Good Practices Guide for Oak Casks and Vats

Cellar Storage Conditions

It is best to store the oak casks and vats in an appropriate area. The humidity of the room should be around 70-80%, and the temperature around 15-18°C. Rooms with high ventilation levels and/or air movement and/or storage under direct sunlight must be avoided to prevent wood shrinkage and leaks.

Initial Commissioning

All our products have been water tested in our cooperage. However, it is important to take some precautions for commissioning of the products. The oak casks and vats can dry out somewhat during transportation.

For an oak vat, we advise you to add 15-20 cm of water in the bottom of the product on the first day. For an oak cask, we advise you to add water to the bottom of the front door.

It is important to use clean, filtered and un-chlorinated water.
The following day, fill entirely the oak cask or vat with water and sulfur (0.5 liter of SO_2 with a concentration of 6%, per cask or vat). This step enables the oak cask or vat to swell and ensure the waterproofness. Inspect frequently to check if any noticed leaks are re-sealing. In some cases you may have to wait a few days and before the leaks seal up. Once the leaks seal, we advise you to tighten the stainless steel accessories by half a turn.
Then, you can empty the oak cask or vat. It is ready to be used.

Internal Cleaning and/or Rinsing of the Oak Casks and Vats

After fermentation, or maturation use a steam generator for 2-3 minutes per hL in order to de-scale the oak casks or vats. Alternatively you can use a low-pressure washing head (<50psi/3.5bar) with ozonated water for 30 seconds/hL. Then, rinse with clean water.
Be careful, do not use high-pressure water with impingement-style cleaning heads. This type of equipment can damage the wood fibers on the internal surface of the vats/casks.
If the oak cask or vat is not used for a few weeks or months, let it completely dry with the upper and side manholes and all valves opened in order to promote ventilation. This step is very important because a good drying process will avoid mold and/or bacteria proliferation.

The use of chemical products is formally not recommended. You could risk damage to interior surfaces and stainless steel accessories of your oak casks or vats. However, for very dirty interior surfaces you can clean with a mild solution of sodium percarbonate using a low-pressure spray ball to help remove tartrates or stone. An alcohol solution such as brandy or other high-proof spirit or ozonated water and/or gas to sanitize your oak casks or vats.

Olfactory and visual inspections should be regularly done. They are important in order to detect the onset of unwanted bacteria or mold.

Furthermore, never remove the stainless steel accessories directly fixed to your oak casks or vats. You could cause leaks when the accessories are re-installed.

Long-term Storage of Your Empty Oak Casks and Vats

DO NOT use SO_2 in your oak casks or vats if they not completely dry! It can lead to the production of pure sulphuric acid and to serious degradation of the stainless steel accessories. Storage with ozone gas is preferred according to the ozone generator's manufacturer's suggested protocols.

Before Using SO_2 in Your Oak Casks and Tanks

- You must empty the cooling plates and wipe off all moisture/water.
- Leave the oak casks and vats opened in order to balance the external and internal humidity. Opening them up completely will also help to keep them well ventilated.
- Inspect the interior of the oak casks and vats and wipe off all humidity or moisture found on any of the surfaces of the tank or accessories.
- Note: these protocols are not required when using ozone gas for storage.

External maintenance

Check if your casks and vats are well installed and blocked for stability.

Do not use chemical detergents, such as in the inner part of your casks or vats.

Your casks or vats are protected by a micro-porous, food-grade, clear wood sealant. We recommend cleaning them with water and a sponge. If wine or product stains are existent, this area could be scraped / sanded and one layer of a food-grade clear sealant can be applied.

If you need to apply an additional layer of food-grade clear wood sealant on the oak or paint on the hoops, please contact our representative. He will able to provide you the references of the products we use. These products must all be food-grade.