

Title: ' Screw-top bottles are not such corkers after all '

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WINE buffs have launched a campaign to banish screw tops from bottles after it was revealed they can leave some vintages just as tainted as cork.

Research carried out for this year's International Wine Challenge (IWC) - the world's biggest wine competition - found faults caused by screw caps were almost as common as cork taint.

Meanwhile, technological improvements have meant a fall in the number of wine bottles spoilt by their corks.

The findings have been seized upon by wine traditionalists and green campaigners, who not only dislike screw caps but say cork is natural and has served the industry for hundreds of years.

Screw caps are viewed by some wine experts as industrial and lacking the romance of a cork, which gives a satisfying pop when the bottle is opened. But they have been adopted widely by supermarkets because it was thought there was much less chance of wine going off under a screw cap, a problem said to affect one in ten corked bottles.

Now tasters at the IWC in London claim cork taint is in decline and that problems affecting wines sealed with screw caps have been underestimated.

From a blind tasting of more than 13,000 wines, they discovered that 4.4 per cent of the wine with corks had faults from oxidation or high sulphide levels - leaving it with an eggy flavour - compared with 2.2 per cent of the bottles with screw caps.

Sam Harrop, a master of wine and the IWC chairman, said that cork taint may have been exaggerated or perhaps quality improvements were finally paying off.

He said: "It is alarming to find that some of the other faults that have been around in the past are almost as bad as cork taint. The cork industry has taken a lot of abuse over the years for poor quality. We are not suggesting that cork taint rates of 5, 6 and 7 per cent have been incorrect, but this year we have established it's much lower than many might think."