

CHEERS TO A LONG LIFE FOR WINE BARRELS

DAVE CAIRNS

A GEELONG-MADE mobile processing unit that extends the effective winemaking life of oak wine barrels is being pitched as a potential solution to a global shortage.

The system developed by RenewOak has been welcomed by winemakers who have been trialling it to rejuvenate wine barrels that ordinarily would be discarded after four or five years.

North Geelong boutique engineering firm Austeng has designed and built an automated, mobile unit to house the process and allow it to be taken from winery to winery.

Austeng managing director Ross George said the RenewOak technology had the potential to launch around the world.

"Our involvement is taking the wonderful ideas and prototypes and turning it into an automated machine," Mr George said.

Expected to at least double the effective life of the barrels, the RenewOak mobile unit will be taken to market at a time when securing oak wine barrels has been increasingly challenging for winemakers.

Barrels can be "re-shaved" and refired but this involves dismantling the barrel and taking it off-site and out of production, whereas the patent-pending RenewOak process uses an abrasive slurry to "sand" internal surfaces without dismantling the barrel.

RenewOak managing director Kim Walker said the chemical-free process removed all barrel residues, along with a fine layer of oak, leaving a clean timber finish ready to impart desired properties to the wine.


"There is no other way of cleaning a barrel like this (in the world)," Mr Walker said.

RenewOak has spent the past three years developing the process, with trials done using stationary units that were not automated.

Mr Walker said the mobile unit had the capacity to rejuvenate up to 50 or 60 barrels a day.

"Most wineries would probably have 100 barrels at the most to do at any one time," he said.

"This device has been designed so that we tow it behind a truck, go to the winery, get their barrels out, clean them up and put them back in inventory."



Austeng managing director Ross George and RenewOak managing director Kim Walker unveil the mobile processing unit that rejuvenates oak wine barrels. Picture: Dave Cairns