

December 24th 2012

The McWilliam's Maurice O'Shea Award was last night given to The Australian Screwcap Initiative, in a move hailed as hugely significant by the country's top wine critics.

Winemaker Jeffrey Grosset accepted the award on behalf of all in the wine industry who pioneered Australia's world-leading move to the new closure in 2000.

James Halliday told The Shout the award is further validation of Australia's move to screwcap.

He said cork is a "350-year-old technology that depends on the vagaries of a natural product" and its days are numbered.

"I believe the screwcap is the most important development in wine since Louis Pasteur unlocked the mechanisms of fermentation in wine and the impact of oxygen on wine [150 years ago]," Halliday said.

Grosset thanked McWilliam's for the award.

He told TheShout that the closure issue is really quite simple.

"Screwcap works and cork doesn't, at least not consistently," he said.

But he said his greatest concern is that Australia is now exporting wine under cork that is available under screwcap.

"The situation with China is fairly clear cut in that it's a lack of knowledge," he said. "We need to explain to them [the benefits of screwcap] – why wouldn't they be able to understand, as Australians have?"

Wine writer Tyson Stelzer, who was honoured by Grosset for his role in teaching consumers about screwcap, said the award sends an important message to the rest of the world.

"While in Australia we have a majority of our wines under that closure, internationally we still have a lot of work to do," he said.

Wine critic Winsor Dobbin told The Shout the award shows that the screwcap message is finally getting through to a broader audience.

"Everyone in the Australian wine industry is tired of getting substandard corks. Tonight the message has been rammed home that if you want a wine in perfect condition, the best way to see that wine is under a screwcap."

Fellow wine critic Jeremy Oliver told The Shout the award will "create ripples and waves all over the world, to the extent that it will be impossible to ignore".

Australian wine icon Wolf Blass congratulated Grosset, and told The Shout that 100 per cent of output under the Wolf Blass label is now under screwcap, both export and domestically.

"The Canadians, the Swiss people, the Austrians and the Germans have adopted it.

Now we have to convince the Chinese," he said.

The McWilliam's Maurice O'Shea Award is presented to an individual or group who has made an outstanding contribution to the Australian Wine Industry.

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