

Title: ' Cork may yet redeem itself '

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Eggy flavours in screwcapped wines are almost as big an issue as cork taint

Cork taint looks like it could be in decline but the scale of the problems affecting wines sealed with screwcaps have probably been underestimated, according to data released following this year's international Wine Challenge.

Faults caused by screwcaps are almost as common as cork taint, tasters found.

Of the total number of recorded tastes of wine during this year's IWC judging, 2.2 per cent showed high sulphide faults related to screwcaps creating vegetal and eggy flavours compared with 2.8 per cent for taint related to cork.

Sam Harrop MW, the IWC chairman who compiled the fault data, said: 'It's quite alarming to find that some of the other faults that have been around in the past are almost as bad as cork taint. While we've been raring about cork taint, all these other issues have been ignored.

"The cork industry has taken a lot of abuse over the years for poor quality corks. I'm not suggesting that cork taint rates of 5,6 or 7 percent have been incorrect but in this year's tasting we've established that it's much lower than many might think. There is the possibility that, in the past, cork taint has been over inflated. Or perhaps all the hard work that the cork companies have done over the years is starting to filter into the system.

Speaking at OLN's International Wine Conference, Harrop said countries which have been using screwcaps longer, such as New Zealand, have much lower failure rates. "There's still a lot of work to do to change winemaking techniques to suit this new type of closure," he said.

The figure for TCA taint is well down on the received industry wisdom on the number of corked wines, which falls somewhere between 5 and 10 percent.

The IWC judges found oxidation faults related to cork in 1.6 percent of tasted wines, bringing the proportion of wines affected by any cork attributable fault to 4.4 percent

It was the first time in the competition's history that faults had been classified in this way. Overall, the failure rate was a shade over 7 percent. \*See International Wine Conference coverage on pas three, four and eight

Faults detected by tasters at the IWC

Of all faults related to closures:

- Cork taint 27.8%
- Oxidation 16/6%
- Sulfides/mercaptans 4.9%

Of all chemical faults:

- Sulfides 24.3%
- Oxidation 7.7%
- SO2 (rotten eggs) 1.7%
- Pinking (a pink tinge) 0.2%

Of all microbial faults:

- Brettanomyces 10.6%
- Rot 5.8%
- Other 0.42%