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WINE INDUSTRY BUSINESS JOURNAL

**Silva Corks to start on \$4 million plant**  
*FOOD-GRADE FACILITY WILL COMPLEMENT PORTUGAL CERTIFICATION*

Monday, March 27, 2006

BY JEFF QUACKENBUSH  
STAFF REPORTER

SANTA ROSA – M.A. Silva Corks USA plans to break ground by mid-April on a \$4 million-plus processing facility north of Santa Rosa. Twice as large as its existing plant, it will be built from the ground up to enhance production and quality control.

Midstate Construction will be building the 30,400-square-foot processing facility in Westwind Business Park near Charles M. Schulz – Sonoma County Airport.

Anticipated to be ready in November, the facility will have 50 percent more workspace, a linear workflow, air and water purification systems and two and a half times more space in the lab to allow visiting winemakers to perform their own sensory tests, according to Neil Foster, co-owner and managing director of the cork distributor.

M.A. Silva Corks USA decided to build instead of rent to gain optimal environment conditions for production.

"The problem with retrofitting a building is you don't know the evil already there," Mr. Foster said. "With a new building, we can start from day one with clean practices."

It's part of an industry-wide effort to eradicate the specter of cork-tainted wine commonly attributed to the mold compound TCA.

TCA-contaminated wine smells musty to trained noses in concentrations as minute as a few parts per trillion. Makers of natural cork stoppers have been responding to the much-publicized cork flap by spending millions of dollars on new, more sanitary cork plants and vertical integration between cork oak forest and winery.

The distributorship currently leases 15,000 square feet at 975 Corporate Center Parkway in southwest Santa Rosa.

The build-to-suit deal with Brondi Development allows M.A. Silva Corks USA to have the building constructed to the level of food-grade standards it wants. That means caulked floor and wall joints, covered insulation and an ultraviolet-tight or ozone purification system to destroy mold spores and bacteria in the water and air.

A cork processing facility receives containers of stoppers from their supplier or sources, tests samples for contaminants, checks consistency of cork grade, applies any firebrand or ink graphics, coats the corks for insertion then bales the stoppers for shipment to a winery.

Many major cork makers are testing stoppers before shipment to the U.S., but secondary testing is necessary because of mold-friendly climactic conditions during oceangoing delivery from Europe and additional quality precautions.

**\$4 million on Portugal cork plant**

M.A. Silva has spent more than \$4 million building its MASilva3 cork processing plant near the cork forests of southern Portugal. A key component of that was the high-tech boiling system for cleaning corkwood under pressure.

In December, the company finished a \$1 million upgrade of its processes to the new ISO 22000:2005 food hygiene standard. That standard requires a Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points plan, or HACCP, for places in the workflow where contaminants can creep into the product.

Sonoma-based consulting food scientist Richard Stier developed an HACCP plan for M.A. Silva Corks USA. DES Architects designed the building.

Mr. Foster and Manuel Silva Sr. of Portuguese cork maker M.A. Silva Corticas founded M.A. Silva Corks USA in 2000.

Company revenues have been growing at 50 percent annually in recent years, and growth of 30 percent to 40 percent is projected for this year, according to Mr. Foster.

The company's workforce has grown to 20, with five more hires planned by the time the new facility is open. Recent hires include a new sales manager and salespeople for the Pacific Northwest. M.A. Silva plans to expand sales there this year and next.

To increase efficiency, Mr. Foster is looking into further automation. In addition to the existing machine that dumps incoming stoppers into processing machines, the company may get an automatic bagging machine to create cork bales. However, machines can't replace human eyes right now for spotting imperfect cork quality or printing, Mr. Foster noted.

For more information, call 707-636-2530 or visit [www.masilvacorks.com](http://www.masilvacorks.com).

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