

Bottle caps: historical fragments, modern icons



True connoisseurs do not drink wine: they taste secrets. (Salvador Dalí, 1904-1989)

Don't even think of throwing them away. They could be worth a fortune. The caps of sparkling wine corks are little gems of technique and design, sought after by hundreds of thousands of collectors in every corner of the world. Should one of the five Pol Roger 1923 caps still in existence fall into your hands, you could sell it for 15,000 euros.

Having become, over time, a true symbol of bubbly, together with mushroom caps, the caps enclosing corks began to be seen as collector's items in the early eighties in the Champagne region of France. Today those pieces of circular tin foil, which could be worth anything from a few euros to several thousands, are precious items to be preserved, listed in appropriate collectors' catalogues and the subject of events and exhibitions for enthusiasts. Such as the National Bottle Cap Exhibition, held on March 16th in the Guido Berlucchi cellar in Borgonato, Franciacorta, which drew exhibitors from Italy, France and Argentina. Organised in collaboration with the Cap Collectors' Club, the exhibition showcased priceless collections from all over the world, along with bottles of yesteryear and paraphernalia from the world of wine. In celebration of the Berlucchi Spring Festival, a special cap was created in commemoration of the event, which already has



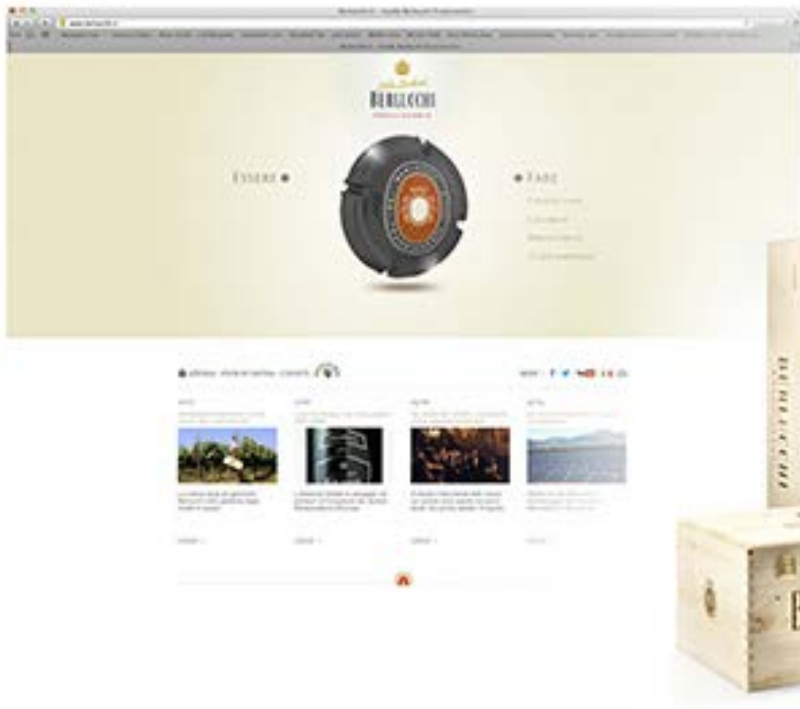
Arturo Ziliani with the president of the Club, Pino Manieri, who gives the prize to Mr. Gianni Legnani

Caps designed by SGA for the club anniversary

cult status among enthusiasts, and one cap was stamped with the colourful logo of the C.C.C. In recent years, the Club has been making new converts, organising meetings throughout Italy, taking part in themed exhibitions, trade fairs and conventions while maintaining contact with various manufacturers. The Club has around 250 members but it is estimated that there are around 5,000 collectors in Italy.

Devised in the middle of the nineteenth century by Adolphe Jacquesson, the owner of a Champagne firm, the "plaques de muselet" represent the apex of the evolution in the methods previously used to prevent the cork from popping due to the pressure, which basically consisted of handmade binding of jute string and iron wire. By ensuring a better grip of the metal cage patented by Jacquesson, the caps guaranteed a hermetic seal for Champagne bottles, thereby preserving the characteristics of the wine. It was a brilliant invention that was soon adopted by all producers of sparkling wine and would become a symbol of quality.

From the second half of the twentieth century, the caps were lithographed, screen printed or lacquered and embellished with decorative elements, coats of arms and brands: now the stars of advertisements for Champagne and Italian Classic Method sparkling



wines, caps are a stylistic element that cannot be ignored in any packaging or global image project of sparkling wine producers.

Italian cellars are also aware of their aesthetic and promotional value: a central feature of the home page of the Berlucchi site, metal caps have become a characteristic element of the lids of producers' wooden cases, enhanced by a distinctive personality.

For an in-depth look at the historical evolution of the sparkling wine cap, see the article by Gianni Legnani, formerly director of the Champagne Information Centre in Italy, on behalf of the Comité Interprofessionel du Vin de Champagne (<http://www.winetaste.it/la-capsula-da-spumante-ha-162-anni/>).



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