

THE MICHIGAN PALETTE

GREAT LAKES BY

DESIGN

Shelf life

Revel Custom Wine Cellars and Benchmark Wood Studio are changing the conversation on how to display wine with innovative design.

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REVEL CUSTOM WINE CELLARS



The pursuit of an exceptional wine is often about the experience and is at times, accompanied by the thrill of discovery when a perfect blend of flavors whets the palate of even the most discerning of connoisseurs.

It seems natural then for those who have a love of the vine-growing variety to also have an equal appreciation for a well-crafted wine cellar with both the beautiful aesthetics and the functionality often sought after in presenting a personal wine collection.

“A wine collection is something that is of great personal value to the collector. To be able to showcase it is how you can enhance your appreciation for it,” said Jim Cash, founder of the East Lansing-based Revel Custom Wine Cellars.

Standing in the 300 square-foot custom wine cellar designed for Bob Pocica, homeowner and Revel team member, it only takes one surveying glance at the nearly 3,200 bottles to recognize the Pocicas’ affinity for blended red wine originating from the Napa Valley in California.

“Wine is identified visually by its labels, so being able to see the label is very important to organizing it, to finding things, to sharing it, and that was really a fundamental principle that Revel was founded on. We wanted to reinvent the whole wine storage concept,” said Cash.

“You can imagine if you walk into a traditional cellar and had the same size room, the same number of bottles, but all you could see was the cork ends of every one of them, how diminished the experience would be if you were trying to talk about your collection and show it to people. Here, you get it visually,” added Cash.

Located at the foot of the basement stairs of the home, the Revel Custom Wine cellar is transitional in design: incorporating contemporary elements of stainless steel, concrete, and glass. Lined with concrete walls on either end of the cellar and transparent glass walls with a double-door entry and exit, the cellar was intentionally designed to create a focal point directing the eye beyond the bottle display to the modern-inspired tasting room overlooking the shores of Lake Charlevoix.

The more contemporary style of the cellar also aligns with the aesthetics of the overall home, which was designed by Jill Ann Rowley of Glennwood Custom Builders and inspired by living in San Francisco, Manhattan, and a personal taste for the clean and elegant lines of modern design.

“We didn’t want a traditional A-pitched roof or northern Michigan home; this is a little more edgy,” said Pocica. “We were trying to bring in things we liked, so I needed a cellar that was a little nontraditional.”

The integration of traditional and modern is apparent from aesthetic choices, such as the embedded 150-year-old reclaimed Michigan barn wood crisscrossing the polished cement floor, the complementary overhead racking with uplighting, and the incorporation of more traditional Revel-design wine racking and one of its new product lines known as Revel-ution Towers.

The towers, which line the front and back glass walls of the cellar were designed to embrace modern style and materials, while continuing to adhere to principles of access, bottle visibility, and functionality. Featuring an engineered walnut wood panel with a steel plate running through its core, stainless steel dowels on the four sides of the square center, the tower holds four bottles in each row and can rotate up to 360 degrees.





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“We want you to be able to see your collection. If you were to put this in a normal cellar, you could see the front, but then how would you get to the bottles in the back? That is why we wanted it to rotate. It is free-standing, so you can be outside of the glass wall and look right through it...you can promote a nice view through there,” said Cash in reference to Pocica’s wine cellar. “We also wanted something that was a little more contemporary.”

Pocica added each section of the Revel-ution Towers are visible when descending the stairs from the main floor of the home and the end result is much more attractive and functional than using the traditional cabinetry-style wine racking.

“I wanted that visual, because if we are going to put glass as kind of the entrance and exit out here, how do you display your wine?” said Pocica. “It gives a more visual impact.”

The cellar also features a number of ad-

ditional Revel wine racking and storage systems, including the original sliding drawers with open-bottom doweled construction with low voltage LED light stripping, case storage drawers, and four patented Revel Wine Wheels. The rotating wine racks are set in each corner of the cellar to take advantage of the space and have functionality similar to its distant cousin: the Lazy Susan.

Free-standing islands with patina stainless steel countertops are also located on either side of the entry and exit points to allow for additional storage, and act as a social gathering point.

“I wanted something that if I am spilling a little bit of wine as I am opening it or pouring it, I wanted something that wouldn’t absorb it, I wanted something to kind of stay with the polished cement and wood,” said Pocica in reference to the patina stainless steel countertops. “We already have metal in here, so it was to complement the wood again.”

The unique wooden dowel bottoms, or

stainless steel for the towers, address a common frustration wine collectors are faced with in traditional wine racks: ability to see the wine without actually touching it.

“We don’t want you to have to go hunting and pull out a bunch of bottles and that was the first part of it. Then we tried to make it universal to accommodate everything else that the regular wine racks could,” said Cash, referencing large format bottles and wine cases.

“For the drawers above your head, the dowels allow you to point the labels downward, so [Pocica] can see every bottle in his collection very quickly and very easily without ever handling wine. That is a big plus for managing your collection,” added Cash.

The wine racking was even customized to Pocica’s specific height so the top bottles are still within arm reach. It is a feature that also adds ease of accessibility into the equation.

“I can get to any one of my bottles, I can see the vintage, and I can identify the wine.

It is not only aesthetically beautiful, but also so functional which is at the core of the frustration for most collectors,” said Pocica.

The reinvention of cellar storage and overall display is also about quality, according to Cash. While the design of the shelving units and towers are partly about wine, the founder of Revel indicated it is also about the materials and skill of the finished carpentry and crown molding used in the custom wine cellars.

“It’s outstanding. It is artisan craftsmanship, which Benchmark and Mike Schaap are known for. This is just precision, fine cabinetry,” said Cash. “We only use furniture-grade hardwoods in our cabinetry and it is all designed to function in a very specific 55 degrees, 70 percent humidity environment. That is why we have to use special woods.”

The level of craftsmanship is attributed to the team at the Holland-based Benchmark Wood Studio, which Revel has contracted to manufacture and be involved in the design process of the custom wine cellars. Derek Schaap, designer at Benchmark, said the studio has had a working relationship with Revel for years.

“Our dynamic partnership with Revel Custom Wine Cellars enables us to deliver an incredible system to exacting specifications, each and every time,” said Schaap.

Benchmark Wood Studio’s experienced craftsmen utilize time-tested woodworking techniques and advanced technology, such as computer-aided design while collaborating with Revel throughout the design and manufacturing process. The custom cellar is then carefully manufactured in Holland, Michigan before being shipped to any destination throughout the world.

“Michigan has a long history of furniture-making and although much of that has shifted elsewhere, we still have a presence,” said Schaap. “It is neat to have this in demand in our area and relevant to today’s wine buyers.”

In terms of the woodworking itself, Schaap noted it is important to use a hardwood that is very durable, weather resistant, and will not influence the quality of the wine.

“With our particular product, we leave everything unfinished as the potential for ruining wine is heightened when lacquer or any other chemical finishes are applied to the woods,” said Schaap.

While there are no chemicals, paints, varnishes, or urethanes used in the cabinetry, there are also other aspects of the cellar’s environment that are taken into careful consideration, such as glass walls providing ultraviolet light ray protection and filtering out

any rays that may be damaging to the wine.

Other features of the Charlevoix-based wine cellar comprise: biometric access, a cooling and humidity unit located in an adjacent room that uses duct work and vents to regulate the environment, and digital notifications to alerting whether the temperature falls outside of a pre-determined range.

As Pocica and Cash settled into the slate-colored upholstered chairs in the tasting room, a glass of Blankiet in hand, they

traded stories about vineyard owners and vintners, replanting and pruning vines, and the almost spiritual experience when discovering a finely made wine.

With an impressive wine collection on display on one side, and an equally breathtaking view of the natural environment of northern Michigan on the other, it was apparent that Revel had attained what it set out to achieve: a purpose-built space attuned to a discerning wine collector.

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