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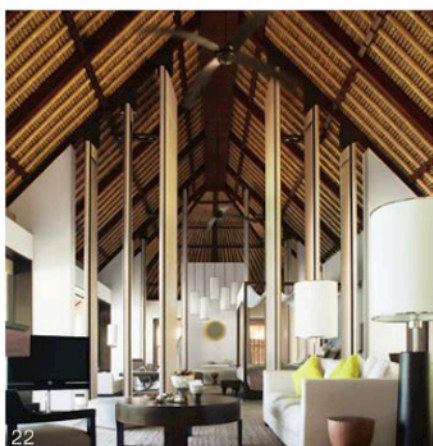


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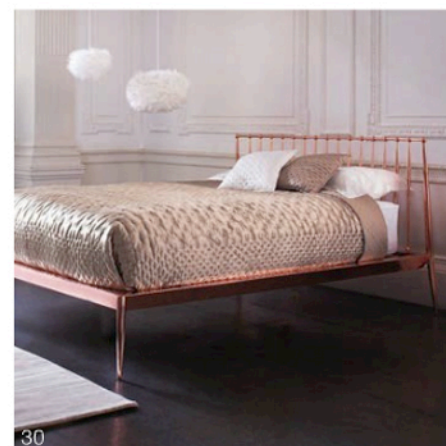
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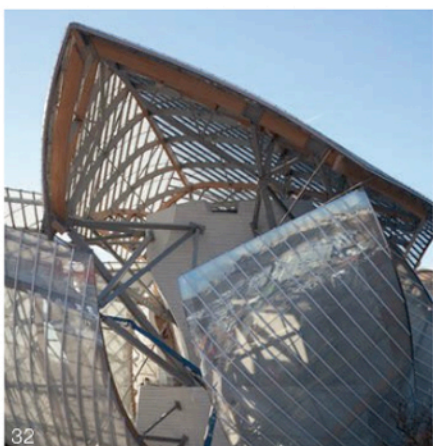
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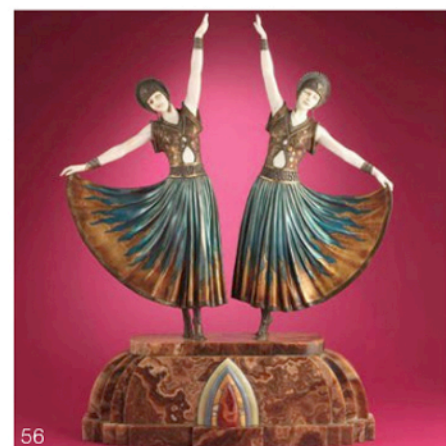
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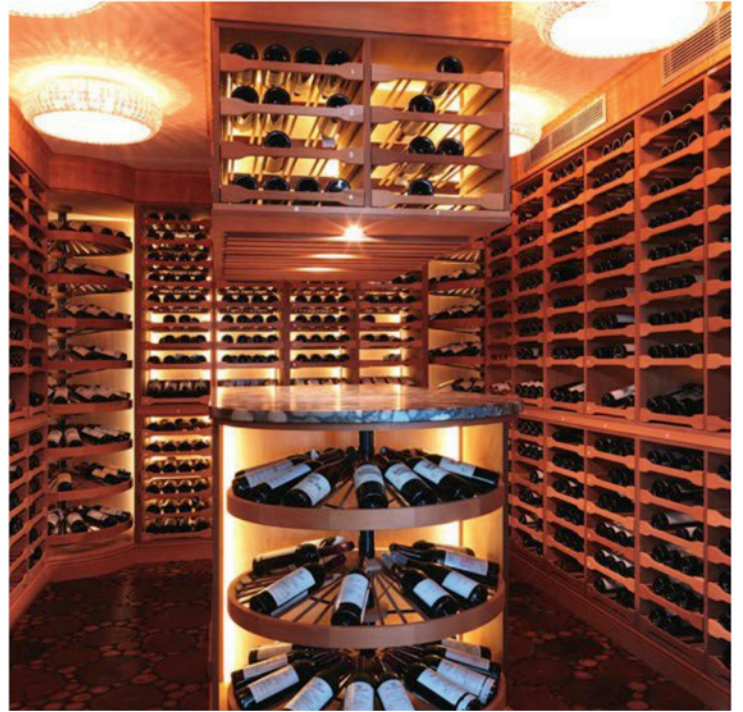
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THE NEW HEIGHTS OF CELLARS

IN NEED OF A STYLISH HOME FOR YOUR GROWING COLLECTION OF WINE? **LARRY OLMSTED**
REVEALS THE COOL, CONTEMPORARY AND CLASSIC CELLARS AT THE HEIGHT OF LUXURY



For centuries wine storage has been simple, for both collectors and winemakers alike: stick the bottles in a basement. Until very recently, the only major advances since the Industrial Revolution were manufactured racking and automated cooling systems, which allowed people who didn't actually live in medieval castles or a chateaux with deep cellars kept cool by thick stone walls, to approximate those conditions in modern homes.

However, in the past couple of years, the wine cellar landscape has changed dramatically in almost every respect: technologically, in style and design, location and even in its purpose. The basement was both practical (heat rises) and metaphorical—where people store things they don't want to see. Today's collectors not only want to see their bottles, they want them to be the centre of attention.

The contemporary wine cellar is increasingly a showpiece, the new 'open kitchen'; a spot for entertaining, complete with table and sink. Several new trends tie together as the cellar, now on public display, needs to be more stylish and more functional.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

"It's been the same for hundreds of years: wrought iron gates, stone floors, redwood racking, all very traditional and underground," says Matthew Goldfarb, principal of The Cellar Manager, a wine collection consultancy in Los Angeles that manages some of the most expensive personal wine collections in the United States. His focus is on helping clients assemble collections, but as an adjunct is often called in to help them design storage. "Today the trend is building wine rooms next to the kitchen that are increasingly accessible for entertaining. They are also much more contemporary, using a lot of steel, glass, plastic and poured concrete. Right now I'm doing one that's freestanding glass on the main floor." In some cases homeowners are installing dual cellars, a larger one off-site, possibly in the basement, for long-term storage, and a smaller public show cellar for frequent use.

Cellars have come out of the cellar and in some cases into the living room, and because they are more visible, they are emphasising glass and benefitting from recent technological advances that has made them better suited for wine storage, including much better insulation and ultra-violet light protection. "Wine is the new aquarium, glassed in and on public display, except aquariums were a fad and I don't think this is," says James Cash, who owns Michigan-based Revel Custom Wine Cellars, the premier US designer, manufacturer and installer of high-end wine storage solutions. Cash has done cellars for everyone from Sir Richard Branson to Hollywood couple Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, as well as tasting rooms at high-end Napa Valley wineries such as Cardinale. "It's no longer something to stick behind a locked door. Today the focus is on the entry, and glass is very popular," says James.

STORAGE SYSTEMS

Traditionally, wine cellars have featured cubby-hole style racking where you can't see anything but the top of the cork, with slots suited only to standard 750ml sizes, along with bigger cubbies for wooden wine cases. Suddenly the emphasis is on access, flexibility and visibility; being able to see the labels, store all sorts of odd shapes and sizes, and get at bottles easily without moving others out of the way. As Goldfarb puts it: "People are much more interested in knowing exactly where everything is and being able to see all the bottles.

"Collectors in the past would have installed diamond or square bins, usually for 12, 24 or more Bordelaise or Burgundy-shaped bottles," says Marc Breitenmoser, owner of Switzerland's nearly 40 year old ARCAve,

perhaps the world's best known designer, manufacturer and installer of high-end custom wine storage, which claims to have invented the sliding cellar drawer. Today he sees a 'steep increase' in special 'collection racks' to showcase vertical (multiple-vintages of the same wine) and horizontal (multiple labels from the same producer) collections. "We also see a huge trend in modular shelves that contain drawers that can hold from splits (halves) to large format collections. The collector wants each bottle accessible and presentable without having to move about other bottles, while at the same time stacking the maximum number in the available space."

Much of Revel's business is also driven by visible and accessible racking. A specialty is its proprietary lazy-Susan style rotating tray. "By far our most popular element that attracts a lot of customers is our wine wheel, especially in corners," says Cash, who also uses a lot of slide-out drawers for visibility. His newest creation is a series of rotating towers made from a single monolithic vertical slab of wood or steel, from which steel dowels protrude, so almost all you see is the bottles, every one easily accessed, and for today's all-glass cellars, visible from every angle.

MINIMALIST MATERIALS

Today's cellars are taking a lot of different directions, but one thing they have in common is a near absence of traditional redwood. Glass is extremely popular for exteriors, either the front wall or all walls. Inside, Revel is getting "a lot of calls for steel, polished aluminium and modern materials, and increasingly the demand is for modernist or minimalist." When it is wood, it's likely something exotic such as South American mahogany. Many customers are also installing tasting tables and sinks, using metal, synthetics and poured concrete. ARCAve, which does more complete cellar construction including walls, is seeing a surprising trend: "The use of natural lava, either magma or solidified volcanic ash, has exploded. It has become the cellar-building material of choice," says Breitenmoser. "Only lava can absorb 30 per cent of its own weight in water. It's perfect to regulate the humidity in cellars, built using massive lava blocks with lava shelves, a bit like the cellars in the Loire Valley and Champagne. Those are stone from sea sediment and due to the chalk content are ideal to regulate humidity. The added advantage of lava is the colour—black. Dark cellars don't reflect light as much and are perfect for long-term storage of age-worthy wines." To make lava shelves work with the newfound interest in storing different-sized bottles together, ARCAve's latest innovation is an integrated layer of sand, which allows any size bottles to be placed flat without rolling and without dividers, and also protects against seismic vibration.

All of these current design trends can be seen in a custom 2,500-bottle cellar Revel recently installed for Londoner Christian Nellesmann in his Sunningdale, England, home. "He wanted the room glassed in, with slide-out shelves so every bottle could be seen at a glance without ever having to move or look behind one. The entire front wall is glass, with the frameless glass door set into it so you can see everything from outside," says Cash. There are also slide-out shelves for full wooden cases, steel-dowelled racks for oversized formats, towers of rotating wine wheels in the corners, and two more levels of these under a centre round table. The cellar itself is a centrepiece of a lifestyle floor that includes an adjacent gym, sauna and indoor pool.

Friedrich Gruber, of Austrian-based Wine Cellar Gruber, builds wine cellars and tasting rooms around the globe, from New York to Singapore, for both private and commercial clients. "The majority of our projects are for residential clients who want to store their personal treasures," he says.

Wine Cellar Gruber is unique in that they build cellars using historic materials, such as ancient bricks from the Austro-Hungarian



Previous page: Revel Custom Wines' various traditional and contemporary wine cellar designs. Above: A Friedrich Gruber Wine Cellar, created with coral stone.

monarchy or limestone from Bordeaux. However, over the years they have evolved to incorporate new materials, Friedrich explains: "We have been experimenting with different materials, the combination of bricks, limestone or coral stone with wrought iron products. But, for me, what's vital is providing a space to store and enjoy wine. Many people have wonderful collections but do not have a dedicated room for these treasures. A wine cellar is not only functional, but it carries the owner's deep-rooted passion. It is a matter of appreciation and affinity for the wine. Many connoisseurs put as much value on the atmosphere of where they drink, as they do with the collections themselves."

TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION

Climate control systems have gotten more efficient and cellar-specific. LED lighting systems like those from French manufacturer Neolux have improved, but the big technological change is informational. While some collectors use computer spreadsheets, most have moved to software management systems such as industry leader CellarTracker, which is currently managing nearly 50 million bottles worldwide. At the most basic level, it keeps track of inventory, but also integrates bottles in a collection with online reviews and tasting notes for more than 1.7 million different labels. The next step is a barcode system, where labels are printed when bottles are added to a collection and entered by scanning, then scanned again when opened. This way the inventory is automatically and accurately updated and when a bottle is chosen, reviews and tasting notes are automatically displayed—some owners are installing flat touch-screen displays in cellars for this purpose. Without the barcodes, "these systems are only as good as the owner—you have to be really diligent about updating them," says Goldfarb. "There's a big shift towards technological accessories and owners accessing their collections or even monitoring cellar temperature through their smartphones." Revel's Cash says the very newest toys are image recognition systems that allow owners to snap a photo of the label with their smartphone, adding or removing it to inventory without barcodes, while simultaneously pulling up info from the winemaker and third-party reviews. "That's still cutting edge, about three years from mainstream," he predicts.

"WINE IS THE NEW AQUARIUM, GLASSED IN AND ON PUBLIC DISPLAY, EXCEPT AQUARIUMS WERE A FAD AND I DON'T THINK THIS IS. IT'S NO LONGER SOMETHING TO STICK BEHIND A LOCKED DOOR. TODAY THE FOCUS IS ON THE ENTRY, AND GLASS IS VERY POPULAR."

Goldfarb allows that for small residential applications, less than 200 bottles in or near the kitchen, a pre-manufactured, turnkey wine fridge could do the trick, and Breitenmoser says even some serious collectors use one of these, often built into kitchen cabinetry, exclusively for champagne. But for larger volumes (the average new cellar holds 800 or more bottles) and higher-end homes, cellars are almost exclusively custom designed and built to order, even when using premade storage components. This is especially the case with display cellars in main living areas—a homeowner cannot simply order a glassed-in cube for his dining room from a catalogue. Custom is also the only real choice for 'cellars' in luxury urban apartments, where basements, garages or extensions are not an option (Cash recently installed a large cellar in a multi-million dollar apartment on the 42nd floor of Chicago condo tower). Until recently a Revel was 100 per cent made and installed to order, but they are releasing their rotating vertical wine towers as ready to order turnkey units, though these are aimed mainly at contractors, not home users. Similarly, ARCAve offers 18 different pre-made component racking systems that can be ordered online, but these are usually bought by builders. ARCAve's entry-level custom residential design uses a prefabricated vault they manufacture offsite out of clay and then install, and with basic shelving a 100-square foot temperature-controlled cellar for 1,500 bottles costs about US \$50,000. Revel's custom cellars average \$40-\$50 per bottle including racking, cooling unit, counters and lighting, so a similar sized 1,500 bottle collection would cost \$60,000 to \$75,000. **F**