

What's Cool

Products that are smart, make your tasks easier and provide cost or labor savings

Bill Pregler

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Barrel Rack Rehab

Cost-effective and environmentally-friendly

A FEW YEARS AGO, barrel rack fabricator **Topco Inc.** of Grover Beach, California ventured into rack rehabilitation. With today's current economy and cost savings on everyone's mind, it is not surprising this side of Topco's enterprise has rapidly become their number one focus.

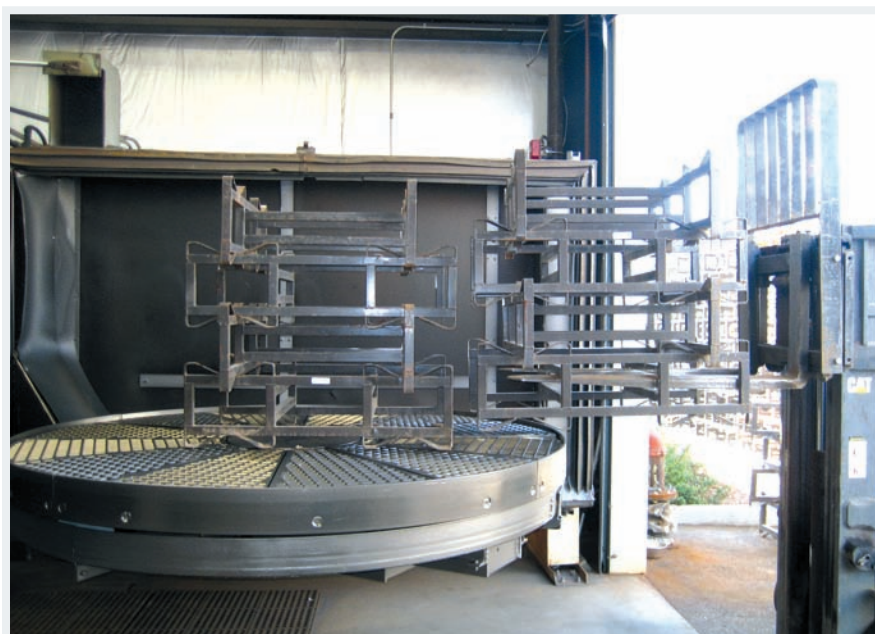
Barrel racks usually live in harsh environments, which typically afford them a limited usefulness of five to seven years. There is probably not a single winery anywhere without a bone yard of rusted and discarded racks behind the cellar.

While new racks generally cost around \$100, to get the equivalent for half is substantial. Even better, to get that rusting boneyard stripped down to bare metal, inspected, repaired and painted in your choice of color, might be something all wineries should consider.



Reusable bone-yard barrel racks rusting in the sun.

BILL PREGLER



MATT KRAUSE/TOPCO

The Pangborn RotoBlast performs quick batchwork production with turntable efficiency.

What I find really cool about the Topco process is each year a winery may recycle a portion of its rack inventory as part of the winery's annual maintenance program. This can be scheduled to coincide with the normal barrel procurement program. How about nice "new" rehabilitated racks to cradle your new barrels?

All this is possible because of something called a **Pangborn RotoBlast**, built by a company in Georgia with an extended history in the aerospace and military industries. In fact, Topco's machine was purchased from the GSA at the Mare Island naval ship yards in Vallejo, California.

It operates like a sandblaster but better. The racks are stripped of old paint and rust in mere minutes by two streams of high velocity steel "micro-balls." The machine utilizes compressed air and rotating wheel vanes to propel the steel shot for deburring, descaling or, in this case, peening to prepare the metal surfaces.

The machine is huge—22 feet tall by 24 feet wide and 15 feet deep—allowing Topco to stack multiple racks on rotating turntables. Thanks to high velocities and automatic rotation, the machine performs "batch work," thereby increasing production and keeping costs and labor to a minimum. It holds 10,000 pounds of blast media alone.

What's Cool



Powder coating the peened metal to a new finish.

MATT KRAUSE/TOPCO

The spent media and debris are collected, separated, and the steel shot is reused. Aside from the inherent advantages over sand blasting (production speed and ease of material recycling), the resulting finish is a peened surface, which readily accepts the powder coat. What is really cool is it is roughened enough (not eroded) to require two coats of paint to achieve the final smooth finish. Two coats instead of one is a deal.

Topco offers four services:

- Refurbishment, where the customer's racks are stripped, inspected and powder coated if found to be serviceable. This can also include ultrasound testing.
- Repair at a flat rate per rack on a case-by-case basis.
- Remanufacturing, which is refurbishment and repair but also conversions if a winery wants to modify a rack.
- Removal of any unserviceable racks at no cost to the customer.

The company offers nine different colors (beige, burgundy, blue, etc.), but custom colors are available upon request.

What's Cool: Recycling rusting barrel racks, while using an environmentally-friendly system that saves money, is a good start. Topco will even make arrangements to pick up your old racks and return them repaired and looking new. Everyone is looking for ways to save money, and cleaning up the old piles behind the cellar is definitely a win-win solution.

For more information, contact the factory at www.topcoproducts.com or 888-473-2005. For sales, call 707-477-0171. **WBM**

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