

Dear Good Somm Bad Somm,

I recently had a guest bring his own wine into my restaurant to enjoy with his dinner. As I opened and served each bottle, a time consuming effort, he offered me tastes and asked my opinions along the way. I was polite and thanked him for his generosity. However, when the bill arrived, he pointed out that he shared the wines with me and he refused to pay the corkage fees. I was shocked. How can I better protect myself in the future?

Sincerely,
 Used and Abused

Good Somm

Dear Used and Abused,

A guest should never assume that just because he shared his wine with the staff during the meal, the corkage fee will be removed. However, you may consider removing a corkage fee if the guest were to buy a bottle or two from your wine list.

Paying a corkage fee is standard in most restaurants but corkage rules may vary, so to avoid any problem in the future you should clearly communicate your policy to the guest verbally or in writing on your list.

And guests should do their part as well! It would be nice if the guest were respectful of the work you have done to procure an extensive selection of wines and *not* bring something you already sell. They should also bring their bottles in an appropriate wine carrier. Guests should also not pickup wine from Trader Joe's or a local drugstore and hand it to the hostess in a brown bag. And finally, it's not cool to pull out hidden bottles from under the table during the meal.

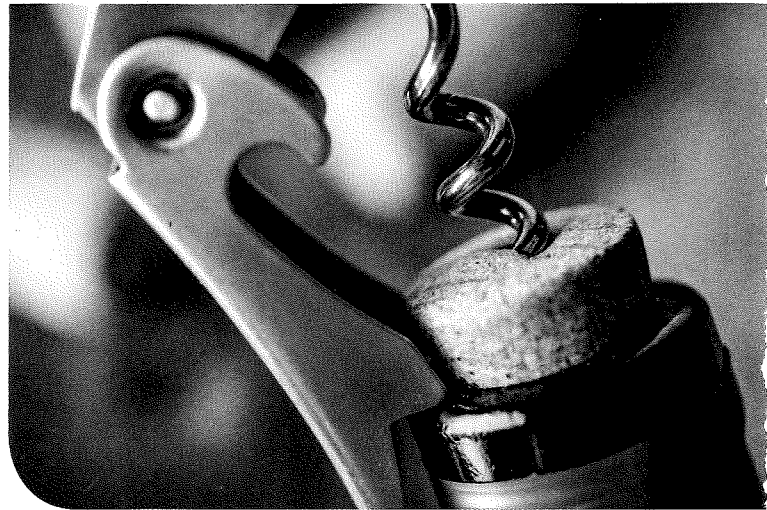
Corkage is a drain on service, for very little revenue, so it's best to keep things as simple and clear as possible.

Sincerely,
 Good Somm

BAD SOMM

Dear Used and Abused,

First off, let me say that these "Corkage Cowboys" who bring their own wine to restaurants are nothing more than pure parasites. I know that sounds harsh, but let me put it in a way that most wine industry pros can understand: People who bring corkage wine to restaurants are exactly like creepy dudes who go to a strip club, sit far from the dance floor, watch the girls, but barely even throw a dollar bill up on the stage or pay for a lap dance. You all know the guy I'm talking about. And the concept here is the same.



Corkage Cowboys want to come out to your restaurant, drink from your nice glassware, have their wine poured from your decanters, soak up your ambiance and leave paying as little as possible. They even want a somm to taste their wine and tell them how "baller" it is.

Going back to the stripper motif: I don't make any money if you hang out with me all night, stare at my ass, then go home and masturbate.

And if you think you're doing anyone a favor by just having *food* for dinner, you're wrong. With the cost of food going up, the cost of labor going up and the cost of rent going up, food is almost considered a "loss leader" in the industry. Beverage is really the only profit-driver left!

That's why the restaurant business as we know it today is virtually on the endangered species list. Restaurants—*good restaurants*—that we all know are shutting their doors seemingly every other week now and being replaced by low-end, casual, gastropub concepts because it's just too expensive to run a fine dining house anymore.

And then you've got people who not only have the nerve to bring their own wine to your place, but then try to weasel out of paying the nominal corkage fee! These people don't care if you go out of business. As soon as you go bankrupt and close, they'll take their precious wines somewhere else and try to drain them.

In short: The best way to avoid a parasite is to keep your hands clean of them. Don't taste anyone's corkage wine unless this person is a wine customer who supports your program. Let him know: I'm not gonna hang around here and jerk you off while I could be shaking my butt on the other side of the room to some customer who's buying. We don't dance for free. SJ

Yours truly,
 Bad Somm

Thank you again for the thoughtful questions. Hope you enjoyed our answers, and with any luck you are receiving the help you truly need. Follow us at @goodsommbadsomm on social media and/or visit our page www.goodsommbadsomm.com