

Why Natural Cork?

That natural cork in your wine bottle? It does more than just preserve the quality and character of your wine. It **preserves old-growth cork oak forests** and a centuries-long way of life through **sustainable harvesting of the bark**. And it **helps preserve the planet by naturally absorbing carbon**, the greenhouse gas responsible for climate change. Artificial plastic stoppers or screw caps on the other hand consume fossil fuels, and use at least five times more energy per ton to produce, before millions of them end up in our landfills and oceans. It may seem like a little thing, but **demanding natural cork is something we can all do**.

Good for Wine

The real cork stopper is good for wine because it has unique innate qualities, which interact beneficially with wine. It contributes to developing its character, gives it authenticity and brings it value. Cork, which is just as natural and noble as wine, benefits from the production of wine and reciprocates with premium performance stoppers. Both industries have grown together over the centuries.

- **Naturally Sequesters Carbon**

“In comparison to the aluminium and plastic closures, **the cork stopper is the best alternative** in terms of non-renewable energy consumption, emission of greenhouse effect gases, contribution to atmospheric acidification, contribution to the formation of photochemical oxidants, contribution to the eutrophication of surface water and total production of solid waste.” 1

“The **capture of carbon by the cork** oaks during the photosynthesis process **results in plant growth and transforms atmospheric CO2 into O2** and, in the case of organic matter, into cellulose. For this reason, the forest is considered to be an important carbon sink.” 2

1. Source: PWC-Evaluation of the Environmental Impacts of Cork Stoppers Versus Aluminum and Plastic Closures, pg. 56

2. Source: PWC-Evaluation of the Environmental Impacts of Cork Stoppers Versus Aluminum and Plastic Closures, pg. 14

- **Timeless Partner to Wine**

- “Ever since the French monk **Dom Perignon** experimented with a new stopper for his sparkling wine in the early 1600s, **cork stoppers** have underpinned the global wine industry.” 1
- “In the Wine Business Monthly 2009 Closure Report, **wineries rated closures** by perceived consumer acceptance. **Natural cork received the highest marks**. A more direct study of consumer perception was conducted by the Oregon State University Food Innovation Center¹. It found that **consumers perceived wine finished with cork to have higher quality and price** than the same wine finished in alternative closures.”

- “In a study conducted by Tragon2, consumers were asked to rate the appropriateness of different closures for a variety of occasions ... when consumers were asked the general question “how likely would you be to purchase wines with this closure”? **Natural cork was selected by a 4:1 margin** over alternatives.” 2
- 1. Source: WWF-Cork Screwed? Environmental and economic impacts of the cork stopper, pg. 18
- 2. Source: CQC, Timeless partner to wine, pg. 1

Good for the Environment

Cork oak forests, referred to as montados, are the lungs of the environment, the economy and the society of Mediterranean countries. They have such an important role for nature and people that they are protected by law. In Portugal, where there is the largest cork oak forest area in the world, the cork oak is the national tree and has been protected by law since the 13th century. A growing awareness of the value of the ecosystem of the cork oak forest has led to important initiatives in reforestation and the systematisation of good practices. It is a way of ensuring the future, without forgetting the old saying: “Whoever cares for their grandchildren, plants a cork oak”.

• The Facts

Cork and Climate Change

Harvesting cork bark assists in the absorption of CO₂ – a greenhouse gas that causes climate change. In fact, harvested cork trees absorb 3-5 times more CO₂ than non-harvested trees. Cork oak trees in Portugal alone help offset 10 million tons of carbon every year. Cork trees are also important producers of oxygen.

Cork Trees Are Harvested, Not Cut Down

Cork stoppers are made from the bark of a cork oak tree, not the tree itself. Bark is harvested from the tree every 9-12 years. Completely renewable and sustainable, harvesting bark does not harm the tree. Each time cork is harvested; cork bark regenerates itself (and in doing so absorbs CO₂). In fact, cork trees live between 100 and 300 years.

Cork Is Biodegradable and Recyclable

Cork is a natural, environmentally friendly material. It biodegrades completely and can be easily recycled without producing any toxic residues. The plastic portion of screw caps is non-recyclable.

If The Trees Go, So Do the Animals

Cork forests – or ‘montados’ in Portuguese – rank among the top biodiversity hotspots in the Mediterranean and Europe. They are home to a staggering 135 plant species and 42 bird species, many of who are endangered or critically endangered.

Cork Vs Screw Caps

Cork stoppers are punched out of strips of cork bark. Simple as that. The manufacture of screw caps and plastic stoppers, on the other hand, involves higher non-renewable energy consumption (not to mention the production of toxic by-products).

Forest Fire Prevention

The thick bark on cork oak trees acts as a protective barrier against fire and heat. This protection extends to the forest itself and the animals within it. In fact, the scientific name for these species of tree is pyrophytes – which literally mean ‘fire plants’.

Social Impacts

Cork is a vital source of regional rural employment. Cork oak woodlands provide employment and guarantee the survival of local communities. It has been estimated that more than 100,000 people in the seven Mediterranean cork-producing countries depend directly and indirectly on cork economies.

• Sustainability

- “Cork harvesting is an **environmentally friendly** process during which **not a single tree is cut down**. The **bark renews itself** ready for the next harvesting.” 1
- “Unlike its synthetic counterparts, **cork is an inherently sustainable resource**, both **renewable** and **biodegradable**. The cork oak tree (*Quercus suber*) is unique in that its thick bark can be stripped off every decade to extract the cork **without damaging the trees**, which can live 170 to 250 years on average.”
- “**Careful forest management** not only provides for the continued extraction of the cork oak but helps to create the conditions for a diverse range of other products that are harvested from the woodlands. A harmonious balance is maintained, where local people can provide for their needs **without damaging the ecosystem or threatening the long-term sustainability** of their most important natural resource.” 2
- “The **cork oak is a slow growing tree that may live for 200 years**, which allows it, on average, to be stripped 16 times during its lifetime. The first stripping only takes place after 25 years, when the trunk of the tree has a circumference of 70 cm.” 3
- 1. Source: WWF – Cork Screwed? Environmental and economic impacts of the cork stopper, pg. 2
- 2. Source: Rainforest Alliance: Profiles in Sustainable Forestry, pg. 2
- 3. Source: PWC-Evaluation of the Environmental Impacts of Cork Stoppers Versus Aluminum and Plastic Closures, pg. 14

• Biodiversity

“**Cork oak trees help to conserve soil** by providing protection against wind erosion and increasing the rate at which rainwater infiltrates and recharges groundwater.” 1

“Cork oak landscapes cover approximately 2.7 million hectares of Portugal, Spain, Algeria, Morocco, Italy, Tunisia and France. As well as providing a **vital source of income for more than 100,000 people**, these landscapes also **support one of the highest levels of biodiversity among forest habitats**, including globally endangered species such as the Iberian Lynx, the Iberian Imperial Eagle and the Barbary Deer.” 2

“The Mediterranean is one of the 25 global ‘hot spots’ characterized by a high level of species diversity (Myers & al, 2000.) It has 13,000 endemic plant species, the second highest number in the world after the tropical Andes (Biro, Merlo & Paiero, 2005). **In cork oak landscapes, plant diversity can reach a level of 135 species per square metre**, and many of these species have aromatic, culinary, or medicinal uses.” 3

1. Source: WWF – Cork Screwed? Environmental and economic impacts of the cork stopper, pg. 8

2. Source: WWF – Cork Screwed? Environmental and economic impacts of the cork stopper, pg. 2

- **Plastic Stoppers and the Environment**

- **Plastic Closures, Green or Green Washing?**
- Submitted By: Patrick Spencer, December 11, 2014 to www.wineindustryinsight.com
- The ongoing debate over which wine closure is best for wine has shifted to a debate over which stopper is best for the environment: A natural cork closure or a manufactured plastic stopper. As astonishing as it may seem, a manufacturer of synthetic plastic stoppers is making the claim that the “Select Bio” closure is the “world’s first zero carbon footprint wine closure.” Even more astounding, the market appears to be buying this blatant example of “green washing,” (the dissemination of misleading information that conceals abuse of the environment in order to present a positive public image).
- The claim of a “zero carbon footprint” is partially based upon the manufacturer’s disclosure that a percentage of its plastic stopper is made from “plant-based biopolymers derived from sugar cane.” Brazil has become the world’s largest supplier of sugar cane and it is estimated that 70 percent of Brazil’s 7 million acres of sugar cane is harvested by hand.
- Cutting sugar cane by hand requires controlled fires in the fields to smoke out nasty snakes and tarantulas. Not only do these controlled burnings pollute the air with soot, risking worker health and safety, but also releases methane, a potent greenhouse gas, and nitrous oxide. According to the World Wildlife Fund and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the harvesting by hand of cane sugar results in the degradation of soils and aquatic systems, and the exploitation of cane cutters, transforming the land into a “carbon-spewing wasteland.” No amount of green washing can wipe away these ugly facts.
- While sugar cane ethanol is less ecologically destructive than some other biofuels, its boosters have overlooked one key fact: You’ve got to plant sugar cane somewhere. Unfortunately, most of Brazil’s sugar cane production is in the Atlantic rainforest. There, sugar cane harvesting has led to deforestation and, paradoxically, reduced carbon sequestration and a larger carbon footprint.
- The negative impact on the environment brought about by plastic corks does not end in the production process. Once produced, they have no place to go. They are not biodegradable. While they may be “fully recyclable” in theory, recycling statistics say otherwise. Here are some recycling facts for plastics in the U.S.:
- A 2012 study by the Earth Institute states that less than 6.5% of the plastic used in the U.S. is recycled. The major portion of that comes from soft drink and water bottles. Municipal recycling centers do not recycle plastic wine closures as they are either too small to be picked out or are considered “multi layered resins.” This leaves more than 93.5 percent of all plastic products going into landfills, beaches or our oceans.
- Compare this to the harvesting and recycling of natural cork. Cork harvesting is considered the most sustainable and environmentally friendly forestry on our planet. The harvesting contributes to the health of the trees and to the quality of life of the local inhabitants by providing high-paying jobs. These forests absorb over 20 million tons of CO₂ each year and provide a significant amount of healthy clean oxygen, two critical factors in helping to combat climate change. They are also home to over 13,000 species of plants, animals and insects that are found nowhere else on earth.

- Prior to the introduction of composite corks and other cork products, the unused bark was considered waste. Today, the “waste bark” is up-cycled into thousands of cork products, creating a 100% raw material usage. Once produced, cork is biodegradable, renewable and easily recycled. For example, in 2013 the Cork ReHarvest Program, with a zero carbon footprint, collected more than 80 tons of natural and composite cork stoppers, (18,000,000 corks) which were recycled into a wide variety of products. Natural and composite corks are continually being recycled and ground up to produce many new consumer products. In fact, virtually every cork product is a recycled product.
- No matter how much green washing the manufacturers of plastic stoppers may apply to their marketing, the facts remain—only cork is sustainable, renewable, biodegradable and recyclable.

Good for Wineries

- **Associated with Higher Quality Wine**

Wine Drinkers in the U.S., Germany, and Australia Associate Wines with a Natural Cork Stopper to be of Significantly Higher Quality than Those with a Screw Cap

NAPA, Calif., March 9th, 2014 – According to a recent market research study on wine closures conducted by [Tragon Corporation](#), **93 percent of U.S. wine consumers associate natural cork with higher quality wines**, while only 11 percent of U.S. wine consumers believe wines sealed with a screw cap to be of high quality. Similar results were found in both Germany and Australia. In Germany, 93 percent of wine drinkers and 85 percent in Australia associate natural cork with higher quality wines. Participants in both the U.S. and Germany went even a step further to indicate that **natural cork is a positive influence on their purchase decisions whereas screw caps and synthetic closures can deter a purchase.**

The 2013 web-based survey was administered to 1,550 consumers throughout the U.S., Australia and Germany. Participants included red and white wine drinkers, 80 percent of which consume wine at least once a week. The survey was comprised of 35 percent males and 65 percent females, who are the primary shoppers for their households and range in age from 25-65. The independent study was commissioned by Tragon with research partners SAM in Germany and AWRI in Australia. View the full report [here](#).

Commenting on the results, Rebecca Bleibaum, Tragon’s VP, Sensory and Consumer Insights, stated, “Consumers in all markets tested – U.S., Australia, and Germany — **perceive wines with a natural cork closure to be of significantly higher quality than those with a screw cap.**”

Additional findings from the study include:

- **Wines with a cork stopper are perceived as being appropriate for all occasions, from an informal dinner at home to dining out for a special occasion.**
- **Wines sealed with screw caps, on the other hand, especially in the U.S., are generally viewed as being of lower or moderate quality, and are viewed as less appropriate for a special occasion or dinner at a restaurant.**
- **61 percent of the U.S respondents indicated that given the choice they would prefer to purchase wine with natural cork stoppers, while only three percent said they prefer to purchase wine with a screw cap.**

- **In Germany, 72 percent of the respondents indicated that screw caps convey moderate to low quality.**

“The data shown for the U.S., Australia and German markets has consistent, and perhaps even unexpected, positive news for wineries that feature natural cork stoppers,” commented Peter Weber, Executive Director of the Cork Quality Council. **“Since consumers overwhelmingly associate cork with high quality wines, having a cork stopper instead of a screw cap can make a critical difference when it comes to selling to the all-crucial, premium segment of the market that successful wineries around the world are targeting. It certainly makes sense for these wineries to promote their use of cork.”**

- **Increase In Sales Volume and Value**

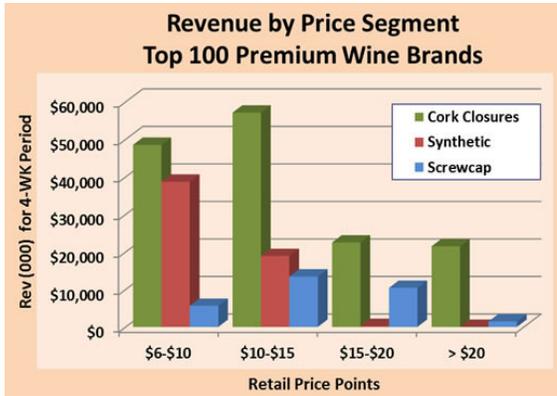
- **Wines Closed With Cork Saw Increase in Sales Volume and Value**
- [WineBusiness.com](#) | November 11, 2014 [corkqc.com January 2017](#)
- Nielsen released sales figures for the top 100 premium wine brands based solely on closure type, showing significant improvements for wines sealed with a natural cork.
- Since the start of 2010, the volume market share for wines closed with cork rose **47** percent. Alternative closures also saw an increase, but of **8** percent in the same time period. While the numbers do not necessarily mean that consumers are making their purchase based solely on closure type, the data does show an improvement in sales of wine closed with cork.

Case Sales by Closure Type

4 Weeks Ending	12/3/2016	12/12/2009	Change	%
Cork Closures	1,060,747	721,049	339,698	47%
% Share	59.4%	51.7%	7.7%	15%
Alternatives	725,359	672,602	52,757	8%
% Share	40.6%	48.3%	-7.7%	-16%
Total Top 100	1,786,106	1,393,651	392,455	28%

[link](#)

- When breaking out case sales by closure type and top brands, those finished with a natural cork have seen significant improvement in volume moved.
- For the most recent Nielsen period, the top 10 brands finished in natural cork performed better in both volume movement and sales compared with the top brands closed with synthetic. Eight of the top brands closed with cork saw an increase in case sales, averaging a **9.1** percent increase in volume and a **9.4** percent increase in value. For synthetically sealed brands, **five** of the top 10 brands saw a decrease in volume, however the average across all 10 remained an increase of **1.2** percent.
- **Sales by Price Point**



[link](#)

- For the four-week period ending December 31, 2016 Cork finished wines topped all price segments, with particularly strong performance in all price segments over \$10. Screwcaps now out-perform synthetics in the price points over \$15, but remain a small fraction of wines priced over \$20.00