

# The New York Times

## THE POUR

### The \$410 Corkscrew



Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Corkscrews, from left: the Code-38 wine knife, a model by Laguiole and a generic waiter's friend.

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THEY come in all shapes and sizes. Most often, they can be found stuffed into kitchen drawers alongside potato mashers, melon ballers and other seldom-used essentials of the kitchen. Wine lovers take them for granted, except when nobody can find one. Call a Boy Scout! He's sure to be prepared with a handy multifunction pocket knife that includes one.

The \$220 Code-38 wine knife.

I'm talking, of course, about corkscrews, which, regardless of the screw cap, remain indispensable for achieving access to the wine within. But would you pay \$410 for one?

Oh, please, why even ask? In an era when people pay hundreds of dollars for a bottle of mediocre Champagne, not to mention thousands for a bottle at auction, who would begrudge the Code-38 wine knife from Australia its retail price of \$220 to \$410? No, it's not made of gold.

The fact is most people pay corkscrews little mind. They're perfectly content with the gimme corkscrew from the local wine shop; or the cheap double-winged corkscrew, in which you squeeze the arms together to extract the cork; or even the Swiss army knife. Ambitious types can find battery-operated corkscrews or tapered yet cumbersome models the size of restaurant pepper mills, which operate not on the principle of twisting the worm into the cork, but with a press and a pull.

In restaurants the world over, sommeliers, those exacting, extracting professionals, rely overwhelmingly on a simple, handy device known as the waiter's friend or, sometimes, as the wine key. Essentially a knifelike handle with a spiral worm for inserting into the cork and a hinged fulcrum for resistance, the waiter's friend has largely stood the test of time, with modest tweaks and improvements, since it was patented in Germany in 1882. Basic versions go for less than \$10.

No product, though, no matter how successful, is immune to the fertile imagination of industrial designers. Enter the Code-38, in which the waiter's friend is re-engineered, using the highest principles of design and top-flight materials. What does that get you?

Well, when I pick up my standby home corkscrew, a Pulltap's double-hinged waiter's friend, I'm not wowed by the black plastic handle, flimsy metal fulcrum and serrated foil cutter. It works fine, but I confess I don't feel much of anything about it. When it breaks, I have others lined up ready to go.

The Code-38, by contrast, offers the satisfying, solid heft of a fine tool. It feels good in the hand, like a well-balanced kitchen knife, and it inspires a sort of confidence that I had been unaware of lacking. The basic \$220 model, which I bought and tested for several weeks, is made of solid stainless steel, with a thick, strong worm. The foil blade is a curved steel arc that can be opened with one hand and resharpened on a stone.

The fulcrum is smooth and shiny. It's a single-hinge design rather than the double-hinge I have on my Pulltap's. The double-hinge is intended as a safety net for amateurs like me, who can't always get the corkscrew in the right spot for a smooth, continuous extraction. Instead, the double-hinge allows you to pull a cork part way out, and then re-set the fulcrum to complete the maneuver.

The Code-38's single-hinge, though, is so precisely engineered that I have yet to meet the cork I could not extract effortlessly, while (in my would-be sommelier's imagination) bantering wittily with the table in front of me and simultaneously surveying the rest of the dining room for trouble.

To read the full article on the New York Times website visit <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/20/dining/20pour.html>