

# To Cork or Not to Cork



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出版者:Simon & Schuster

出版时间:2007-10

装帧:HRD

isbn:9780743299343

In "Judgment of Paris," George M. Taber masterfully chronicled the historic 1976 wine tasting when unknown California wines defeated top French ones, marking a major turning point in wine history. Now he explores the most controversial topic in the world of wine: What product should be used to seal a bottle? Should it be cork, plastic, glass, a screwcap, or some other type of closure still to be invented? For nearly four centuries virtually every bottle of wine had a cork in it. But starting in the 1970s, a revolution began to topple the cork monopoly. In recent years, the rebellion has been gathering strength. Belatedly, the cork industry began fighting back, while trying to retain its predominant position. Each year 20 billion closures go onto wine bottles, and, increasingly, they are not corks. The cause of the onslaught against cork is an obscure chemical compound known as TCA. In amounts as low as several parts per trillion, the compound can make a \$400 bottle of wine smell like wet newspaper and taste equally bad. Such wine is said to be "corked." While cork's enemies urge people to throw off the old and embrace new closures, millions of wine drinkers around the world are still in love with the romance of the cork and the ceremony of opening a bottle. With a thorough command of history, science, winemaking, and marketing, Taber examines all sides of the debate. Along the way, he collects a host of great characters and pivotal moments in the production, storage, and consumption of wine, and paints a truly satisfying portrait of a wholly intriguing controversy. As Australian winemaker Brian Croser describes it: "It's scary how passionate people can be on this topic. Prejudice and extreme positions have taken over, and science has often gone out the window."

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