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CEO RYAN KINGHORN

RETURN TO CORK

The switch back to natural cork continues. More and more wineries, having tried screwcap, are finding that it is not the solution for all their wines. The latest to return to cork is Haselgrove Wines of Australia's McLaren Vale, a company that specialises in small-batch wines designed to reflect individual terroirs: these are premium wines (the top bottlings sell for A\$100 on the domestic market) and need the very best closures, that will allow the wines to age gracefully in bottle and be pure-flavoured and expressive when they are opened.

Haselgrove had been using screwcaps for all its wines. But now the company has reverted to cork, and Amorim, for many wines.

Why the switch? Because China is an increasingly large market for Haselgrove, and China has made it clear that it prefers cork. To use any other closure, says CEO Ryan Kinghorn, 'would not position my product as a premium wine in that market'. It's partly a pragmatic decision, partly a technical one: 'I believe in listening to the market and delivering quality wine in the required packaging', says Ryan. But he also adds that no closure other than cork can give his wine the cellaring potential it deserves. 'There is no alternative closure that can deliver what cork achieves.'

He's encouraged, too, by Amorim's focus on innovation, and the rise in cork quality in recent years. 'The quality of corks produced today far exceeds what was available in the past. We believe Amorim is the leader in innovation in quality improvement, so we are very confident in using cork not only for export markets, but also for our domestic red products.'

Haselgrove's decision follows that of other key producers: in 2011 Klein Constantia in South Africa returned to cork for its 2010 Perdeblokke Sauvignon Blanc, having bottled the wine under screwcap from 2006-09. Perdeblokke, the winery's premium Sauvignon Blanc, is aged on the lees for around 10 months, and then-winemaker Adam Mason disliked the 'slight whiff of sulphide' he got on opening it under screwcap. He argued that changing the winemaking to suit the closure was letting the tail wag the dog. 'By bottling under screwcap, we lowered the quality of the wine,' he said.

Cape Point, which turned to screwcap in 2010, has also returned to cork, as has Napa Valley's Rutherford Hill, the latter citing both technical



reasons – 'nothing ages wine better than real cork,' says winemaker Steve Rued – and environmental ones. 'As a sustainable winery, cork is the natural choice for Rutherford,' he says

In Australia, Rusden Wines, after five years of screwcap trials, has decided that it will use cork for all its wines in future. 'It has become clear that cork is best for our wines,' says Christian Canute, winemaker of Rusden. 'Our wines are handmade, and bottled without fining or filtration. Under screwcap I have noticed the wines "sweat", producing overly dominant reductive characters; a problem we have never had under cork.'

Rusden's handcrafted wines have won it respect from critics including Robert Parker: its Black Guts Shiraz has averaged more than 95 points from Parker in the last 10 years. But sommeliers confirmed, says Canute, that the wine under screwcap was reductive and also had a lot of bottle variation. Canute saw Rusden losing customers because of these problems, and when further laboratory analysis confirmed that screwcap was the cause – and when the entire 2009 vintage of Rusden Driftsand Grenache/Shiraz was affected – Canute made the switch.

In New Zealand, where winemakers are more devoted to screwcap than anywhere else, Sacred Hill in Gimblett Gravels has returned to cork for its Special Selection range. For winemaker Tony Bish it's the suitability of cork for wines made for long ageing that is key, and he pays tribute to the huge increase in cork quality in the last 10 years; an increase that has, for him, made the move possible.

Major markets like cork, too. In China, estimates suggest that nearly 100% of Chinese wine-drinkers believe that screwcapped wine looks cheaper and thus less desirable for gift-giving; and according to a 2011 survey by Tragon Corp, 93 of US wine drinkers believe that cork conveys an image of high quality. In Europe, the most cork-loving markets are France, Spain and Italy.

CORK IS THE NEW FAVOURITE MATERIAL OF DESIGNERS

Cork is the new favourite material of designers. Why? It would be easier to ask why not. It's authentic and natural, and those two attributes increasingly spell luxury. It's comfortable – ideal for seating. Some designers (Ichiro Iwasaki and Philippe Nigro) use it to upholster chairs, as if it was a textile. Danish designer Søren Rose Kjær for De La Espada uses it for lampshades, combined with steel bases. Lisbon company Corque Design uses it for pretty much everything, from walls to dining tables. For the launch of Guimarães, Portugal, as 2012 European Capital of Culture, sculptor Gabriela Gomes designed the first all-cork modular home. Floors and stools? We know about floors and stools.

We know about them particularly because they were so much in evidence at the Serpentine Gallery's Pavilion, part of the Cultural Olympia, in London's Kensington Gardens in 2012.

Architects Herzog & de Meuron and Chinese artist Ai Weiwei created a magical haven of dark, soft curves, not surprisingly visited by hundreds of thousands people in an Olympic year that was also the rainiest summer Londoners can remember.

The material supplied by Amorim and used by the designers for the Serpentine Gallery Pavilion was a dark composite which, says Carlos de Jesus, Amorim's Marketing Director, 'started out on a cork stopper production line'. The pavilion consisted of 110 mushroom-shaped (or Champagne-cork-shaped) seats, and 12 cork-clad columns, one for every previous pavilion on the site, holding up a flat grey roof which rose just above the level of the surrounding park and had a mirror pool on top – a pool which, in the



summer of 2012, was never naturally empty. Said architect Jacques Herzog, 'everyone loves cork: it smells good, and smell is important; it's warm, soft, natural; it's something earthy. It's the opposite of what you'd expect underground – you'd expect something cold and stony, and this is a surprise.'

But de Jesus's point is key. There's no waste with cork. What isn't used to seal a bottle can be used for a million other items. There are cork surfboards, umbrellas, cooking aprons. Porto company Simple Forms uses it, with rubber, for bathroom sinks. Mercedes-Benz has used it for trims in its luxury cars; it has been tested for airline seats. Says de Jesus, 'In the last five years, Amorim has submitted 20 patents for different product applications, and over the last 10 years we have spent €53m on



Serpentine Gallery's Pavilion, part of the Cultural Olympia, in London's Kensington Gardens in 2012

research and development to improve technical performance and quality.' Cork has potential for soaking up oil spills. It may even have a future in bullet-proof textiles.

One of Amorim's latest sponsorships has been an international design competition at France's Domaine de Boisbuchet, where 367 entrants designed everything from chairs to camera cases. The winner was Anna Loskiewicz from Poland, with her idea for cork beehives. These take the form of a lidded box, dark, warm and waterproof, standing on legs, with a prominent yellow entrance and exit for the bees: simple and functional.

It also has a part to play in fine art. David Nash, a sculptor known for his sculpture made from wood, often partially burned so that the surface

is charred, has been on show at London's Kew Gardens. He was inspired by a visit to a Portuguese cork forest: he went there to draw the trees (these drawings are on show in the Shirley Sherwood Gallery of Botanical Art) and then spotted a 40-tonne pile of harvested bark. He started playing with the pieces of cork – and the result was Cork Dome, shown here. In shape and mass it is, by coincidence, almost the inverse of the Serpentine Pavilion.

And that Serpentine Pavilion? It was carefully taken down in October 2012 and reassembled in the private collection of philanthropists Usha and Lakshmi Mittal. Having had so many Olympic visitors tramping over it, it deserves a quieter life from now on.

CAPE CRUSADER

Speaking at Cape Wine 2012, Antonio Amorim linked Amorim's focus on sustainability with South Africa's famous biodiversity

The year 2012 marked the 30th anniversary of Amorim in South Africa, and to celebrate this milestone chairman Antonio Amorim was delighted to speak at the opening seminar at Cape Wine 2012.

He pointed to bulk exports as a key hindrance on South Africa's progress towards a better image for its wine abroad; 'As a consequence,' he said, 'the industry's present profitability levels have become lower. There is now an urgent need to elevate its premium positioning and average prices to achieve a sustainable return in the long term.'

A positive image as a premier, top-end wine producer would also aid South Africa's image in general and help its efforts to export other products. He added: 'Making decisive progress toward positioning South Africa as a world-class appellation

for the production of premium and superior wines, gaining additional image and value is a vital response to the competitive challenges we face today. These are key requirements for the health and long-term sustainability of South African wines. Wine brands that can incorporate those solutions are likely to have higher perceived value and positioning than those that do not and as a result can also command higher prices.'

Amorim's strength in sustainability goes hand-in-hand with South Africa's focus on biodiversity. 'McKinsey, the global consultancy, states that 87% of consumers in Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, UK, United States and India worry about the social impact of the products they buy,' he added. In 2012 another piece of consumer research by Edelman found that in the past 18 months the relevance of purpose in buying intention has doubled in Japan, increased by 70% in China, by 43% in the Netherlands and India and by 36% in Germany. Seventy-two per cent of those surveyed said they would switch to a different brand of the same quality and price that supported a good cause, over one that did not. In 2008, when Edelman began this research, the figure was 52%. As Antonio Amorim pointed out, 'Here's some evidence that in future, after price and quality, the next trigger may well be purpose.'





Amorim is a global partner to the wine industry in its efforts to increase sustainability. A partnership even more important now that the OIV has officially recognized the vital role played by cork oaks in reducing greenhouse gases.

The wine industry, through its annual purchase of 12.5bn cork stoppers, makes possible the preservation and economic viability of the 2.2m hectares of cork forest that exist across the western Mediterranean. In turn these cork forests provide an income for 100,000 people and constitute hotspots of diversity, as well as providing barriers against desertification, both environmental and social.

The use of cork is on the increase: in 2010 cork exports from Portugal increased by 10.2%, in 2011 by 7.9%, and in 2012 by 5.2%. The market is expanding.

Cork also helps to give wine a more premium image: we allude elsewhere in this issue of *Bark to Bottle* to research in China and the US which demonstrates that cork stoppers make wine more desirable to consumers in those countries. In Europe, France, Spain and Italy consumers also have a preference for natural cork closures.

AND THE WINNERS ARE...

Amorim has become a world-wide Bronze Patron of the Wine and Spirit Education Trust, alongside other key wine trade producers and suppliers. Thus Amorim is supporting the educational work that the WSET carries out at all levels, and recognizing the importance of encouraging the next generation of the international wine trade.

This year, for the first time, Amorim has also offered a study scholarship for two Level Three students, one from the UK and one from the international base.

At the glittering Graduation Ceremony in London's Guildhall recently, Carlos de Jesus and Trust President Jancis Robinson presented a cork-framed certificate to Amorim scholar Pierre Brunelli, of London's Greenhouse restaurant.

Congratulations to him, and Sebastien Nickel from Languedoc-Roussillon, who both impressed the Wine & Spirit Education Trust judges so much that in 2013 they will be heading to Portugal for an expenses-paid visit to the cork harvest in the forests of the Alentejo, and tours of Amorim's modern production units and R&D laboratories in Oporto, to learn at first hand about cork stoppers and their all-round benefits.

WSET is the largest global provider of wine and spirit qualifications, with training from 500 providers in 60 countries, and in 15 languages. In the last academic year, over 43,000 students took a WSET qualification.

For more information go to www.wsetglobal.com

EURO BIZ AWARDS

Corriceira Amorim is delighted to have been nominated as a finalist in the European Business Awards. It is one of 100 companies – alongside internationally-respected names such as Ikea, DHL and Volkswagen – that have been awarded a Ruban d'Honneur prize, and is one of 10 selected finalists in the Innovation section of the Awards. The criteria for selection, as well as innovation, include ethical principles. Final results and overall winners will be announced in April 2013.



Commenting on the Awards, Christine Lagarde, head of the International Monetary Fund, said 'It is wonderful that all the states of Europe are together [in entering the European Business Awards]. We want a strong Europe and you are participating in the process of building a strong Europe, piece by piece.'

Innovation is, of course, a key plank of Amorim's strategy.

Elsewhere in this issue of *Bark to Bottle* we look at Amorim's involvement in the use of cork in fields from aircraft to beekeeping; and of course innovations in cork stoppers are resulting in annual increases in sales volumes, all of which help to preserve the cork forests which are so vital to the economy and ecology of the western Mediterranean.

The combined turnover of the companies (from 28 countries) that have applied for the 2012/13 European Business Awards exceeds one trillion euros. Newcomers include some emerging countries such as Turkey and Kazakhstan. In total, these organizations provide employment for 2.7 million people on the European continent.



Carlos de Jesus and Jancis Robinson presenting Pierre Brunelli with award

IN BRIEF

GREEN AWARDS

This April will see the second Amorim Environmental Award, part of the *Drinks Business* Green Awards. These awards were launched in 2012 to recognize wine businesses that practise a holistic approach to caring for the environment in terms of social, agricultural and production responsibilities.

Amorim wanted to sponsor an award because it cares about environmental responsibility, and wants to encourage others in the wine industry in their concern, too. Amorim's Sustainability Report (available at www.sustainability.amorim.com) charts the progress we have made in the last five years in reducing our carbon footprint, increasing our use of renewable energy at all our production plants, and giving practical support to forest farmers. We practise what we preach.

Last year's winner was Avondale in Paarl, South Africa. The judges liked the way Avondale incorporates organic, biodynamic and scientific principles in its viticulture: biodiversity is key, and it uses natural predators against pests. It has a programme of clearing alien vegetation and planting native trees, and it has excellent waste-water systems.

Its packaging focuses on polystyrene-free recycled boxes, recyclable gift bags and recyclable tin closures; and of course the use of natural corks. Johnathan Grieve, owner of Avondale, said he was 'honoured and thrilled' with the award.

Any company interested in entering should contact Drinks Business: www.thedrinksbusiness.com.

drinks business
GREEN
AWARDS
2013

UNDERWATER CHAMPAGNE

A Champagne bottle, pre-dating the French Revolution, has been presented to Amorim in recognition of the company's work on replacing the corks on a shipment of 18th-century Champagne that was shipwrecked off the Baltic coast and had lain there undisturbed ever since.

The bottle was one of 168 that were discovered on the Baltic seabed in 2010. Of these 145 were brought to the surface, of which four were from Heidsieck & Co, 46 from Veuve Clicquot and 95 from the now-defunct Champagne Juglar. Some bottles were sold at auction, the record being €30,000 for a bottle of Veuve Clicquot 1841.

Amorim's know-how was vital to the salvage operation: the corks were believed to have been Portuguese, and Amorim was entrusted to produce replacement corks to the 18th-century pattern – carved as a whole, rather than as Champagne corks are made today. Company specialists, using manual cork-cutters, travelled to the scene of the find and assisted with the replacement of all the old corks.



Some of the bottles were emptied for analyses to be carried out on the wines. It was one of these bottles, together with its original cork, which has been presented to Amorim, and is now on display at the Founder's House at Amorim's HQ

SITTING COMFORTABLY?

Turn the warmth and comfort of cork to your advantage with these 100% cork stools. Modelled as Champagne corks, they're just the thing for sitting and sipping. So much so that BBC1's 'Saturday Kitchen' host, chef James Martin, owns one, and recently gave another – on air – as a corking birthday present for his wine presenter colleague Olly Smith.



Stockist and Source: www.notonthehighstreet.com



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