

Scientists to settle dispute over taste of wine in bottles with corks versus screw caps

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(Phys.org)—A team of researchers with Oxford University (with assistance from Bompas & Parr) in collaboration with the Portuguese Cork Association is gearing up to settle the dispute over whether wine

tastes better when stored in bottles with corks or screw caps—and they are not simply taking the word of tasters. They are going to study wine drinkers' brains while they sip. The event, [Neuroenological Tasting—The Grand Cork Experiment](#), is scheduled for today and tomorrow, and those in London's Soho area who are interested in participating are encouraged to sign up.

Taste, like most everything else related to the senses, is purely subjective—one person may love the taste of chocolate while another finds it dull and pasty. How, then, could scientists possibly conduct an experiment designed to decide which of two methods of storing [wine](#) is "better?"

The answer lies with science. Rather than just asking people which they prefer, the researchers plan to put sensors on the heads of taste testers while they sip. The sensors will monitor brain pleasure responses and translate them into numbers that can be used for comparison purposes. The researchers will also be looking at other factors that might be related to how we register the taste of wine. Does hearing the [cork](#) pop, for example, induce greater or lesser enjoyment? What about participating in opening the bottle? Does smelling the wine before drinking have an impact? Do different types of cork cause the wine to taste differently? The researchers plan to find out.

Logic suggests that wines stored with corks likely [taste](#) different—the cork allows fresh air to enter the bottle while air inside gets out—corks allow the wine to "breathe," unlike screwcaps, which hold everything in place.

The debate over which storage method tastes better extends beyond those who drink wine—winemakers, too, have engaged in such arguments, making assertions that until now have not been based on objective facts. It is likely many will be rooting for the screw cap,

however, as approximately 20 percent of wine that is bottled with a cork is lost to cork taint—a fungus that ruins the wine.

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