

## Mushroom-Style Corking of Sparkling Wine Bottles

Many amateur winemakers have noted the difficulty of fitting their finished bottles of sparkling wine with the classic “mushroom” cork and wire hood (like that typically seen on a bottle of champagne). As a devoted sparkling wine maker, this problem has vexed me as well.

My Ferrari (Italian) floor corks is the version that is specially designed to accommodate large champagne corks (i.e., It has oversized brass jaws and an “open bottom” that allows the partial insertion of oversized corks). Given a bit of practice, one can quickly figure-out how to partially insert oversized champagne corks into a 26 mm American-style sparkling wine bottle, compress the “exposed” cork and wire hood into the “mushroom” shape using a benchtop bottle capper, and, finally, tighten the wire hood with a twist tool to finish the job. An example of such handiwork can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Mushroom-style cork affixed to 26 mm sparkling wine bottle

So far, so good. Unfortunately, looks are deceiving in this case. Why? Well, when you try to open this bottle – forget-about-it! It’s almost impossible to get the cork out without some sort of heroics. No matter how much you practice, you’ll never look elegant trying to remove a cork with a pair of pliers at the Sunday dinner table.

I am still experimenting with ways to solve this problem of the “stuck cork syndrome”. Currently, I am experimenting with various depths of insertion and applying beeswax to the corks before insertion. In addition, I am trying to find alternative champagne-style corks that have a slightly smaller diameter than those supplied by my usual source ([www.piwine.com](http://www.piwine.com) 28.5 x 47 mm). Another possibility, is to move from American-style sparkling wine bottles with 26 mm openings to Euro-style bottles with 29 mm openings. While I already own a 29 mm bell housing for my bottle capper, I have yet to source any Euro-style bottles for experimentation.

In the meanwhile, Howie Hart, the resident sparkling wine guru on [www.winepress.us](http://www.winepress.us) has recommended an alternative approach which I will now describe. Instead of using champagne corks and wire hoods, Howie suggests using somewhat smaller diameter/length Belgian beer corks and matching wire hoods (see [http://www.winepress.us/forums/index.php?/topic/51167-bottling-sparkling-wine/page\\_hl\\_%2Bbelgian+%2Bcorks\\_fromsearch\\_1](http://www.winepress.us/forums/index.php?/topic/51167-bottling-sparkling-wine/page_hl_%2Bbelgian+%2Bcorks_fromsearch_1)). Midwest ([www.midwestsupplies.com](http://www.midwestsupplies.com)) sells 25.5 x 44 mm Belgian beer corks (part no. 6791) and matching wire hoods (part. No. 6792).

I secured some of these Belgian beer corks and tried inserting them into empty champagne bottles as an experiment. However, even with the Ferrari's cork depth setting at its minimum (see Figure 2), the Belgian corks were inserted too deeply into the champagne bottles and were somewhat difficult to remove. I discovered that if I set the cork depth adjustment nut to the minimum setting and then added a half-inch shaft collar to the cork insertion pin as a spacer (see Figures 2 and 3) that the Belgian cork was inserted to just the right depth – i.e., just below the champagne bottle's glass detent used to secure the wire hood (see Figure 4).



Figure 2. Ferrari floor corker insertion pin adjusted to minimal cork depth setting.



Figure 3. Ferrari floor corker insertion pin fitted with half-inch shaft-collar spacer in order to reduce the depth of Belgian beer corks in champagne bottles.

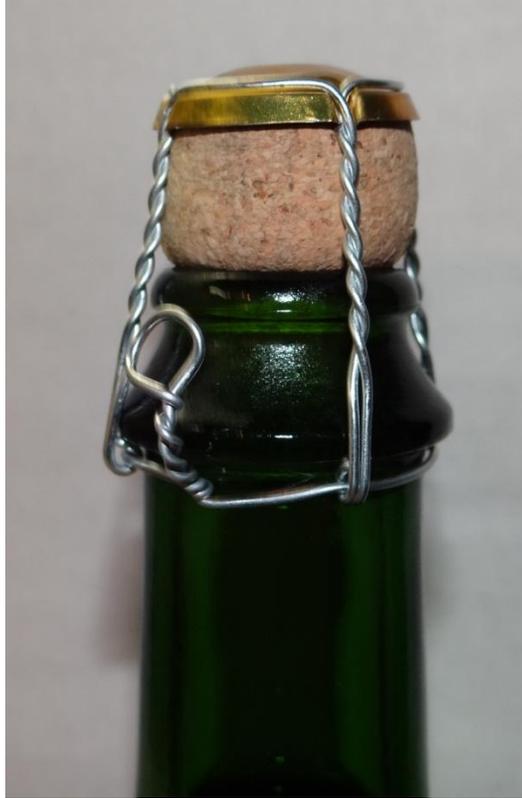


Figure 4. Champagne bottle fitted with Belgian beer cork and wire hood.

Experiments, so far, have resulted in sparkling wine bottles characterized by the distinctive mushroom cork closure that can be readily opened at the table without undo difficulty. Until I discover a better way, I will be fitting my sparkling wine bottles with Belgian beer cork closures.