

Designing custom wine cellars

A proper wine cellar allows homeowners to carefully cradle their tasty investments

By Maureen Alley, associate editor

Designing the perfect wine cellar requires knowing how clients plan to use it as well as creating the right atmosphere; temperature and humidity control are two factors that can either positively or negatively affect the aging process of wine. And because wine is an investment for most homeowners, it's important to utilize a wine cellar designer early in a project so the proper setup is created.

Most wine cellar designers suggest storing wine in an environment of 55 to 65 degrees and between 50 to 70 percent relative humidity. To maintain constant temperature and humidity, proper insulation is suggested. "We stay away from fiberglass insulation because it can literally get saturated inside the wall unless one has a good vapor barrier. In a 2x4 wall, we like to go with 3½ in. of ridged

Artistic Wine Cellars has many clients who don't drink wine but want a wine cellar for added resale value.

polyurethane. That means it will have a foil cover on both sides of it which acts as a vapor barrier,” says Patrick Wallen, owner of Artistic Wine Cellars, San Rafael, Calif.

Proper insulation offers the versatility of placing the wine cellar anywhere in a house. “It’s just a matter of constructing the room properly. We recommend having R-13 on the walls and R-19 on the ceilings, then a moisture-resistant drywall and a door of exterior grade with weatherstripping around it,” says Matt Helm, Southern California design consultant for Cincinnati-based Wine Cellar Innovations.

A refrigeration unit is just as important as the insulation. “There are two types of refrigeration: a ductless split system and an air-handler split system. Both operate with a compressor outside, which is similar to a central air-conditioning system for a regular home. The ductless system has a unit that is mounted on the wall in the wine cellar. That one is very easy for remodels or jobs where space is an issue. The



Grotto Custom Wine Cellars offers high reveals, waterfalls or cascades to show off a homeowner's wine collection.

other is a forced-air system with supply and return vents inside the cellar with the runs hidden in the walls,” Helm says. “It’s a much more finished and cleaner look.”

Because maintaining constant temperature and humidity is so important, some companies offer technology to monitor these factors. “We manufacture wine cooling units that can call a homeowner if it’s too hot or cold to tell them they need to check it,” says India Hynes, owner and president, Vinotemp Corp., Rancho Dominguez, Calif. “We also have a tracking system with an inventory panel.”

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Wine Cellar Innovations helps homeowners set their wine cellars apart from others by offering different wood choices and other personalization options.

Where to begin

At the beginning of the design process, many designers prefer to sit down with a homeowner for an interview process. “We want to determine his buying styles, how his collection has grown over the past few years, where he thinks it’s headed for the next 10 to 15 years, and what kinds of bottles he buys. We need to know if he buys magnums or double magnums — for long-term investments or if he primarily buys 750 ml,” Helm says.

Once the buying style is determined, designers then will focus on racking and appearance. “We focus much more on the form: what people can do to make it their own, what type of wood choices they’d like to see on the inside and how they are going to personalize the wine

cellar,” Helm adds.

Wine cellar designers stress the importance of knowing if the client plans to use it for bulk storage or to show off their wine. “If it’s just for storage, then we’ll include a solid wall of wine. If the homeowner wants to show it off, we have a presentation rack that will break up a wall or different depths of racks,” says Doug McCain, owner, Wine Master Cellars, Denver.

If homeowners plan to show off their wine, it’s important to rack the bottles in a manner that clearly shows off the labels. “We can do high reveals, waterfalls or cascades to show off the wine bottles,” says Luis Mora, founder and CEO of Grotto Custom Wine Cellars and Cabinets, Aliso Viejo, Calif.

Proper racking is important with regard to the cork. Bottles should be stored horizontally so the cork is in contact with the wine. The temperature in the room also can

affect the cork. "If the room is any dryer than expected, corks would dry out, and any wetter, mold would develop on the bottles," Mora adds.

Most racks are made of All Heart redwood due to its resistance to decay and mildew. "Sixty percent of our sales include All Heart redwood. It's beautiful and has character but it's getting scarce as we go on," Mora says.

Wine cellar clients like to set their wine cellars apart and are starting to move to other types of woods, Helm adds. "I do a lot of things in hunter and mahogany, and walnut is becoming popular.



Temperature and humidity can adversely affect the aging process of wine. Because these two factors are so important, Vinotemp Corp. manufactures wine cooling units that will call a homeowner if the wine cellar is too hot or cold.

Then there are the people who are truly over the top and choose Purple Heart redwood," he says.

Not all wine racks are made of wood, such as with Wine Master Cellars that offers a steel racking system. "We have different frames that we can use to attach differently than wood racks. We can go around corners and curved walls, and put racks completely in a corner," McCain says.

Designers interviewed by *Residential Design & Build* say there's not much difficulty in designing wine cellars, as long as they are included early in the project. "When it comes to specifications, builders and architects will be better served to

go to someone like me who specializes in wine cellars," Wallen says. "The perfect time to call us is when the space has been framed but nothing has been roughed in."



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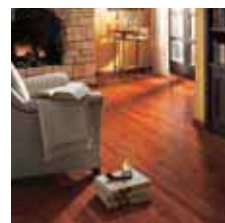
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Wine Master Cellars first determines how the homeowner plans to use the wine cellar. If they choose to show off their wine, presentation racks are available. A solid wall of wine is available for the homeowner who wants the wine cellar for storage.

Cellar demand rising

The demand for wine cellars has increased as more people get into the lifestyle and hobby of drinking wine. "Wine is becoming much more a part of our everyday culture. Twenty years ago, hardly anyone drank wine and if they did, they weren't drinking fine or aged wine," Helm says.

The future of wine cellars will continue to increase in demand as more homeowners recognize these spaces can add resale value to their homes. "I have clients who don't even drink wine but just want a wine cellar in their house — it's like keeping up with the Joneses," Wallen says.

The next step in the evolution of wine cellars is to enter the popular world of green products. "I've been waiting for



the green builders to call me and look for different man-made products for wine cellars. Even though our wood is done with sustainable harvest, every local town is adopting green building processes,” Wallen adds. “It’s just a matter of time when we move into building wine cellars with only man-made products.” ▶

WINE CELLAR RESOURCES

Artistic Wine Cellars
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Grotto Custom Wine Cellars
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