

Which Italian wines may be screwcapped

29 Oct 2012 by David Gleave MW

David Gleave MW, UK wine importer specialising in Italy and Australia with a keen appreciation of the virtues of screwcaps, reacts to the recent news that Italian officialdom has relaxed its ban on these non-traditional stoppers for wine bottles - a bit. Come back tomorrow to read about an inflammatory new classification of Barolo crus.

'Those people with long memories', writes David Gleave MW, managing director of Liberty Wines, 'may recall that we sent a letter to the Italian Minister of Agriculture in October 2006 asking him to amend the ministerial decree of July 1993, which banned the use of anything other than natural cork on DOCG wines. The point we tried to make to the Minister was that the world of wine had changed significantly since 1993, so producers should be allowed to decide which closure was best suited to their wines and their market.'

'This letter started a debate in Italy. While it has taken a while, it is good to see, six years later, that a new ministerial decree, dated 13 August 2012, finally supersedes the previous decree. Unfortunately, this new decree only goes part of the way. It states that all DOCG wines, apart from those with the name of a sub zone on the label, or the name of a vineyard, can use alternative closures such as screwcap or synthetic corks. Many DOCG wines, or those from sub zones like Soave Classico, were already using synthetic corks in defiance of the law, but none could be so blatant as to use screwcaps. This is about to change.'

'As from early next year, we expect to start shipping a Soave Classico under screwcap. But here is the rub. We can ship both a Soave Classico and a Soave Superiore DOCG under screwcap, but not a Soave Classico Superiore DOCG. This latter wine needs to be sealed with cork. Such a crass compromise does little to promote the image of Italy as a quality-focused and innovative wine producing country, especially when we currently import Chablis Grand Cru, Chablis Premier Cru, Puligny Montrachet Premier Cru and other such European wines sealed under screwcap.'

'We have been in touch with many of our producers to see if we can move to screwcap. Cantine Leonardo is taking the issue to the Consorzio del Chianti. The decree has removed the obstacle previously placed in the way of those producers who wanted to use screwcaps, but does underline the fact that local *Consorzi* must instigate any change. Once a majority of members of any *Consorzio* votes in favour of a change, the amended law (*disciplinare*) for that particular zone must be sent to Rome for approval.'

'Leonardo will ask for this amendment to take place in Chianti, as will La Giustiniana in Gavi. Franco Massolino reports that he has received a circular from the Consorzio of Barolo e Barbaresco to ask the opinions of producers as to whether they should change the law to permit the use of alternative closures in Barolo. Under the current ministerial decree, Massolino could use a screwcap on his Barolo, but not on his single vineyard wines.'

'Following the 2006 letter to the Minister, we urged a number of our Italian producers to move to screwcap. Allegrini and Pieropan declassified their Valpolicella Classico and Soave Classico in order to use screwcap, while Paolo De Marchi at Isole e Olena has bottled about half of our allocation of Cepparello under screwcap since the 2005 vintage. Livio Felluga, Franz Haas, Cesconi, Poggio al Tesoro, Capezzana and A Mano are among those producers who have seen the positive benefits to quality that screwcaps offer. We hope this new ministerial decree will, despite its flaws, enable other producers to move to the sort of closure the vast majority of our customers prefer.'