

The Times-Tribune.com

Lifestyles

Fewer people get in twist over screw caps

More people than ever are untwisting, rather than uncorking wines.

One of the most frequent questions I get — along with questions about ice wine and Mad Dog — is how I feel about screw caps.

Print Page

Published: Wednesday, October 22, 2008 10:34 AM EDT

Dave Falchek/Staff Writer

More people than ever are untwisting, rather than uncorking wines.

One of the most frequent questions I get — along with questions about ice wine and Mad Dog — is how I feel about screw caps.

While some are hung up on their skid row connotations, screw caps can be found sealing some very good wines. For many light, drink-it-soon, white wines, screw caps are the best closure to protect the wine. Nearly all wines from New Zealand are screw capped and just about every wine region from Napa Valley to Bordeaux and Argentina to South Africa have some screw-capped wine.

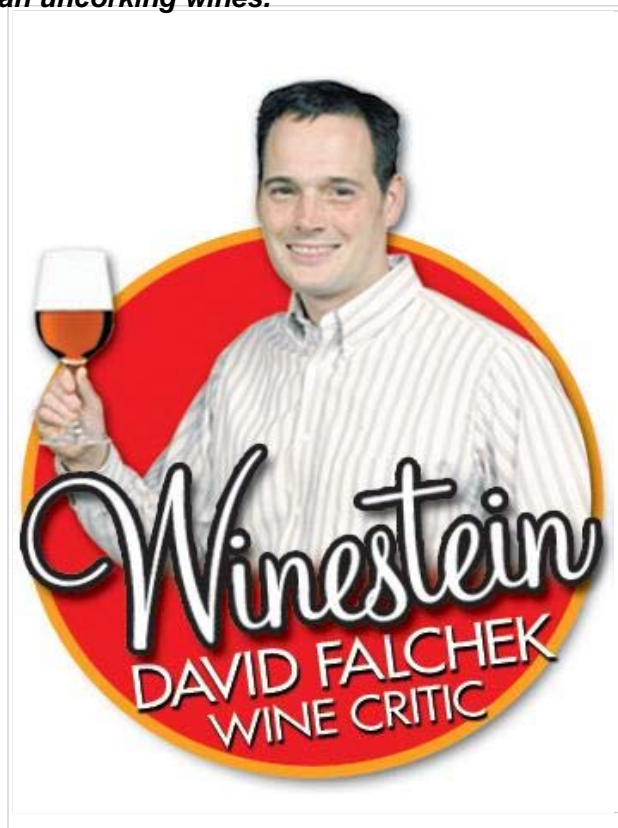
Screw caps have been rehabilitated.

Corks have their own spotty past. A certain percentage of corks impart "cork taint," a wet cardboard, wet basement smell to wines. Frustrated winemakers turned to the plastic/rubber corks and now more to screw caps. Cork producers cleaned up their act to the best of their ability, and those plastic/rubber corks have their own problems. But twist caps are here to stay.

Don't focus on ceremony

Many people view wine as an exclusive, special-occasion drink that requires the traditional ceremony of removing a cork. I've found knowledgeable wine drinkers don't mind screw caps and focusing on what best preserves the wine rather than how it is opened. Screw caps work.

New-closure vanguard Don Sebastiani Jr. said that, on most fronts, promoting screw caps has been an uphill battle. While his company's Screw Kappa Napa brand does well, he has moved other brands to the rubber stopper called the "Zork."





The average shopper doesn't want to take a screw cap wine to a party, give one as a gift, or order one at a restaurant with a boss or a date, he found.

"Functionally, we are very happy with screw caps but a segment has not accepted them," Mr. Sebastiani said. "Everyone embraces the Zork. It has that 'ah-ha' factor that screw caps will never have."

The distinguished Burgundy House of Drouhin began using screw caps in 2005 on its entry-level Laforet line. Family representative in the United States Laurent Drouhin said his company wanted to rejuvenate the brand with the trendiness and approachability of screw caps, countering Drouhin's undeserved stodgy image. Screw caps have been a success technically and commercially he said, and wait staff and younger wine drinkers like them. Drouhin doesn't make very much Laforet, though, and sells it through its well-trod distribution channels.

Few complaints

"We get very few, if any complaints. The people we see who are not fans of screw caps are usually the sommeliers of French origin," he said. "But we aren't trying to overload the market either."

Keep the cork screw in the drawer. Here's some screw cap-topped wine worth drinking.



Joseph Drouhin's Laforet wines are straightforward and capture some of essence of Burgundy for a very reasonable price. The 2006 Laforet Bourgogne Pinot Noir has bright black cherry flavors and a slight earthiness with a brush of fine

tannins. For an authentic Burgundy, this is a great value. \$14.

Drouhin 2007 Laforet Bourgogne Chardonnay has mouthwatering smells of soft lemon and is clean and pleasingly crisp. A straightforward wine, ideal with lemon pepper chicken or just sipping. Special order in Pennsylvania. \$17, Three and a half stars.

Screw Kappa Napa isn't a fraternity. This Don Sebastiani & Sons brand puts the screws to the nation's best-known wine region. The 2006 Zinfandel has a dusty, smoky raspberry-anise nose and chocolatey flavor. The wine is a bit hot (high in alcohol), and thin. Overall, this is a nice zin. Not available in Pennsylvania. \$14. Three and a half stars.

From New Zealand — where nearly all the wines are topped with screwcaps — comes Kim Crawford 2007 Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc, the benchmark for the under-\$20 New Zealand sauvignon blancs. Powerful aroma of grapefruit rind and lemon grass give way to tastes of tangy citrus. The 2006 vintage was a tough act to follow, but this Crawford does not disappoint. \$18. Three and a half stars.

Today, there are very good wines under screwcaps. Many of my new favorites — Argentine Torrontes, New Zealand sauvignon blanc, and white Bordeaux — are screw capped. Next time you see one at a party or at a friend's home, give it a twist and don't bring up screwcaps' past.

David Falchek, a Times-Tribune business writer, reviews wines each week. Contact him at dfalchek@timeshamrock.com.

Copyright © 2008 - The Times-Tribune

[\[x\] Close Window](#)