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# STEAMPUNK FANTASY

THERE'S SOMETHING IRRESISTIBLE ABOUT A CONTRAPTION OF BOLTS AND CHAINS – ESPECIALLY IF IT OPENS A BOTTLE OF WINE. BRITISH INVENTOR ROB HIGGS GIVES US THE LOWDOWN ON HIS US\$250,000 CORKSCREW.

TEXT JENNIFER CHEN PHOTOGRAPHY TAN WEI TE ART DIRECTION DON TAN

## WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO CREATE THIS CORKSCREW?

I made this after being told by Marcus of (design company) Oneofone to “take as much time and money as you like and make the coolest thing you can think of”. I reckon in the three years that followed, he occasionally regretted this.

## WHAT'S IT MADE OF?

Discarded bits from scrapyards, farmyards, steamships, fishing boats, flea markets and beaches. My favourite bits are an ancient fishing spearhead, a cannon ball, bicycle gears and a blacksmith's hammer.

## HOW DOES THE MACHINE WORK?

You place a bottle in the jaws and a glass in the chuck, then wind the handle. It takes 127 turns to complete one complete cork and pour cycle. The machine lowers itself onto the bottle, many gears and spanners push a corkscrew in, then start pulling the cork out. Little arms then move in, grab the cork and drop it in a little dish. A bell rings to indicate seven turns to go before a big hammer drops, releasing a clockwork spring. The spring spins a big steam train speed governor, which drives a gear that pushes an arm to lift the bottle up and tilt it over the glass. The bottle drops slowly back down to rest and the big hammer drops again to reset the machine for another go.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR MORE BIZARRE CREATIONS?

I have made eight-ton, 10m-high nut-cracking contraptions and miniature

clockwork robots, milk exploders, apple squashers, feather oilers, chicken feeders, comedy mouse traps, man traps, tidal-powered jumping machines, clockwork bouncing tape measures, pyrotechnics, humanoid robots for Nasa, water squirters for kindergartens, drawbridge-powered coffee grinders, seagull-triggered fog horns, self-welding contraptions, axe clocks, collapsing ladders, wine bottle exploders, medieval siege engines, fruit cannons and flaming baguette cannons.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

I've just been offered a commission this morning to make a child-powered, clockwork, chocolate-juggling vending machine and a treetop jungle weather station. Last week it was a full-size flying steam train in a jack-in-the-box style stone monument. ▲

*Rob Higgs' corkscrew is currently being exhibited at Opera Gallery Singapore, #03-05 Ion Orchard.*

