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## NATURAL CORK IS THE BENCHMARK

In the US, Germany and other parts of Europe, natural cork is the consumer choice

WHEN IT COMES  
TO CONSUMER  
ACCEPTANCE  
NATURAL CORK GETS  
A 'VERY POSITIVE'  
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# NATURAL CORK IS THE BENCHMARK

*In the US, Germany and other parts of Europe, natural cork is the consumer choice*

US consumers continue to love natural cork. So do German consumers, and Spanish consumers, and Italian consumers, and French consumers. And so does Hollywood – though for different reasons.

Let us explain. The message of US consumers comes from *Wine Business Monthly's* latest closure survey: when it comes to consumer acceptance natural cork gets a 'very positive' thumbs up from the 292 wineries across the USA which took part in the survey.

This rating has changed very little since *WBM's* first survey, published in 2004. The survey has been conducted at one or two-year intervals since then, and the 2013 report emphasises that 'natural corks continue to be the standard by which all other closure-types are measured'.

This year's survey focused on perceptions of closure performance – which included price, how closures perform on bottling lines, consumer acceptance, ease of removal, and perceived environmental impact. While *WBM* stresses that it's not a scientific study, it does provide a sharp insight into how wineries of different sizes see different closures.

*All sizes of wineries continue to love the bottling-line performance of both natural corks and technical corks, while being less happy about that of synthetic closures.*

But small to very small wineries particularly liked natural cork – and there are of course many more small wineries in the USA than there are large ones. Small to very small wineries also came top in their appreciation of the product performance of natural cork – how it protects the wine after bottling. Large wineries (those producing more than 50,000 cases a year) were more enthusiastic than small ones about screwcaps, presumably because they are more firmly established in the volume market: it will be interesting to see how the introduction of Helix will impact on that sector in future years.

Helix is the innovative system produced jointly by Amorim and O-I, the world's leading producer of glass packaging. It's a system with a technical cork with a moulded head which twists into, and out of, and into again, a specially produced bottle with an internal thread finish on the inside of the neck. Launched at Vinexpo 2013, it offers a combination of the premium image offered by cork and glass with the convenience that consumers love. In future *WBM* surveys the 'ease of removal' ratings, where screwcaps understandably showed well because of the absence of any need for a corkscrew, will also now be affected by Helix.

When it comes to environmental impact, the results are predictable. Natural corks are seen as positive, technical corks slightly positive, and screwcaps and synthetics between neutral and negative.

Overall 84% of the wineries in the survey use natural corks for all or some of their wines: a strong thumbs-up for the quality image and environmental advantages of natural cork.

In Germany, the latest customer-satisfaction survey carried out by Amorim Cork Deutschland reveals an approval rating of 98% – good news in a market where Amorim is the leading supplier of cork closures, with 30% of the market. That adds up to 120 million corks per year. Some 50m of those are

sparkling wine corks; the rest cover the range from natural corks at the top end to technical corks at the more popular end.

Ninety-eight per cent satisfaction is good, but Amorim aims to keep improving. The service and satisfaction level has constantly risen since the first survey eight years ago: what customers particularly value is the quality of Amorim corks, allied to fast delivery and traceability. More than 100 producers took part in the latest survey. Says Gert Reis, managing director of Amorim Cork Deutschland, 'This very positive results shows me that we are on the right way to establish natural corks from Amorim as the preferred wine closure.'

In Spain, Italy and France surveys give very similar results. In Spain, loyalty to cork is common to a significant 92% of consumers, shown by a study carried out in 2012, within the framework of the Cork project. In Italy, a 2011 survey revealed that it is the preferred choice of 85% of consumers. In France, a 2010 Ipsos study showed that 90% of consumers preferred cork, and 80% of wine industry professionals, too.

*The reasons have a lot in common: cork performs well, it's natural, it's traditional, and it's associated with tradition.*

But we mentioned Hollywood earlier. No, we're not so naïve to think that film studios have a view on wine closures. But cork has other functions – and cork granules, because of their lightness, are greatly valued in special effects. *Total Recall*, *Mission Impossible* and *Ghostbusters* (the debris was made of cork) all used it; in *Dante's Peak* the volcanic rocks were not made of rock.

But just occasionally a bottle of wine does find its way into a Hollywood movie – and when it does it will probably be sealed with natural cork. In *Hitch*, with Eva Mendes and Will Smith, a bottle of Ostatu Rioja makes a cameo appearance: a small company, but a great wine. And a client of Amorim? Naturally.





# CHILE'S TOP 100

*A new iconic Chilean wine blends the country's best*

Amorim natural cork is being used for a wine which seeks to encompass all the regions of Chile and the skills of its greatest winemakers. Yes, one wine.

The idea began in 2012. A plan evolved to blend 100 barrels of the same grape variety, supplied by 100 different producers in different parts of the country, into a single wine. The vintage was 2011, the grape variety was Cabernet Sauvignon, and the wines were delivered unblended; the winemaking teams from seven producers then got together for massive blending sessions.

*The final wine is called, not surprisingly, 100 Barricas de Chile, and the producers call themselves Top Winemakers.*

On the back label are listed the full 100 – too many to list here, unfortunately. But the seven winemakers who decided the blend were from Viña Anakena, Viña Apaltagua, Viña Casa Silva, Viña Casas Patronales, Viña Conosur, Viña Tarapacá and Viña Veramonte.

Some 30,000 bottles were produced, and will be put on sale for €75 each, or the equivalent. Main markets are expected to be Brazil, Chile, China, Canada, the USA and the UK. But if you fail to get your hands on a bottle, don't worry; the exercise will be repeated in future years. With Amorim natural cork stoppers, of course.



# A 10-DAY BRIDGE

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*A cork bridge at the V&A was a highlight of the London Design Festival*

Bringing together the cellular structure of cork, its use as a floor covering, and the London Design Festival, and what do you get?

Or, to put it differently, bring together Amorim and architectural practice Fashion Architecture Taste, and what do you get?

The answer to both is the same: a uniquely-designed cork bridge crossing the Medieval and Renaissance Galleries at London's Victoria & Albert Museum, the hub of 2013's London Design Festival.

Said Ben Evans, director of the LDF, 'Working with the V&A and architects FAT has given us the best cork floor I have ever seen.' The pattern meandered across the bridge like trompe l'oeil tiles – but the design, far from being derived from either vernacular Portuguese floors or from medieval or renaissance ones, was based on the cellular structure of cork.

The cork, naturally, was supplied by Amorim. António Amorim, chairman and CEO of Corticeira Amorim, commented that 'Amorim's partnership with the London Design Festival is a unique opportunity to showcase CorkTECH by Wicanders®, our innovative, design-driven natural cork flooring.' For Sean Griffiths, director of FAT, it was 'a fascinating experience entering Amorim's world of cork. It really is a 21st-century material which is highly sustainable.

Using cork has allowed us to work in a very different way, starting with the material as generator of the concept. Cork has a very natural appearance which is supported by an intricate geometric structure, and the main idea of the design is to capture the relationship between these aspects of the material. The design also makes use of the strong visual acoustic and tactile qualities of the material.' It was certainly seen by plenty of people.

*Visitors to the V&A during the 10 days of the Festival totalled 111,538, making it one of the busiest periods in the Museum's history. That's a lot of feet: luckily cork flooring wears well.*







# SUMMER SPARKLERS IN ENGLAND

*The 2013 vintage in England is looking good – and good wines need good corks*

It's been a sparkling summer for English fizz. Not only has the sun shone bright and long, after two wet years, to ripen the fruit with gusto – but previous vintages have walked away with a staggering number of awards on the international scene.

English sparkling wine – made just 80 miles from the famous chalk hills of Champagne, and on similar chalk terroir – has come of age.

None more so than at Dorset's 85-acre Furleigh Estate near Bridport, planted with the classic Chardonnay, Pinot and Pinot Meunier combination. Furleigh made its first commercial vintage in 2009. It was this vintage – described by wine writer Olly Smith as 'as effervescent as the trail of a giant comet' – that won not only a Gold medal, but the overall Trophy for Best English Wine at this summer's International Wine Challenge. In 2012 and 2013 Furleigh's Blanc de Noirs, Blanc de Blancs and Rose also won national medals and trophies for the Most Outstanding English Sparkling wine.

*These wines are treasures. Which is why winemaker and co-owner Ian Edwards has entrusted them to Amorim's top grade Spark 2 cork closures, supplied in the UK by its agent Neville & More.*

A former actuary, he was good with spread sheets and forecasts – and so conducted extensive research to find the ultimate stoppers for his wines. Beginning with just 14,000 bottles in 2009, the estate production has increased to over 50,000 bottles a year. Now the cork closures are also branded to increase recognition and awareness.

'It's all down to being in charge of every single little detail' explains Ian. 'We can reassure our customers that they have got the very best – in terms of both the wine and the packaging. After all, people often keep the cork as a celebration memento.'

As you read this, Furleigh will just be beginning the 2013 harvest, forecast as great on quality. Who knows what the future will bring for these stunning sparklers?





# TOP BUBBLES IN CAPE TOWN

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*Amorim again sponsored the MCC Challenge, and was delighted with the quality*

Amorim's close involvement with sparkling wine quality means that it is a natural sponsor for the MCC Challenge: nothing to do with cricket, but instead South Africa's annual judging of traditional-method sparkling wines, Methode Cap Classique. This year saw the 12<sup>th</sup> year of Amorim's sponsorship, and the tasting gets bigger every year. Sales are rising, more companies are entering the MCC market, and this year 100 wines were tasted, all, of course, bottled under cork.

The wines were this year judged by Allan Mullins CWM, Neil Pendock, Jenny Ratcliffe-Wright CWM, Cathy Marston, Giorgiou Meletiou and visiting judge Jaume Gramona Marti, producer of one of the most characterful Cavas of Spain.

Winners in the various categories were: Rickety Bridge Blanc de Blancs 2009 (vintage blanc de blancs); Colmant (nv blanc de blancs); Graham Beck Rosé 2009 (vintage rosé); Graham Beck Rosé (nv rosé); Simonsig Kaapse Vonkel 2007 (museum class); Boschendal Grande Cuvée 2009 (brut vintage); Colmant (brut nv). Congratulations to all.

*Quality matched the increase in quantity: wines in the Museum Class, for 2008 vintage and older, were notably good.*



## EDUCATION GOES EAST

**A**morim cooperates with Ease Scent, a leading Chinese institution dedicated to wine promotion and study – and as part of that partnership, two Ease Scent tutors, Ms Jie Shen and Mr Wen Chao Jiang, visited Amorim last July to learn about cork.

They took their new-found knowledge back to China and passed it on to other Ease Scent tutors, who run courses in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and 14 smaller cities.

The first of these sessions was recently held in Beijing and each of the approximately 30 Easy Scent tutors participating had access to detailed information on natural cork's technical performance, as well as its capacity to create additional value for wine brands looking to established themselves in the Chinese market.



*Chinese consumers are adamant that the best wines in the world are sealed under cork – a fact reiterated by Louisa Rose of leading producer Yalumba on Australia's ABC news earlier this year.*

## ANY OLD CORKS?

*Amorim and Vinocamp join forces in recycling corks*

**A**n event called Vinocamp ought to generate a lot of corks, right? And it did: thousands of them. And courtesy of Amorim's Europe-wide cork recycling programme, they're all being cleaned, ground up and being reused for other cork products – perhaps even as you read this.

Vinocamp is a day-long event at which the wine world meets the social media world to taste, and talk, discuss projects, have study sessions, have lunch, swap bottles, taste some more, and have dinner; some 200 people took part in the most recent Vinocamp, in Paris last September. Previous Vinocamps have taken place in the Rhône, in Champagne, the Jura, the Loire, Bordeaux, Burgundy, Savoie.... Lisbon, too, where participants naturally visited a cork forest to watch the cork harvest, and (after a restorative picnic) visited Amorim's cork factory.

Amorim now has 22 permanent cork recycling points in France, collecting corks for reuse in insulation, footwear and many other purposes.



# SUSTAINABILITY MARCHES ON

*Amorim's latest Sustainability Report shows emissions dropping, FSC certification rising*

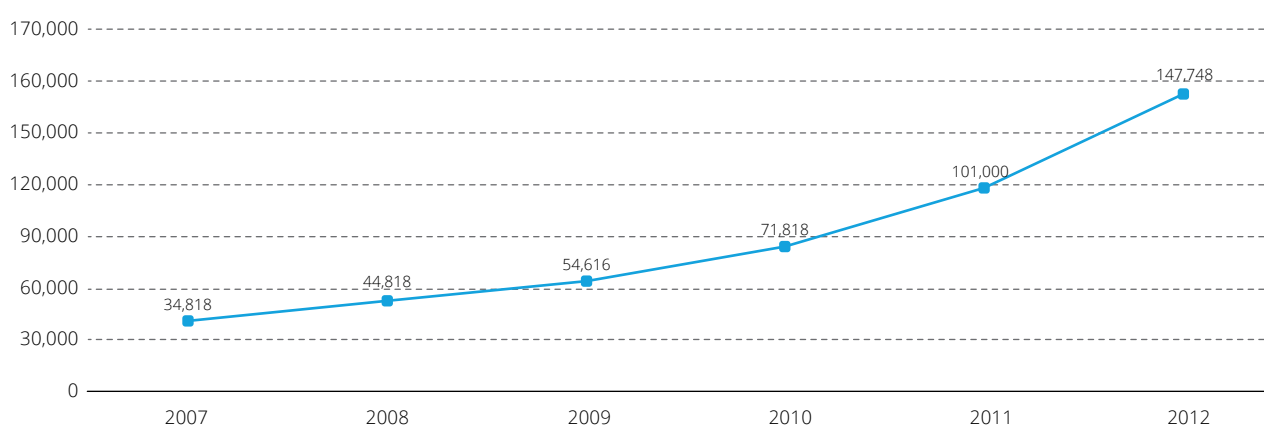
The publication of Amorim's latest Sustainability Report reveals that the activities of Corticeira Amorim result in the sequestration of more than 2 million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year, which is a massive 15 times more than all its operations emit in the same period. In addition, in 2012 biomass – essentially zero-emission fuels such as cork dust from the production process – supplied 62.5% of Corticeira Amorim's total energy needs. In some units, this figure rises to almost 90% , up from just over 50% five years ago.

Cork forests play a crucial role in carbon capture. Cork oaks, like other trees, capture CO<sub>2</sub> and store it through photosynthesis, and transform it into organic tissue containing 50% carbon. It is stored not just in the trunk and branches, roots and bark but also in the forest soil. Cork oaks can live 200 years, so carbon is stored for long periods of time.

If we compare today's figure with past years, in 2012, the year of the Report, Amorim's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions were 46,740 tonnes. In 2006 the figure was 52,443 million tonnes, so total emissions have fallen even though Amorim's total sales have risen from €443m to €534m in the same period.



FSC cork oak forest (ha)



One of Amorim's aims has been to raise awareness of the importance of responsible forest management: it was a pioneer in obtaining Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification for cork forests. It now has 36 establishments, either industrial or in distribution, with FSC chain of custody certification – that's six more than the previous year. The Report shows that there are now 147,748ha of FSC-certified cork forest. In 2007 the figure was 34,818ha: a fourfold increase.



# A classic combination. With an unexpected twist.

Say hello to Helix – the innovative wine packaging concept combining an internally-threaded glass bottle and a twist-off, twist-on cork. It's everything you love about cork and glass. Now with re-sealable convenience.

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[helixconcept.com](http://helixconcept.com)



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AMORIM



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#### DROP US A LINE

For more information about cork and/or Amorim  
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