

FT Wine Buying & Investing

Why the dusty cellar turned into a high-spec 'wine room'

Showpiece Wealthy clients want top designs and the best technology, writes *Alice Lascelles*

For many wine lovers the expectant gloom of a subterranean wine cellar is all part of the fun, but a new breed of oenophile is now choosing to forgo this in favour of something rather more hi-spec: the feature wine cellar.

Hand-crafted from walnut, oak, bronze and glass, artfully lit and equipped with the latest cellaring technology, this new style cellar is not tucked away in the basement, it is an architectural feature — and even an entertaining space — in its own right.

"In the old days you'd go and get the wine out and no one even saw the cellar," says Richard Miller, managing director of cabinet makers Halstock, which has created a number of high-end designs for private clients. "It would be dank and dark, possibly with a frog in it and an old bicycle — good for keeping the integrity of the wine, perhaps, but not very welcoming. Now we're seeing cellars increasingly being located in proximity to the games room or the kitchen, so they're accessible and visible. They're something that people can share with their friends, much like a gun room or an art collection."

At the more modest end of the scale, that cellar might be a climate-controlled, glass-fronted feature wall integrated into a hallway or games room. The spiral cellar — which sees bottles racked round a corkscrew staircase in the ground — has also become a popular solution for properties tight on space. But a growing number of wealthy clients

are now commissioning fully-fledged "wine rooms", according to Mr Miller.

These are spaces which marry state-of-the-art cellaring with professional-standard tasting tables (equipped with sink, spittoon and decanting area), bars and glassed-off dining areas which allow guests to admire their host's wine collection while they eat.

Halstock's biggest project to date has been a 70 sq m wine room for 8,000 bottles complete with tasting and decanting areas, wine conditioning cabinets and a gated zone for the rarest crus, says Halstock's senior designer and project manager Paul Walton.

"Precision is everything," says Andrew Richards, development director at London-based architectural and interior design practice Studio Indigo. "Not just in the design of the climatic equipment but also in the design and execution of the finer details of the cabinetry and metalwork."

That means ensuring that drawers are cushioned to minimise vibrations. Smooth finishes are important, as is an odour-free environment. LED lighting is used throughout to eliminate temperature fluctuations. Bare metal edging is also discouraged in order to protect labels from the slightest nick or scratch.

More tech-savvy collectors are now also equipping their cellars with eSommelier, a piece of software that tracks every bottle using a unique barcode.

"This allows you to see your whole inventory, along with tasting notes,



On display: one of Halstock's designs complete with decanting area

valuations and cellaring advice, instantly, on your i-pad," explains Matt Tipping, fine wine sales manager at Berry Bros & Rudd, the wine merchant.

Showpiece cellars demand a different style of curation to the traditional cave, says Mr Tipping. "Normally you'd organise bottles by type or maturity in a cellar, but in this instance it's finding some highlights or centrepieces to make a feature of — perhaps a selection of magnums, or one really large format, or a bottle of each of the first growths from a specific vintage on display next to each other. Something that really draws the eye in."

In some cases, these displays can come closer to art installations. Smith & Taylor, the wine storage specialists, recently completed a wine wall in Mayfair showcasing 68 vintages of Mouton Rothschild's celebrated label series fea-

turing work by artists including Francis Bacon, Salvador Dali and Jeff Koons. The wine wall "looked almost like a butterfly case", says managing director Sebastian Riley-Smith.

"Along with pools, gyms and screening rooms, prestige cellars are increasingly a way that developers are trying to outcompete each other," says Mark Wilkinson, partner at Knight Frank, the estate agents, giving the example of Lillie Square, a new development of luxury apartments in Earl's Court which features a dining space for 12 flanked by a wall of glass-fronted, climate-controlled cabinets which residents can lease in order to cellar and display their wine.

"Even if they don't drink it," he says, "it allows people to have a more personal, tangible connections with their wine collection."

Putting it down Premium storage solutions

Halstock Cabinet makers specialising in bespoke cellars, particularly in oak or walnut. Prices start at around £50,000 for a feature wall rising to more than £1m for a wine room. www.halstock.com

Cellar Maison Cellar designers with a strong line in more contemporary wine rooms, back-lit feature walls and glass-sided, walk-in wine "pods". Prices start around £20,000 plus VAT. www.cellarmaison.co.uk

Spiral Cellars Provides a range of ingenious designs for wine collectors short on space. Prices start at around £11,500 for a build-your-own spiral cellar, and rise to £63,000. www.spiralcellars.co.uk

Smith & Taylor Has created bespoke cellars for Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, a luxury hotel with a Michelin-starred restaurant, and Morton's, a London club. Prices are £50,000-£250,000. www.smithandtaylor.com

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