us.



Jochen Keller

Jochen has spent 20 years in a number of international functions across sales and marketing with leading producers around the world, including Langguth Erben, Constellation, Champagne Pommery, Hess Group, Diageo-Percy Fox and now Vinventions.



Caroline Thomas

Caroline Thomas, who has been with Nomacorc for the last 10 years and is responsible for marketing and communications across Europe.

The Venue We would like to thank M Restaurants Victoria, whose wine bar manager Harry Crowther was also involved in the debate and comparative tasting, for hosting the debate.

The Highlights

Over the course of the next few pages we go into full detail about what was said by whom at the debate. But to give you a head start, here are some of the key conclusions that came out of the debate:

- Which closures different wineries and buyers use is of paramount importance and should be a key part of the decision making process. Yet it's sometimes overlooked.
- Once a decision to use a particular type of closure is made, it is not regularly re-visited unless there is a specific need to do so. There is not a lot of swapping and changing of closures used.
- It is very much horses for courses, buyers are keen to be able to use and pick the right kind of closure for the right wine, which might be down to price or style.
- Price and convenience are major determining factors in the reason screwcap is the preferred option for entry level and sub £8 wines.
- Whilst traditional cork is still the preferred option for some of the panel, only the best quality corks can be relied on for their consistency and to give the best results.
- The panel talked of the different frustrations that come with working with different closures.
- It also felt that modern winemaking and the reductive styles of wine that are now in demand means there is a higher level of wine faults which is often blamed on the closure, when in reality it is the winemaking to blame.
- There is certainly a willingness and interest to learn more about the different and new styles of closures and the panel welcomed the opportunity to openly debate the options but would like to see wider industry interest and understanding of closures.
- The panel urged the wine education bodies to make closure appreciation and understanding part of the syllabus.
- The comparative tasting, showing how the same wine changes based on the amount of oxygen ingress from the closure, proved a fascinating exercise throwing up more questions about how far a closure should go in determining the taste of a wine.

Background to Vinventions

V I N V E N T I O N S

Vinventions was created with the goal of becoming the most innovative and trusted supplier of complete wine closure solutions to the still and sparkling wine industry globally.

As the most comprehensive provider of closure solutions worldwide, Vinventions' portfolio includes seven product and services brands designed to support the diverse requirements of still and sparkling wine producers across five continents. Vinventions strives to provide closure solutions that maximize performance, design, and sustainability, thanks to its uniquely innovative product brands that span every major closure category including Nomacorc PlantCorcs™, Ohlinger Natural Corks, Vintop Screwcaps, Syntek Synthetic Corks and Vinolok Glass Closures. Vinventions' two service brands are: Wine Quality Solutions, which include enological devices, equipment and services that improve the quality and consistency of wine through real-time quality control; and Wine Marketing Solutions, which bring a scientific approach to the art of wine marketing with services including neuromarketing, brand promotion programs, packaging design support and consumer research.

Vinventions today has over 550 employees with seven world class production sites located in the United States, Belgium, Germany, Argentina, China, France, and South Africa. Producing over 2.5 billion closures annually, one in every eight bottles of wine sold globally is protected by a Vinventions closure solution.

The Debate

Lots of determining factors

The first thing to get clear about this kind of debate about wine closures is that the last thing you are going to achieve is, sorry to say, closure. Such are the enormous choices now available to producers, suppliers and buyers, there really is no one quick solution for all wines.

You really do have to take every wine on its merits.

Ben Stephenson at Hangingditch said it is important for a wine merchant like himself to have an open mind. "I don't see it as there being one perfect closure out there. There are, though, ones that I would consider over others."

His main go-to closures, for example, at the moment are Stelvin, particularly for younger, fresher wines, Vinolok, as they look so stylish, and good natural cork for their overall quality. His least favourite types being synthetic closures, and agglomerated corks "of any description," twin top corks, and what he calls the "two by two" corks.

Doug Wregg of Les Caves de Pyrene said that ultimately you can only go by what you have seen and tasted. "You can only really judge your own experiences with closures," he stressed.

He agreed that with the huge diversity in the styles of wine now available on the market, and being distributed by a business of the scale of Les Cave de Pyrene, then there really can't be one closure solution for all.

Wregg explained: "Considering the variety of wines we work with there is room for multiple types of closure." Each one dependent on an individual assessment of costs, the commercial needs of any given wine and "finally according to how you feel the wine needs to express itself."

Valentin Radosav at Gymkhana agreed that it was hard to generalise. "I don't have a personal preference." For him it comes down to the "purpose" you have for the wine and the "perception" that people have when drinking it. Is it a wine, for example, you want to lay down for five, 10 or 20 years? Do you expect to see your Bordeaux wine with a cork? Your perception, said Radosav, is that if it is under cork it has to be good quality.



But equally if a customer sees a wine under screw cap they are re-assured that it won't be corked. Whereas as a sommelier he is more re-assured that a wine under cork would have developed and taken on more flavours as a result.

When it comes to his customers, rarely is he ever asked or challenged by a guest about the closure the wine comes in, and has no problem selling premium wine under screw cap.

So many variables

Elliot Awin at Awin Barratt Siegel said it was inevitable that any debate about closures will be swayed by the passion and resolve of the different participants, and this was no different.

For him there are lots of "variables" to consider. Be it "ceremony, ease of opening, control over wine evolution, fault management, aesthetics/tactility, cost, through to the environmentally-friendly nature of the closure."

"Our discussion certainly moved into the direction of wine evolution and the protection from fault; Nomacorc evidently excel in this department," he said.

For Phoebe LeMessurier, she is less concerned about determining which closure is used, more the ability of the winemaker to make a good wine. "Closures do not influence my

decision on buying a wine," she said. "I would like to trust the winemaker has chosen the best closure for their style and for what they would like to achieve."

Radosav agreed the right closure would ultimately come down to why the wine was made and who it was for. "It is important to look at the purpose of the wine, its target market. Is it being made for early consumption, or for ageing, what is the price strategy for the wine. If I was making wine, I would look to have a wide range that could potentially use different closures, right through to top quality corks."

If he is ever asked by a customer why a particular closure has been used on a certain wine, he would say it was down to the preference and the needs of the winemaker.

A lot of the debate around closures comes down to how different solutions allow or deny the movement of oxygen through the closure and into the wine. This panel was no different.

Cork Matters

For Doug Wregg at Les Caves de Pyrene, the clear favourite for this was still traditional cork. It is, in his view, the best way for oxygen to pass through the cork and relate to the wine.

"The wine is living, and the transmission of oxygen (through a cork) seems to work in harmony with the wine. But as soon as the wine is put under different closures which allow less oxygen ingress then I find the wines are often dull, tight and awkward. I know these corks (oxygen permeable) can do that, but for me it is about the whole package and aesthetics is one part of that."

Wregg, though, conceded that which closure you prefer is very much a personal issue for both growers, producers all the way down the supply chain to the sommelier and retailer.

But he conceded the traditional cork market also lets itself down in quality. "I love really good cork and hate really cheap cork," he said.

Fortunately for him the majority of the artisans and independent growers that Les Cave de Pyrene works with use high-quality corks and closures.

"(Making a traditional cork) is an artisan craft like making barrels and seems to go with making artisan wines. You should not underestimate the aesthetics of having a beautiful cork in a wine. It is part of the experience. Wine under a beautiful cork express themselves

wonderfully and differently."

If he had a blank cheque then he would like to see all the wines he sells in a "beautiful € cork." Or as one French wine grower once said to him: "If you are a beautiful woman you don't wear cheap makeup. That's why my cork costs €."

Wregg said it stands for reason that if you use "cheap cork, and agglomerates" and the like then the incidents of "taint, or migration of cork flavour in to the wine" are going to go up. He noted that agglomerated corks like Diam impart unappealing off-flavors, for example. Stephenson agreed, adding that Diam corks are not neutral, even if they are popular.

Cork issues

A number of other panellists agreed that in an ideal world traditional corks would still be more widely used. But only if they could trust them. But that's the problem, they can't.

LeMesseurier said she had a love-hate relationship with traditional cork, and just the weekend before had opened a bottle of 1975 Penfolds Grange with friends only to be bitterly disappointed to find it was corked. But such is the risk you take. "I love cork, but when you have celledared it and had it in your house for 20 years, the most depressing ever is to bring it out at a dinner party and find it is corked," she said.



“Doug has some valid points on corks, but I have also seen such great ageing results under screw cap as well, so I am still pro the cap! Yes, there can be reductiveness under cap, but I see that as a winemaking issue not just a closure issue—and personally I have seen more reductive wines under cork lately. I guess it depends on who’s making your wines. After judging at the IWC last month, it was still frustrating to see so many cork issues from producers who had clearly spent money on higher quality corks.”

Stephenson agreed there was certainly “a place for place for high quality cork on great bottles.” But equally “this can still lead to disappointment sometimes!”

Douglas Blyde said that it was the inconsistency of traditional corks that was particularly difficult to work with and it is quite possible to find variations within a six-bottle case of wine. He had even “encountered a corked whisky” in his time.

Radosav said there is certainly a lot more confidence now in the sommelier community about the quality of corks being used across the world.

Price factor

Price is clearly also a key factor in determining which closure is best suited to the right wine. It would be hard to make the commercial case to put a traditional cork in to a sub £5 bottle of wine.

The panel was asked whether there was a price threshold over or under which they would prefer to use a particular type of closure, say for a wine under £8, over £10, or over £20.

LeMessurier says it is less about the price point per se, more the origins of the wine. She explained: “I’m happy for cork or screw cap in each of these categories. It really does depend on where the wine is coming from and who is producing the wine. I know natural wines do not support cork and also many countries still do not accept screw cap for their higher end wines, however, there are countries that are completely supportive of screw caps, such as Australia, in all price brackets. I do feel more comfortable buying certain wines with a screw cap though for both ease of mind and consistency of style.”

Wregg felt that for any wine below £8 that a screwcap was the best solution. “You are looking for a closure that preserves freshness by preventing and moderating oxygen ingress.”



For wines over £10 he would be happy to use a Vinolok glass closure or one of the Nomacorc oxygen-permeable options.

He added: “In an ideal world I would propose Stelvin on very inexpensive wine, Nomacorc (according to purpose) as an alternative in the cheap-middle range with Vinolok in the upper middle range for certain wines and then expensive cork for more expensive wines.”

Awin was not sure price was always the way to go in determining which closure to use. “Sadly, this is still impossible to answer, much like what is your favourite wine—there are too many variables. At sub £8, commercially speaking, we could be talking about a traditionally packaged claret, for which ceremony to the consumer may be important; not seeing a screw cap on the dinner table could rank up the list of their priorities. We also may be talking about a Kiwi Sauvignon to be taken on a picnic up a hill—I don’t want to carry a cork screw even if there is a 0% chance of fault!”

Instead he preferred to go back to choosing a closure based on different occasions. A choice, he admitted, had been swayed by taking part in the panel debate. His selection would be:

- Ceremony: mushroom cork (Champagne) or expensive natural cork.
- Ease of opening: screw cap.
- Control over wine evolution: Nomacorc.
- Fault management: Nomacorc.
- *Aesthetics/tactility: expensive natural cork or Vinolok.

Stephenson was keen to turn the question on its head and said the issue was not about the price point of the wine, but “the cost of the closure” itself and how much that would “dictate which closure is used in relation to the value of the wine being bottled.”

Role for screw cap

When it comes to price then, screw cap is usually cited as being the cheapest solution around.

Don Huffman confirmed that in the US the average screw cap cost is between \$50 and \$150 per 1,000 price point compared to, say, Vinolok which comes in at \$600 to \$800 per 1,000.

But with so many wines now under screw cap it was interesting to hear the panel have quite different views about how effective they are. LeMessurier was very much in the pro camp and was surprised to hear screw cap not being more widely praised during the debate. She explained: “I didn’t realise that there were still such strong opinions against screw cap. I’ve been in the wine industry for so long, on both the producer and the distributor side, and we have worked so hard in opening people’s minds to all closures so I found a lot of the push back against screw cap quite surprising.”

Her experience of working with leading Australian producers like D’Arenburg also showed how well certain wines under certain screw caps are still now performing over 30 years down the line. “I love screw cap and not had any problems with them.”

Awin agreed that from a cost point of view, screw cap was the way to go for so many wines. Particularly for the entry-level Australian wines it is now shipping in bulk and bottling in the UK.

“Your hand there is being forced purely on cost,” he added. “We are trying to hit a price point so are very much determined by what is available, what is economical, and what is being manufactured in the UK as it becomes too expensive to import.”



Which, for them, means using a Stelvin Saranex screw cap. But he also questioned the levels of quality there are now were between all the different types of screw cap. "Screw cap has to develop for entry-level wines. But how does it do that?" he asked.

He cited, for example, a recent comparative tasting that ABS did of entry-level screw cap Australian wines in supermarkets and found far higher levels of reductiveness in the wine than you would expect. "I think that is more of a problem than the level of corked wine you are seeing in £15-plus wines from Bordeaux," said Awin.

But as with cork there are now so many different layers and levels of screw cap each allowing different levels of oxygen ingress that it can be confusing lumping them all together as one generic.

Huffman said that there were still plenty of commercial winemakers using screw caps and not all fully understanding how they work. Simply putting on a screw cap on a wine does not shut down the wine's natural maturation process. There are so many other factors still at play.

Need for more debate

The panel was agreed that just by talking about the issue amongst themselves there really was more need for wider education, knowledge and awareness about what each of the available closures now offer.

Radoav spoke for many when he said: "Even though I am in the industry I think there should be more programmes, more advertising and education about the advantages of each closure. But one that is fair and not misleading."

The panel was also agreed that in modern day winemaking where there was far more emphasis on reductiveness, which meant there were now more faults being picked up which, in turn, made it hard to determine whether it was down to the closure or the way the wine has been made.

Wregg said it has bottles returned all the time from restaurants and bars claiming it is corked when in fact it might be oxidised, reductive or faulty in a different way. "The cork is blamed for so many things," he added.

LeMessurier pointed out that wine faults is not part of the WSET syllabus and is not even discussed or taught at Master of Wine level.

Huffman would certainly welcome a wider debate and understanding of what he sees as being basic issues such as realising the ingress value in a closure will remain have an impact on the wine throughout its lifespan.



Wines for closure

The panel then went on to discuss the growing trend of wines being made increasingly to suit a particular type of closure that is deemed to work best stylistically and for what the winemaker is trying to achieve.

Huffman said it was now quite possible to predict when a wine is going to tail off or become oxidised based on the phenolic structure and oxidative characteristics of a particular grape. "We can now talk to winemakers in terms of predicting those oxidative characteristic and when a wine is going to taper off."

He said he can now walk a winemaker through their winemaking process and recommend the best closure for the wine to be enjoyed as the winemaker intended. Those winemaking tools are available to winemakers as never before through Wine Quality Solutions—also part of Vinventions.

Comparative tasting

The debate concluded with a comparative "Taste the Difference" tasting, conducted by Don Huffman. Here the idea was to take the same wine—red and a white bottled on the same date and under the same conditions—and then see what impact there was on the wine by using three different Nomacorc wine closures, each with different oxygen permeability (ingress value), or to give it its technical term, oxygen transfer rate (OTR).

Vinventions and Nomacorc have been using the same tasting to show wineries what impact a different oxygen permeable closure can have on a wine. The goal, it stresses, is not to prove that one closure is better than another, but to underline the impact different closures can have on the quality and performance of a wine in the glass. That, after all, is what matters.

For our tasting, the two wines chosen were:

- a white wine, Moncaro 2014, a 100% Verdicchio wine that had been aged in bottle for 22 months.
- and a red wine, Lirac Saint Valentin 2014, a blend of 40% Grenache, 40% Syrah and 20% Mourvèdre, which had been aged in bottle for 10 months.

And the different closures used were:

- Select Green 100: oxygen ingress per bottle is 0.40 mg of oxygen after three months, 0.66 mg after six months, 1.22 mg after 12 months, 1.11 mg thereafter.



- Select Green 300: 1.51 mg after three months, 1.99 mg after six months, 2.62 mg after 12 months, 1.11 mg after 12 months.
- Select Green 500: 1.71 mg after three months, 2.25 mg after six months, 3.13 mg after a year and 1.72 mg thereafter.

Keep in mind that these wines only have trace amount of oxygen difference. To put it in perspective, natural corks are inconsistent and can range between 1 mg to 6 mg per year and per bottle.

The panel were poured each wine and asked to taste and explain the differences they found in the taste and performance of the wine under the different closures.

It made for an enthralling session with the panel fascinated to see the differences in the wine—with some seeing greater differences than others.

For Awin it proved without doubt how much more education and understanding is needed about how different closures perform and the possibilities they offer for all levels of the industry. None more so than amongst wine producers and winemakers. He explained: "What may have been missed is that winemakers need a certain level of education and understanding as to what level of oxygen ingress would work best for their wines. Being from an engineering background, I loved the fact that with Nomacorc, the winemaker can control accurately the level of oxygen transfer post-bottling; it extends their remit, enforcing responsibility to understand the evolution of their product post-production."

He added: "The tasting certainly showed the difference in evolution of three different closures, each with a predictable oxygen permeability. I thought the levels of O₂ ingress were easy enough to spot relative to each other, however, what would have been interesting is if the room discussed which would be their drinking preference; I am sure the room would have been more divided! This for me provoked the thought of closing a single wine under different closures allowing for a range of optimum drinking windows and personal preferences. We will certainly consider the possibility of

different closures for some of our own wines which currently, influenced by value, we default to screw-cap with a standard liner.”

Le Messurier added: “It was good to look at the differences that just a small amount of oxygen can make when sealing up wine. Being able to taste the wines side by side was quite interesting and a good lesson to us all as to how much oxygen makes to wines.”

Wregg said the “differences between the wines was very clear.” The tasting, he added, was interesting in that it rubber-stamped the idea that “even small differences in the same cork lead to very different results in the way the wine shows.” “Technically they are very good.”

But the process did not sit comfortably with his own approach to wine. “I felt the exercise was about imposing a neat scientific solution without understanding what wine is in a holistic sense. I see wine as an aesthetically interesting, potentially beautiful, variable and mutable thing. We were talking about stability, a guarantee that the wine would perform the same each time the cork is pulled. A living wine is never the same (otherwise it is not alive).”

But equally he appreciated there was a pressure and a desire from those in the wine industry to do all they can to guarantee the quality and consistency of the wine.

He said: “Against that is opposed the view that wine is product and there is a responsibility towards consumers to get that product to them in the best possible condition.”

Huge technical advances

Huffman said a tasting of this type was only possible because of the huge advances in both closure technology and also glass manufacturing over the last 15 years. “Everyone is smarter now. Everybody recognises that the adhesion of the cork against the interior finish, the extraction force and the breathability of the individual cork becomes imperative,” he explained.

We have certainly come a long way than say back in 2003 when, Huffman said, there was only one synthetic closure option and one oxygen transfer rate.

The big turning point, he said, was in the mid-2000s when Nomacorc partnered with a series of trials and studies by the likes of the Australian Wine Research Institute, UC Davis in California, Geisenhiem Institute and wine bodies in France and Argentina, looked at what impact different oxygen transfer rates from a closure had on different grape varieties, like Chardonnay, Semillon, Shiraz or Malbec in different countries and regions of the world.



The results were conclusively yes, said Huffman. Oxygen ingress makes a big difference on different varieties.

Hence the development of the Nomacorc Select Green series (which cost between \$120 to \$160 per 1,000 closures, or \$220 to \$280 per 1,000 for the Reserva range) that have been developed to allow different levels of oxygen ingress to take place between the closure and the wine. Natural corks cost between \$150-1200 per thousand.

By changing those ingress levels, it will then have an impact on the phenolic characteristics of the wine, be it the balance, the bitterness, the sweetness or the acidity levels, added Huffman. “You can adjust things and you can prevent things, which is key.”

More reactions

Radosav said he was fascinated by the process and the opportunity to “taste wines blind with different corks and levels of oxygenation” and to be able to notice “the effects of just a small difference in the oxygen levels.” Even the colours between the different wines was very noticeable.

He was interested to know whether the same effect could be achieved using screw caps.

Yes and no, replied Huffman. The challenge with screw caps is how well the different liners used are fitted in to the cap and integrated in to the threads. So in theory it is possible with the highest quality of screw cap, like Saranex or Saran Tin, “to make a very predictable closure.” You still need to understand the wine chemistry prior to bottling and have control of the bottling end-to-end. You see, there is three times the amount of headspace area above the wine, and if you do not have oxygen under control there and in your wine, that can cause other wine faults.

Stephenson also found the tasting thought-provoking and would be keen to see and experience a similar tasting, but this time using higher quality wines over a more extended period, and including other closures such as cork or Stelvin. But he stressed he was “not fully sold on it as a closure” and whether they are easily recyclable in the UK.

But Wregg believed it also “showed how the closure is only one element in the whole picture.” He added: “If you showed the wines in different glasses then they would have performed differently; or at different temperatures; or if different bottlings had different amounts of sulphites added—and so on.”

It certainly got him thinking further about what the role of a closure should be. He explained: “One thing I did wonder about was typicity, the sense we have that the wine is truly communicating itself, its sense of origin. The tasting muddled that because it put the cork before the wine and showed that cork is an intervention, a process, that affects the wine within. When you are confronted with three expressions of the wine you can either say that the wine is typical in three different ways or, only one of the expressions is typical. It can get a bit extreme – did not Randall Grahm say once that ‘all wine is corked’ or words to that effect. It sounds clever, but then you can also say that wines are Stelvinned, Diamed, Nomacorced, etc.!”

Blyde was interested to know what sort of reaction Vinventions has had from traditional cork producers to its work. Huffman said that clearly some were potentially at odds with its



findings, but stressed Vinventions also sells its own range of “high end natural corks. We visually inspect and smell every single one of them to avoid TCA and are in the \$1,400 per 1,000 range,” he said. So believes it is also part of the premium natural cork sector and has a role to play as well.

How the closures perform

For the record Vinventions has found that overall, doing the same tasting on a regular basis, it has been found that for the white Verdicchio wine the Select Green 100 is the freshest and most acidic, Select Green 300 is fruity and less acidic and the Select Green 500 is the most floral, well balanced and a more rounded mouth feel.

Whereas for the red blend, after 10 months in bottle, the closure that has the most impact on the wine is the Select Green 300, which is the most intense and expressive under the three closures. The Select Green 100 is slightly closed by comparison, but high intensity on spices and aromas and the Select Green 500 is the less acidic but has the most notes of fire and smoke (empyreumatic).

The Nomaticorc Green Line range

The closures at the centre of the debate included the Nomaticorc Green Line, which are made from sustainable, renewable sugarcane-based raw materials designed to help wines age and grow in the bottle through a range of controlled ingress closures.

Reserva: has the least amount of oxygen ingress (0.29 mg of oxygen after three months through to 0.60 mg per year thereafter), is TCA-free and is designed for library wines for ageing, has a zero-carbon footprint, and comes with a 25-year guarantee.

Select Green: low oxygen ingress for wines that can age up to 15 years, with three different oxygen ingress levels, the Select Green 100, Select Green 300 and Select Green 500 (see comparative tasting). It is also a zero-carbon footprint closure.

Classic Green: designed for bottles that will be opened within five years. Described as Nomaticorc's "workhorse closure" such is its popularity and widespread use, particularly in the US. It has ingress per bottle of between 1.70 mg after three months, through to 3.12 mg after a year and then 1.74 mg per year after that.

Smart Green: a robust value closure for quick rotation wines in retail. It is a serious alternative to screw cap, providing a true uncorking experience to the consumer and guaranteeing consistent wine quality through a controlled level of oxygen ingress, and is designed for wines that are consumed within three years after bottling. It has ingress levels of 2.02 mg after three months, through to 4.11 mg after a year and then 2.73 mg per year after.

Zest Premium: To be used up to two years and is meant for sparkling wines. It is also a zero-carbon footprint closure.

For more information on the Nomaticorc Green Line, visit www.nomaticorc.com/green-line, and for the full range of Vinventions' closure solutions, go to www.vinventions.com

V I N V E N T I O N S™



THE BUYER

CONNECTING THE PREMIUM ON-TRADE

www.the-buyer.net

Supplement written and edited by Richard Siddle

Design: Gigantic Creative

Photography: Stephen Morris

www.stephen-morris.co.uk

www.eventphotographer.org.uk

If you are interested in hosting a similar buyer's debate and roundtable then contact The Buyer at editorial@the-buyer.net.