

the upstairs cellar

Love pairing wine and food?
Consider storing your vino above ground in a walk-in cooler.

THE SIGN OVER THE entrance to Tim and Sherry Fellows' wine cellar says it all: In vino veritas.

And the truth, said Tim, is that he and Sherry enjoy their wine so much they don't want to hide it in a basement cellar. When they built their dream home in southwest Grand Rapids six years ago, the Fellows included a 121-square-foot tasting room on the main floor.

"It's smack dab in the middle of the house," said Fellows, who owns Two Chefs Inc. catering company with his wife. "We love to entertain. And when we cook, we always pair the food with the wine. So it just made sense to have our wine cellar next to the kitchen."

The upstairs cellar is a concept that has piqued the interest of oenophiles — especially baby boomers — weary of carting cases to the basement.

"A lot of empty nesters are converting spare bedrooms into cellars," said Laurie Lindrup, vice president of Revel Custom Wine Cellars. The Grand Rapids firm makes high-end rack systems that have been installed in luxury homes, spas and restaurants across the country.

"We're also working with clients who have a large cellar downstairs but want to add a smaller wine room upstairs," Lindrup said.

Todd Needham, cellar designer and owner of Grand Rapids firm Matrix Wine Cellars, has been promoting the idea of main floor cellars for years. He said he



A granite-topped table in Tim and Sherry Fellows' wine cellar allows guests to enjoy wine and tapas surrounded by racks of bottles. The cellar has one door that opens into the kitchen and another that opens into the living room.



Large glass windows make this upstairs wine cellar feel like part of the kitchen, where the homeowners love to cook and entertain. As a personal touch, they added acid etchings of their favorite winery labels to the glass.

can create an efficient, walk-in cooler anywhere in the house.

"If done properly with the right materials, why not have your wine close to food and entertainment, rather than down by the furnace," he said. "It really takes the wow factor out of a wine cellar when you have to walk by the laundry to get to it."

The Fellows' cellar has plenty of "wow," with a 2,000-bottle capacity and entrances from the living room and the kitchen. During parties, Fellows said, he sometimes opens both doors so guests can wander through and peruse the bottles.

The room also includes two granite tables. "One is raised with bar stools so we can have a tapas party. It stays about 58 degrees and that's not too uncomfortable."

Another special feature in the cellar is a Cruvinet nitrogen system to keep opened bottles fresh for up to six weeks.

"Not that we keep anything open that long," Fellows said with a chuckle. "Usually if we open a bottle we plan on drinking it."

Builder Joel Harner of Let Us Inc., revamped one Cascade home to include a 700-bottle glass cellar adjacent to the kitchen — with views of the Thornapple River. The glass walls are visible from the

entrance hall and just steps away from where the owners cook and entertain.

"It's a wine cellar that's meant to be seen, with custom, clear redwood racks and a large island for opening bottles," Harner said.

As a personal touch, the owners added acid etchings of their favorite winery labels to a large glass window.

The key decision when building an upstairs cellar is how to keep the room at the proper temperature. Options range from a wall unit that vents into an adjoining room, to a ducted system with an outside compressor.

The latter "is definitely the Cadillac of systems," said Needham. "You don't have to see it or hear it, but it will maintain the cellar at 55 degrees." The price tag can run as high as \$8,000, he said. "But for someone collecting futures with some fabulous wines, it's the system to get."

Wall units, while much cheaper, must vent hot air into an adjacent room. "That's OK if it's in the basement and the air is venting into a mechanical room," Needham said. "But it's not really a good choice for upstairs."

Another consideration for any cellar

is the rack configuration. Fellows has adjustable racks that allow him to store everything from single bottles to magnums, plus plenty of room for crates.

Most cellars also have a display shelf to showcase special bottles.

But Revel has taken the concept of showcasing wine to a new level.

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"In a traditional cellar, you can't really identify the wine," Lindrup said. "But standing in a Revel cellar, you can identify 70 percent of the bottles without touching one."

Priced from \$25,000 to \$80,000, Revel systems are handcrafted from Honduran mahogany (it doesn't warp or crack) and contain a series of dowel-bottom sliding drawers and a wine wheel carousel.

"It's visual and so cool," Lindrup said. "You can see your prize possessions."

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