



The Contemporary Cellar

Wine lovers explore new ways to shape and store their collections

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When it comes to collecting, wine lovers are as varied as the bottles they keep. While many are satisfied with a few cases stored in a cool corner of the basement, others invest in a luxurious walk-in cellar, capable of holding several thousand bottles. Yet a middle way is emerging for many wine collectors, who purchase most bottles for early drinking and design their storage to support an active lifestyle of cooking and entertaining.

This contemporary cellar embodies several key characteristics. First, it is meant to be an integral element of the living spaces, not isolated underground or off-site. Second, it is generally sized to hold fewer than 1,000 bottles, to fit space constraints yet ensure a diverse selection. Finally, it reflects the tastes, both for wines and aesthetics, of the collectors who build it.

"Most of our cellars are visible from the front door," says designer Billy Carpenter of Vancouver, B.C.'s Vin de Garde, which specializes in modern cellars. "When you walk into the home, our installations are in full view."

Inspired in part by the increasing popularity of such displays in restaurants, these cellars are most often located on the main floor of a home, and are typically lined with sheet glass and brightened by LED fixtures. Though in some cases these elements serve to accent a traditionally designed storage space, many collectors are breaking from this aesthetic, and are trading in redwood racking and tile floors for stainless-steel detailing and modern finishes.

"If I get 20 inquiries into cellars, 18 of them are contemporary," says Curtis Dahl, of New Jersey's Joseph & Curtis Custom Wine Cellars, who's seen the style gain traction over the past several years.

Keep in mind, however, that these trends bring with them a new set of challenges when it comes to cooling and humidification. "When you're building a temperature-controlled cellar on the main floor, it's like putting a refrigerator in the middle of your home," cautions designer Scott Hughes, founder of CellarMaker in Atlanta, Ga. "You have to be very strict about the construction methods."

However, with a keen attention to detail, architects and designers are becoming increasingly able to work around these problems, and collectors are finding new ways of looking at and thinking about wine storage while still keeping their prized bottles in a protected environment. The trend is strongest among midscale collectors, but it has advantages for larger inventories, too. Those with expansive collections are starting to build not one, but two cellars in their homes: a smaller cellar for display, supplemented by a larger one for long-term storage.

Over the following pages, we'll take a look at a selection of cellars across North America; they hold, on average, 600 bottles of wine. In some cases, the size of the cellar was determined based on a fixed amount of usable space; in others, a smaller selection was simply a better match to the collector's buying and drinking habits. Stylistically, these spaces range from traditional to contemporary, and the collections themselves are no less varied, with some made up of wines intended for near-term consumption, and others focused on ageworthy bottlings.

Whether offering creative solutions for making the most out of your wine storage, or sharing tips for investing on a smaller scale, these wine lovers agree that the contemporary cellar can be the perfect match for a number of different collecting styles.