

Coravin Founder and Inventor Greg Lambrecht uses the Coravin Wine Access System to pour wines for our tasting.

PUTTING Coravin TO THE TEST

IS THE **GROUNDBREAKING WINE ACCESS SYSTEM** AS GOOD AS IT SOUNDS?

BY AMY ZAVATTO / PHOTOS BY DOUG YOUNG

Imagine if you had the magical power to seamlessly syphon out an eentsy taste—just an ounce or two—of, say, a '61 Haut Brion without disturbing the wine's integrity. You would not open the foil or pop the cork; no oxygen would seep into the liquid inside. It would be as if nothing had ever happened to the bottle sleeping in your cellar. The only mark of tampering would be the reduced amount of juice left behind.

This is the promise of inventor Greg Lambrecht's Coravin Wine Access System—one that has shaken up the wine world with its wish-come-true promise of unsullied dipping into the most bespoke of bottle.

But does it really work? We decided to put it to the test ourselves at The SOMM Journal.



Coravin's Greg Lambrecht is flanked by New York City somms Rebecca Banks (left), Wine Director at Balthazar and Education Director for Keith McNally restaurants, and Marika Vida-Arnold (right), Wine Director at the Ritz-Carlton Central Park.

Time in a Bottle

Over a six-month period, we sat down with Lambrecht, as well as Marika Vida-Arnold, Wine Director for New York City's Ritz-Carlton Central Park, and Rebecca Banks, who oversees the wine programs and education for restaurateur Keith McNally's Manhattan mini-empire that includes Balthazar. Beginning one warm, bright autumn day this past September, Lambrecht and his team met with us at Auden in the Ritz-Carlton to dip into four bottles, equally divided between the Old World and the New: the Kistler 2011 Kistler Vineyard Chardonnay from Sonoma; Burgundy's Marquis d'Angerville 2010 Volnay 1er Cru Fremiet; the Fromm 2010 Clayvin Vineyard Pinot Noir from Marlborough, New Zealand; and the Étienne Sauzet 2011 Puligny-Montrachet Les Referts: four gorgeous wines with much to offer—and much to lose if Coravin didn't live up to its promises.



Author Amy Zavatto prepares tasting notes.

Cheerful and confident, Lambrecht seemed anything but worried—and rightfully so. That '61 Haut Brion? It was actually the oldest and most prestigious wine that Lambrecht used as a very expensive guinea pig for his invention, launched in July 2013. A science geek with a background in physics, nuclear medicine and mechanical engineering who had made his career by inventing ground-breaking technology for difficult surgical procedures, Lambrecht took his burgeoning love for wine, and inspiration cleaved from a fine heart-valve device he'd crafted, and created a super slender, hollow needle that would gently pierce a cork, access the wine within and fill the remaining space with inert argon gas. When the needle is removed, the cork, he found, would close back in on itself and the wine would remain with its current state of evolution intact.

Blind Spot

During our first session, one of each of the four "control" bottles were accessed via Coravin, tested for soundness and then sampled by our panel, with tasting notes recorded. On our second round in October, Lambrecht blinded us on the Kistler and the Sauzet, with five samples of each wine laid before us. In each flight, one of the wines was the one we'd accessed the month prior; the rest could be any possible mixture of bottles also just-accessed with Coravin or with their corks pulled entirely. In February during the final tasting, the remaining bottles—the Fromm and the Volnay—were blinded in the same manner.