

WE CAN DRINK THE REST TOMORROW

Air serves a very important purpose when you're drinking wine. Most importantly, it "opens up" a wine and helps to bring out its character. When you slosh wine from a bottle into a glass, a lot of air gets mixed in. This causes those aromatic compounds to fill the glass and makes the experience of drinking a good wine all that much better. There are decanters and aerating gadgets to speed up this process, too, if swirling's not your thing.

But once air gets to the wine, the cat is out of the bag. While it will taste fantastic for a few hours, it will then slowly lose its fruitiness, its aroma, its body, and just about everything else. Eventually the wine will oxidize due to exposure to O₂ in the air, which starts a chain reaction in the wine, forming hydrogen peroxide, then acetaldehyde, neither of which you want to be drinking a lot of. Once a wine is uncorked (or once the cork starts to fail), this process begins in earnest.

So to combat that longer-term exposure, the kind that doesn't happen in your glass, they tested an array of wine preservation gadgets, from simple hand-operated pumps that seal the bottle and pump out the air

VACU VIN WINE SAVER

This is the preservation system just about everyone starts on. It's cheap, brainlessly simple to use, and for overnight preservation, it usually works well. Just pop a special rubber stopper into the bottle's mouth, then press the hand pump to the top. Pull back a few times and air gets sucked out of the bottle, creating a (somewhat weak) vacuum. A clicking noise alerts you when the pump can't extract any more air.

In theory it's a perfect solution: If air is the enemy, then no air is the answer. Getting the air out of the bottle should theoretically protect the wine indefinitely. The trouble is the part *where you create a vacuum by hand*. How much air can you realistically pull out of a wine bottle with a \$10 piece of plastic? Some have actually measured the strength of the vacuum created and calculated that it's only about 70 percent complete, and that's on a fresh pull. That leaves plenty of air in the bottle, plus, over time, there's fear that a Vacu Vin seal leaks, letting in even more air every day. Furthermore, some have speculated that the process of creating the vacuum sucks out the volatile esters from the headspace in the bottle, essentially removing flavor compounds along with oxidizing elements.

In reality, that's a whole lot of doomsaying over a stocking stuffer, and for short-term wine keeping, *Vacu Vin works better than detractors claim. In fact, in my two-day test, the Vacu Vin wine earned my highest score.* I couldn't tell it apart from a fresh bottle. But things went south—way south—after a week. At the seven-day mark, the Vacu Vin wine had become extremely musty and was completely undrinkable, lending credence to some of the theories about its long-term effectiveness.

For short-term storage, Vacu Vin is foolproof and works fine, but if you need to keep an open bottle for more than 48 hours, look elsewhere.

Rating: 7 out of 10

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