



wine design

HOME WINE CELLARS
ARE ALL THE BUZZ THESE DAYS BY JON BELL
PHOTOS: FABIENNE PHOTOGRAPHY & DESIGN

For wine connoisseurs there's really no better place to be than in the Pacific Northwest. From the pinot noirs of Oregon's verdant Willamette Valley to the bold merlots of Walla Walla, Wash. and everything in between this corner of the country is ripe with offerings in enology—that is, the love and study of wine and how its made.

Small wonder, then, that as Northwest wines have continued to flourish, so too have home wine cellars fast become important and tasteful sanctuaries not only for storing the wine lover's cache but also for sharing the fruits of fine wine with friends and family in style.

Just 10 years ago Ron Cowan, president of the Portland wine cellar company Stellar Cellars Inc., was dividing his time just about in half between home wine cellars and general contracting projects. About five years ago he was able to shift to wine cellars exclusively, including a few for various homes on the Street of Dreams tours in 2004 and 2005.

Today Stellar Cellars gets a call every day and, according to Cowan, has more work than it can handle.

"Wine cellars seem to be the latest must-have accessory," says Cowan, 61. "All the really great houses have wine cellars, so if you want to have a house that's in that category you should really have a wine cellar."

Kyle Bigbee, president of Hillcrest Construction, says putting a wine cellar in the \$3.5 million home his company built for this year's Street of Dreams makes great sense considering the popularity of all things vino.

"The house has got just about everything else," he says. "It's just kind of the norm on most houses like that these days, especially for people who entertain."

While not too extravagant, Bigbee says the cellar in Hillcrest Construction's home incorporates wine barrels, tile, wainscoting, racks for wine glasses and, of course, some space for wine storage. It's on the lower level of the home and will provide homeowners with another option for entertaining.

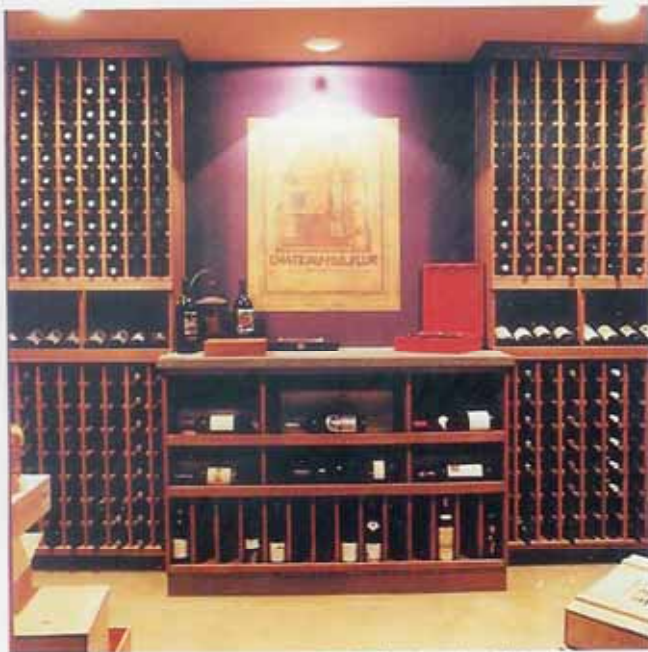
"It's kind of a little novelty room for people to hang out in," Bigbee says.

That aspect of the wine cellar—the entertainment factor—is becoming more and more prevalent, says Cowan. No longer

Visitors to this cellar are warmed by their surroundings as well as their wine.
Builder: Ryan Olsen Development, Inc.

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Wine cellars come in all shapes, sizes and styles. Photo courtesy Stellar Cellars.

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are "enophiles" limiting their wine cellars to low-light, temperature-controlled storage areas. Many cellars that Cowan designs these days include tasting or entertainment areas separate from the storage area.

"One trend is to have a tasting room outside of the wine cellar itself because you don't want to freeze," he says. "So if they can afford it and if they have the room for it, they want a tasting room. The wine cellar's just not for storage anymore."

Main ingredients

What makes for a great wine cellar? Lavish or simple the good ones all need to incorporate a few basic principles.

The best, according to Robert Parker—the famous wine taster whose perfect palate has been known to make kings and paupers out of many a vintner—are subterranean, vibration-free, low-light rooms that maintain relatively constant temperature and humidity levels.

Cellars can be large or small: anything from converted small closets to multiple-room configurations. Some are little more than credenzas or shelving units; others can accommodate thousands of bottles of wine and guests enough for a bubbly dinner party.

Cowan says he's built humble cellars that hold a mere 300 bottles of wine; others have had room for 1,000 bottles, 6,000 bottles and a whopper off Portland's Skyline Boulevard with a capacity of up to 12,000 bottles.

"It all depends on how crazy you are about collecting wine," Cowan says.

Experts differ on the proper temperature for wine storage, saying wines should be stored anywhere from 55 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit. The builders at Stellar Cellars insulate walls and ceilings, install vapor barriers and, if necessary, employ "split" cooling systems that use a compressor and an air handler to maintain constant temperatures.

Most cellars also contain some form of racking, usually wooden, to allow for proper, long-term wine storage. Different racking holds different bottle shapes, from standard 750 ml bottles and larger magnums to champagne bottles and splits.

Subtle variations

Beyond those essentials wine lovers seeking their own private cellar are limited only by imagination—and space and budget.

Cowan says smaller, simpler cellars like a 344-bottle room in the basement of a house will cost a couple thousand dollars. Higher end cellars, with full cooling systems, textured walls, extensive racking and lighting

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and so on, can run well over \$100,000.

Stellar Cellars has built cellars in businesses, homes and even condos. Builders have dug out 16-foot by 22-foot cellars eight feet below basement level; Cowan's own personal 1,200-bottle cellar is accessible via elevator. Some also incorporate spiral staircases, antique fixtures, murals and specialized display areas.

Cowan says it's also important for home wine cellars to have a focal point, be it artwork or a display of wine, to add a little interest.

"If you want just storage, that's fine," he says. "But I always try to find a focal point or an art piece that breaks up boring racking."

In vino (cellar) veritas?

Although home wine cellars are in demand these days, homebuilders still must consider whether an extravagant cellar will help move a house.

When building a spec home—that is, not for a specific client—it might not make sense to factor in a cellar. That was the case for Keith Coppenger, president and owner of KDC Construction LLC, who built this year's charity home for the Street of Dreams.

"It's hard to guess what someone wants," he says, "so you have to look at what's reasonable."



Photo courtesy Apex Wine Cellars

It's a different story when building for clients who specifically request a cellar though. In addition to the Street of Dreams home, Coppenger is building a 9,000-square-foot home in Colton for a California couple who want a wine cellar.

"As a builder the question then is what do you want to do in there?" Coppenger says. "Do you want to store your wine? Do you want to entertain in there or show off expensive stuff? Is climate control a big issue? For me it's more just providing options and a menu to let the customer decide where they want to put the money."

Smaller sips

For those who enjoy fine wines but might not want a full-on cellar, another popular storage option is on display in many of this year's Street of Dreams homes: stand-alone or built-in wine coolers.

Essentially refrigerators with adjustable temperatures and shelving for wine bottles, the coolers range in size from under-the-counter models to full-size refrigerators, holding anywhere from 30 to more than 200 bottles of wine.

"I think in my houses right now, the big wine cellar is not to me as much the vogue thing as the Sub-Zero wine coolers," says Bill Winkenbach, president and owner of B.C. Custom Homes, which has two houses in this year's showcase. "They are beautiful pieces of furniture that become part of your kitchen ensemble."

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