Seeking closure

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Diam Mytik may be produced using one of two different technologies: Diamant or Revtech. Diamant eliminates TCA; Revtech does not, and it should be stopped before this inferior process ruins Mytik's reputation.

For Diamant, cork granules are placed in an autoclave, which is injected with compressed super-critical CO_2. When in a super-critical state, CO_2 is neither gas nor liquid but combines the penetrative behavior of gas with the extractive property of liquid. This removes TCA, TCA precursors, and all other volatile compounds. The contaminated CO_2 is piped into a sealed system, where it is cooled, reverting the CO_2 to gas form, forcing the TCA and other contaminants to drop out, while the purified CO_2 is reused in the Diamant process. The now odorless cork granules are mixed with a food-grade binding agent and food-grade polymer microspheres, molded, and baked. When mixed, the microspheres have the consistency of talcum powder; but when baked, they swell to fill the gaps between the cork granules, the whole becoming more elastic than cork.

The super-critical CO_2 Diamant process should be synonymous with Mytik, but unfortunately, almost 15 percent of Mytik closures are produced using Revtech. This is an older, cheaper, steam-cleaning technology, the principle of which is widely used by other technical cork producers to reduce (not eliminate) any existing TCA content, with roughly 75–85 percent success. While any reduction in TCA might sound good, the sifting, mixing, and baking routines involved in the production of technical corks actually distributes remaining TCA evenly throughout every closure in a batch, and it was precisely this phenomenon that caused the Altec debacle of scalped wines at the turn of the millennium.

Some winemakers are not convinced by Diam Mytik and often cite scalping as the reason. Since Mytik Diamant cannot scalp a wine, it makes me wonder whether these opinions have been influenced by an experience with Mytik Revtech or perhaps even a non-Diam product. MDC and MDA branded on a technical cork indicate Mytik Diamant Classic and Access respectively, whereas MRC and MRA denote Mytik Revtech Classic and Access—but many closures have no branding whatsoever, whether produced by Diam or other manufacturers.

If there is no indication of any brand or type, a technical cork gives me no confidence, and I will assume the worst—that it has probably been steam-cleaned—even though I know that the closures used by some of Mytik Diamant's strongest supporters in Champagne are blank.

Revtech is "doomed to disappear in years," according to Diam, but it really should go now and any existing customers referred to its sister company, Piedad, which offers steam-cleaned closures. Furthermore, all producers of Mytik Diamant should proudly display the brand.

Essential unison

Mytik Diamant is not just about the avoidance of TCA; it is also about consistency, ensuring that all bottles of the same cuvée have an identical oxygen transmission rate (OTR) and thus develop at the same pace as one another. But this of course depends on each bottle having the same volume of oxygen in the headspace, which is why Mytik and Jetting should be always be used in unison.

The cork granules in Mytik's Classic and Access closures are different in size, with Classic the finest and Access slightly coarser. Access has a slightly higher OTR, but oxygen ingress is not determined solely by granule size. The microspheres are impervious to oxygen, and it is by tweaking the proportion of microspheres, cork granules, and the food-grade glue used as a binder that Diam is enabled to produce Mytik closures with an almost unlimited range of bespoke OTRs and degrees of elasticity. Classic and Access are merely the standard offerings.

Some *chefs de caves* want the elimination of TCA and consistency of OTR that only Mytik Diamant can offer but believe that, for their house style, even Mytik Access leaves their Champagne too tight on release. In most cases, they have rejected Jetting for very much the same reasoning, and some of these *chefs de caves* are now developing a much higher OTR Mytik with Diam. For me this is not a solution. Why increase oxygen ingress for every year of a Champagne's life simply to produce the first flush of generosity when released, something that can be more easily achieved by adjusting the Jetting (*see À la Volée,* WFW *48*) without any risk to longevity?

LBM's Jetting equipment is not fixed; it has to be set up by the winery for each and every new batch. Depending on the design and speed of a disgorgement line and the pressure of the sparkling wine, this entails adjusting the jet to ensure the foam rises to about 10mm (0.4in) from the lip of the bottle, so that the cork is inserted just as the foam reaches the top of the bottle. However, if a winemaker believes a house style requires a more open aroma and palate on release, this can easily be achieved by setting the initial foam level to, say, 15mm (0.6in) or whatever. Once set, the headspace of every bottle will contain exactly the same, albeit very small amount of oxygen when the cork is inserted. To achieve a similar taste profile with a bespoke OTR would take a long time, and that time would diminish the potential longevity of the wine. Without Jetting, a bespoke closure would be a futile exercise, because the variability of headspace oxygen would far outweigh any difference in OTR, while using a bespoke closure with Jetting set to the standard level would be pointless.

I am sure that bespoke OTRs have their uses, but this is not one of them. Mytik Diamant closures and LBM Jetting technology are no-brainer must-haves for any sparkling-wine maker, but they should work together, not against each other. ■

Illustration by Dan Murrell