

CHEHALEM

FALL 2004



SEEKING CLOSURE

Or, Screwcaps happen when the cork industry is satisfied with just screwing around.

By Harry Peterson-Nedry

USUALLY WHEN TECHNOLOGY AND ROMANCE COLLIDE NO ONE NOTICES. They normally don't even play together, have the same friends, dress the same or admit the other exists. In the wine neighborhood, however, you can expect "sound and fury" over the next few years as frustrated winemakers and collectors tired of "corked" wines go head-to-head with consumers who value the romance, tradition and ceremony of naturally corked wines—value it enough to pay for bottles they can't drink because of TCA. And the "sound" will pit popping corks and zipping screwcaps.

Although a non TCA-affected natural cork is a great closure especially for long-aged wines, it has become Russian roulette guessing which ones will be good and which ones not. We want every bottle we open to be the same.

"Corked" wines affect between 1.2% (per cork makers) and 18% (per recent wine maker summaries) of wines finished with natural cork. In extended tastings I personally have tallied 8% of our own wines, no matter how expensive or perfect cosmetically the cork is, which are either noticeably "corked" or are affected in a more insidious way, with aromatics and flavors clipped to where even I can't recognize it, and the consumer would think twice about repurchasing it.

WHAT IS TCA? TCA (2,4,6 trichloroanisole) is a compound sometimes found in natural cork and woody materials that imparts moldy, musty, wet cardboard, burlap sack aromas to wine (you may have also noted it in bottled water, entering building spaces, etc.). It is part of a natural biodegradation and detoxification reaction on toxic compounds (chlorinated phenol precursors) by microbes (like filamentous fungal strains allowed to prep cork bark) to create anisoles which are harmless, except to wine appreciation. TCA can be detected on the nose and palate at levels as small as two parts per trillion. Current chemical instrumental methods (SPME-GC/MS) can detect 0.68 PPT.

All TCA takes to form is a source of chlorine, a woody source like cork, fiber or wooden surfaces, and molds. Chlorine and mold concentrations don't have to be large. Wineries like ours which don't use chlorine-based cleaners and exclusively use (CONTINUES NEXT PAGE)

Above: The closure you see on INOX™ Chardonnay is the future, not the past or a sign of "cheap" wines.

(CONTINUED FROM FRONT) non-chlorinated well water have no TCA in the facility.

The cost of spoilage exceeds \$10 billion worldwide annually (per Butzke), 80% attributable to these anisoles. A problem worth solving.

CHEHALEM'S STANCE AND THE BENEFITS

Our movement to plastic corks several years back was a response to personal TCA frustrations (Supremecorq, see Archived Newsletter article on website). Moving on to screwcaps continues that hunt for a perfect closure. Many high tech Australian, New Zealand and increasingly more California, Oregon and Washington wineries are also moving towards Stelvin closures (the leading version of screwcaps).

Beginning with the 2003 INOX™ as an introduction, screwcaps will exclusively seal all our 2004 white wines, except Ian's Reserve Chardonnay, and will seal our 2004 3 Vineyard Pinot Noir. The exceptions await a few more years of aging trials before we make the change. Although cork taint prompts the move, other benefits should also accrue to us.

In Australian Wine Research Institute's 2000 closure trials, screwcaps showed the lowest reduction in SO2 levels and lowest browning of white wines; this resulted in sensory findings of highest retained fruit levels, lowest oxidized or aged characters and no TCA. Studies have also shown natural cork to impart unwanted woody flavors of their own to wines which affect the wine's final perception.

Screwcaps provide a better seal—it isn't about cutting costs, for in fact they cost more to use today. Besides proving to almost entirely eliminate TCA and oxidation, screwcaps also conveniently allow the wine to be stored upright (with no corks to keep wet) and to be easily opened, resealed and recycled. Also, cellar humidity and temperature conditions aren't as critical to control.

The number one problem with screwcaps is perception—impressions that wine under screwcap is inferior, based on old skidroad stereotypes, especially to those invested in the ritualistic, romantic, prissy wine service that serves at best to pass the inspection responsibility off to the consumer, and at worst to isolate the diner in a rarefied, pretentious game—the *pomp and the pop* of the tableside ritual. We like tradition, but not at the expense of wine quality.

New ceremonial rituals could replace old, including a general education as to why winer-

ies that care and are the most responsible use screwcaps, and how the paradigm has twisted—from low quality wines wearing screwcaps to highest quality wines now sporting them.

THE CORK INDUSTRY RESPONSE AND THE

ENVIRONMENT *The efforts of cork manufacturers to clean up their act are a matter of too little too late... It's ironic the screw cap was in fact a French invention. Jamie Oliver: Food and Drink*

The cork industry's task is not an easy one, because of inherently difficult technological challenges and years of denial and inactivity.

They need to move from a tradition-bound old industry, to a modern industry with an old but reliable product.

They have recently tried to excuse the problem on environmental grounds, arguing cork, as imperfect as it is, should still be used because the cork holds in thrall the Mediterranean cork oak forests and its bird and animal population. To preserve a sustainable industry to protect a broad ecosystem is emotionally persuasive. However,

tolerating shoddiness and the cork industry's ongoing dismissal of the problem will not save these jobs, forests, or their inhabitants. Properly addressed, it is feasible the industry could rise phoenix-like from TCA ashes, but it will take efforts only recently undertaken and an admission that they, not their customers, are responsible for their forests and industry.

Possibly equally critical to the environment, what is the cost of wasted resources, when 10% of a product is spoiled and all energies and raw materials used in its production, from grapegrowing to packaging to transportation, are thrown away?

Screwcap packaging is easily recyclable, with aluminum having ingrained recycling processes. Natural corks can biodegrade, but often begin in the bottle and plastic corks don't get recycled by the average consumer.

AS AN ETHICAL AND ECONOMICAL ISSUE

We should not knowingly ship wine that contains some portion that is flawed. Responses from wineries that "the wine was in perfect condition when it left here" tries to pass the buck. It is our product and we shouldn't tolerate this level of packaging failure—the cork suppliers are ours and not yours. Abdication of our responsibility is unethical, if not criminal.

Is it acceptable to knowingly release defective products? That's what we're talking about here: defective products. That's what corked



New packaging technologies from Germany (Vinolok) are investigating glass closures, for a higher-end look, recyclability and equivalent prices.

wines are. And let's not kid ourselves. Every winery that uses corks knows full well that somewhere between three and five percent of everything it sends out the door is defective.

Matt Kramer, *How Can They Live With Themselves?*
Wine Spectator October 2003

To finish for Matt, none of us would tolerate 8% (my number) defectives from say maternity nurses or munitions manufacturers or payroll services.

Corked wines cost our winery financially, because of returns (*minor*, because most people don't return or complain) and because of dissatisfaction, *major*, when a customer is less than totally pleased, even if he or she doesn't know exactly why. *Insidious, silent, destructive.*

Chehalem product at risk of cork taint, if we were using natural cork only, is worth \$250,000 retail. And we're a small potatoes winery.

HESITANCY ON RED WINE AGING

Initially the move to screwcaps involves mainly whites, screwcaps being especially effective with aromatic wines. But with age-able reds there is some hesitancy, with a paucity of aging data consisting mainly of anecdotal experiences from trials long ago.

Wine myth has it that the natural cork is required for proper aging of wines, arguing that gradual oxidation through the cork takes place and that screwcaps will hurt aging, with no oxygen allowed into the bottle. Myth only, because *wine aging is a reductive, not oxidative process*, and because in correctly corked bottles the only oxygen ever present is there to begin with, dissolved interstitially in the wine.

Oxygen is not the agent of normal bottle maturation. When a wine ages in the bottle, the oxidation-reduction potential decreases regularly until it reaches a minimum value,

depending on how well the bottle is sealed. Reactions that take place in bottled wine do not require oxygen. Professor Pascal Ribereau-Gayon, University of Bordeaux.

Although I normally live by the maxim, *In God We Trust, All Others Bring Data*, screwcaps for upper end pinots may soon make me wing-it without reams of aging data, especially when anecdotal information leads us to anticipate very positive results, including wines looking younger longer—and without Botox!

"Peter Pan" wines that take a little longer to grow up aren't a bad thing, especially with little bottle-to-bottle variation and with an extended optimal drinking plateau. Especially with Pinot noir, which is normally built to reward early drinking anyway, extending aging potentials should be perfect. Fruit characters are retained, even while mature bottle characters begin to develop. As Penfolds' chief winemaker remembered, old experimental screwcapped wines *aged like wines in a really cold cellar.*

There is indeed some irony that we wineries are slow to convert completely to screwcap on long aged wines, since they are the wines that need them the most to prevent oxidation and maintain fruit freshness, and provide the reductive environment for aging.

Long-aged wines will follow. The marketplace just needs to be educated to accept it as it comes. I view this move a little like going from vinyl to CDs in music. Even if we still have a turntable (read *corkscrew*) for romance and old time's sake, we'll seek digital purity in the long-run—startlingly bright and clear, as if in the concert hall, without scratches, hiss and warping in the sun.

Plus screwcaps are very easy to open. 🍷
See chehalemwines.com for additional reading.



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

FREE SHIPPING!

Cool weather brings another cool deal! We will once again pick up the tab for case orders shipped Fedex ground anywhere in the US, for all orders placed by October 31, 2004.

HARVEST 2004-ONLINE

As in year's past, Harry will be submitting ongoing reports of Oregon's vintage 2004 to be posted online at www.chehalemwines.com. Check it out and send us an email when you do.

SALUD WINE AUCTION

November 13-14, 2004. Considered one of the country's premiere wine auctions, *Salud, Oregon's Pinot Noir Auction* benefits seasonal vineyard worker's healthcare. Highlights of the event are a Saturday preview tasting at

Domaine Drouhin winery, followed by dinner and auction Sunday at the Governor Hotel in Portland. \$275 per person includes both days' events. Call 503-681-1850 for details.

THANKSGIVING OPEN HOUSE

November 26-28, 2004. New releases include 2003 Pinot Blanc, 2003 Pinot Gris Reserve, 2002 Ian's Reserve Chardonnay, and 2002 Reserve Pinot Noir. 15% case discount Thanksgiving weekend only for new releases. Open Friday and Saturday 10am-5pm and Sunday 10am-3pm.

CLASSIC WINES AUCTION

March 3-5, 2005, Portland, Oregon. Dinner and auction benefits Metropolitan Family Services. Call 503-232-0007, ext 106 for details. 🍷



NEW RELEASES

By Dan Beekley, National Marketing Manager

DAN'S WINE PRIMER It's time to brush up on your grape history. This set of new releases features one wine from each of our major grape varieties (except Riesling). Who knows, maybe you'll need this trivia if you ever try out for Jeopardy! If not, you can stun your friends with your breadth of knowledge.

2003 PINOT BLANC Pinot blanc, planted in Europe, and mostly in Alsace, has found a home in the US. For many years the grape was confused with Melon de Bourgogne, the main white variety of Muscadet. In the 80's the mistake was discovered and now all Oregon wines labeled Pinot blanc are the real McCoy.

Pinot blanc has also been confused with Chardonnay! and many are made in a similar style (barrel fermentation, full malolactic). We choose to showcase ours in more of an INOX™ style—fruit forward, bright, and largely tank-fermented. This is our fifth vintage for Pinot blanc (from a small parcel at Stoller), and the wine picks up where the 2002 leaves off. There's a lush, almost banana cream aspect, and lots of stone fruit wrapped around fairly bright acids.

2002 IAN'S RESERVE CHARDONNAY Chardonnay is believed to be named after the village of Chardonnay in the Maconnais region of France. Many believe the grape was first bred there. DNA fingerprinting shows that the variety is a cross between Pinot and the obscure Croatian grape Gouais Blanc, which is nearly extinct.

Chardonnay is made in a wide range of styles from richer, tropical versions, typical of warmer climates (Australia, California), to steelier, drier, brighter styles from cooler, or marginal, climates (Chablis). I think Oregon's fits somewhere in between.

Look for '02 Ian's Reserve to have warmer nuances such as pineapple and mango from the warm vintage, yet still feature cool-climate hallmarks like green apple and lemon drop. Like a lot of our '02's (red and white), it might be the best we've ever made.

2003 PINOT GRIS RESERVE Pinot gris (gray) is mostly known in the wine world as Pinot grigio (the same grape, just from Italy), a wine that is often light, lemony, and undistinguished. (I know, I know. There are some great ones too. Lighten up.) In Germany the grape is called Grauburgunder (dry) or Rulander (sweet). In Alsace it can be known as Tokay d'Alsace, Auxerrois gris, or Auvernat gris.

The Oregon style can range from steely, nervy and bone dry to this style—texturally creamy and medium-bodied with a floral, apricot, and melon aroma.

2002 RESERVE (née Rion) PINOT NOIR Universally considered to be the great red grape of Burgundy, Pinot noir is considered to be the holy grail of winemaking. It is also grown in Champagne, where it can be blended with Chardonnay and Pinot meunier, or bottled on its own (Blanc de Noirs).

The new world has embraced Pinot noir (California, New Zealand, Oregon, and South Africa). Germany offers some fine renditions called Spatburgunder.

Pinot noir can be made in a variety of styles and is considered widely to be the most aromatic and complex red wine variety. In Oregon, flavor profiles line the color spectrum from raspberry and red currant on one end to blackberries and black cherries on the other.

Pinot noir is a low-yielding grape and is difficult to grow. Growers are typically maniacal about their vineyards. Resulting wines are considered by some to be expensive, but those in the know realize that the results are often ethereal and stunning. This is one of those wines.

Laced with hints of chocolate and turned earth, our Reserve is a study in finesse and elegance, but in an ageable vintage like 2002, powerful too. The Rion name, a thank you to Harry's friend Patrice Rion for advising Chehalem early on, is deleted starting 2002 to help Patrice avoid confusion in the marketplace, as he begins his new negotiant company. Thank you, Patrice! 🍷





WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

London Financial Times, May 1, 2004, Jancis Robinson, "Americans Fall for Riesling."

Seven Fine American Rieslings: **Chehalem Dry Riesling 2002 Oregon...**

...Oregon producers are experiencing their own small Riesling boom (everything in Oregon is small—except the beards of the winemakers). There is now an official shortage of Riesling grapes in Oregon where prices per tonne can be even higher than in Washington...Chehalem's \$19 Dry Riesling runs out after 4-5 months...

Wine Spectator, June 30, 2004, Harvey Steiman, "Oregon Scores Big with 2002 Pinot Noirs."

Vintage Rating: 97

It is clear that 2002 is the state's best vintage yet. The first wave of 2002 Pinot Noirs is terrifically ripe and extraordinarily well-balanced, marking the pinnacle of a string of warm, dry vintages. Ten of my top 15 wines in this report, which covers Oregon wines reviewed in the past year, are 2002 Pinot Noirs. The other five are Pinot Noirs from 2001, also a strong vintage.

TOP WINES: Chehalem 2001 Rion Reserve Pinot Noir (93)

SMART BUYS: Chehalem 2002 INOX™ Chardonnay (88)

Wine Spectator, May 31, 2004, Harvey Steiman

90 Chehalem 2001 Ian's Reserve Chardonnay: Smooth, round and elegant, appealing for its nicely formed nectarine and apple flavors, open-textured on the long, tangy finish.

89 Chehalem 2002 Pinot Gris Reserve: Bright and juicy with grapefruit and melon flavors that last on the tangy finish.

Wine & Spirits, August 2004, Patrick Comiskey

91 Chehalem 2003 Willamette Valley Pinot Gris: A little dull and hoppy at first, this wine gains its footing with air, transforming from blunt to detailed. Those ethereal elements of sea air that gris can sometimes provide become vividly present...something here feels pure and clear and transparent.

The Oregonian, August 8, 2004, Matt Kramer

2003 INOX™ Chardonnay... Winemaking doesn't get any purer than this...fresh tasting, clean chardonnay with hints of pear and apple...drink it young and cool.

In Vino Veritas, Syndicated Wine column by

Jonathon Alsop

Chehalem 2003 Pinot Gris: Chehalem (pronounced shuh-HAY-lumm) is a champion of white wine in Oregon, and this pinot gris is a super example of the best this region produces. The color is golden and sunny with a slight pink tint to it, and its texture is soft, rich, and smooth around the edges. Flavors and aromas of pear, white peach, melon and banana blend beautifully with flowers and perfume. Best of all, the texture and weight of the wine are perfect...If it were a loudspeaker, there'd be plenty of bass...

Northwest Palate, July/August 2004

Chehalem 2003 Dry Riesling:

Highly recommended. Dry. Pungent aromas of mineral, straw, and faint apricot. Austere flavors of stone fruit and mineral. Lively and well balanced, with fruit concentration just emerging...

Chehalem 2002 Corral Creek Pinot Noir:

Recommended. Fragrant aroma of cherry fruit, with a warm, spicy, vibrant cherry fruit flavor. Youthful and bright; pair with cedar-planked salmon.

Chehalem 2002 3 Vineyard Pinot Noir: Recommended. Graham and plum fruit in the nose.

Focused flavors of black cherry and berry balance light toast. Juicy, clean flavors are bright and long. 🍷



Wine & Spirits, Fall 2004

Harry recognized as one of the 50 most influential winemakers in the world.

"...Peterson-Nedry has been a passionate student of and advocate for the Willamette Valley as the sum of its parts, including Ribbon Ridge, the Chehalem Mountains, the Dundee Hills, the Eola Hills, and the McMinnville and Carlton/Yamhill Districts, all of which will soon be new AVA's..."



IN THE VINEYARD

ORGANIC FARMING, BIODYNAMICS, LIVE/SALMON SAFE, SUSTAINABLE FARMING, LLAMA-FRIENDLY FARMING...

By Michael Davies, Chehalem Assistant Winemaker and Vineyard Manager



A Ridgecrest block showing straw mulch for natural weed suppression and soil enrichment.

WHAT DO THESE VARIOUS LABELS OR TAG LINES REALLY MEAN? We all know that there is a bewildering array of words and phrases employed by companies these days to affirm their environmental stewardship or ecological consciousness. Our challenge is to separate the wheat from the chaff or the substance from the spin.

My take is that irrespective of the logo on the product or the words used, it is about intent. The intent to always do better. To farm more responsibly. For this reason there is no first-place nor is there a finish line.

At Chehalem we currently do not use one of the above labels although our practices are in compliance with a number of them. In 2002 we transitioned away from all herbicides at both Corral Creek and Ridgecrest vineyards. We have not employed systemic sprays for disease and pest prevention at Ridgecrest for two years, and at the beginning of 2004 stopped using them at Corral Creek. We are using organic straw mulch in a number of our vineyard blocks to suppress weeds, enhance organic matter and help retain soil

moisture throughout the season. Primarily we rely on mechanical means of weed-control and manipulate the grapevine canopy by hand to minimize disease pressure. We also prioritize soil-stability, soil structural health and bio-diversity within the vineyard by sowing diverse cover crops every fall. Soon, we intend to use bio-diesel in our tractors. In a socio-economic context, we employ a core crew of skilled people and pay them a meaningful living wage thereby contributing to a sustainable community.

Following is an effort to clarify what these terms mean:

- **ORGANIC FARMING:** A well-recognized and highly regulated set of criteria on how to farm. According to the Department of Agriculture it represents “a production system which avoids or largely excludes the use of synthetically compounded fertilizers and pesticides...relying on crop rotations, crop residues, animal manures, legumes, green manures, off organic wastes and aspects of biological pest control to maintain soil productivity and tilth, to supply plant nutrients and to control insects, weeds and other pests. Soil as a living system is central to organic farming.” Visit www.tilth.org for more information.
- **BIODYNAMICS:** A less widely known set of ideas which actually led to the development of organic farming. It incorporates homeopathic methods working in conjunction with natural phenomena. A primary focus is on revitalizing the soil as the vehicle for production. Vineyards are nurtured through holistic preparations and composts, whilst forms of energy generated by the earth, sun, moon and other planets are harnessed. Read more at www.demeter-usa.org.
- **LIVE (LOW INPUT VITICULTURE AND ENOLOGY):** An Oregon version of a European-grown system of integrated production. LIVE is best represented as a scorecard which allows farmers the freedom to farm how they wish within certain rules and denotes practices as “desirable” and others as “undesirable”. Points are given to actions aimed at improving grape quality, diversification of the agro-ecosystem, and reductions in the use of fuels and chemical inputs such as pesticides and fertilizers. LIVE-certified farmers can now also use the Salmon-Safe logo.
- **SUSTAINABLE FARMING:** This is a broad-brush term meaning slightly different things to different people. However, the key idea is “the ability to meet our needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs”. Farming sustainably principally concerns the ecological or environmental realm but can also apply to social and economic sustainability.
- And finally, **LLAMA-FRIENDLY FARMING:** A figment of my imagination, but who knows when we might start seeing this on the back labels of wine bottles! 🍷