

# WINE CELLAR SHOWSTOPPERS

MODERN WINE STORAGE EMERGES FROM THE BASEMENT INTO MAIN-FLOOR, STATE-OF-THE-ART CENTERPIECES.

BY MICHAEL PATRICK SHIELS

**S**ince its invention in the 17th century, the glass wine bottle has been identified as the ideal vessel for preserving the luscious liquid gleaned from fermented grapes. While it remains the antique yet state-of-the-art storage option, the cellars that sophisticated collectors build to contain those treasured bottles are undergoing radical changes for the first time in centuries.

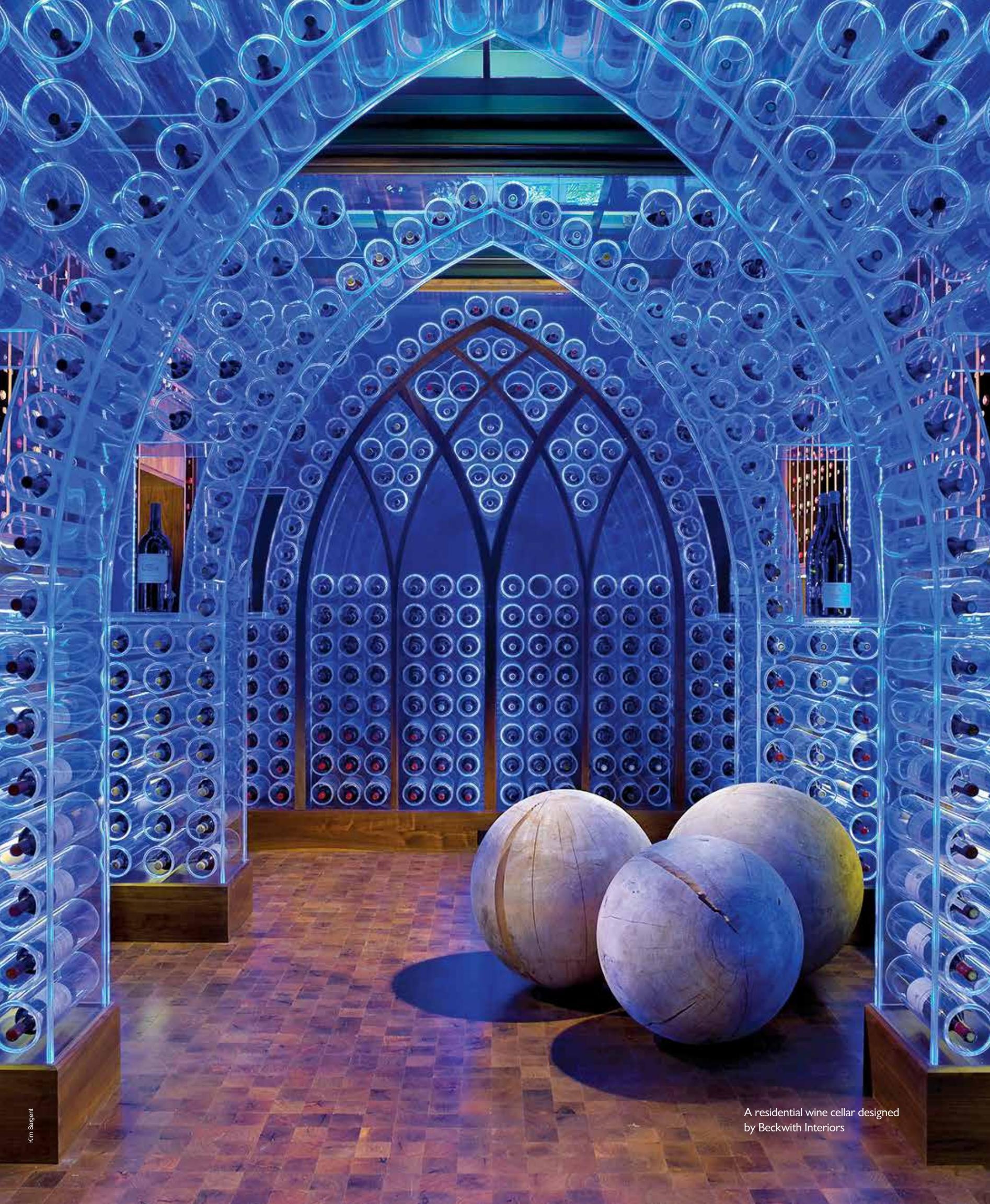
Wine cellar design has progressed from underground caverns and makeshift cubbies in obscure, dark basements to prominent, main-floor showstoppers filled with light and featuring high-tech elements. It's not just billionaires, celebrities and wineries who are installing these world-class cellars. Well-heeled wine enthusiasts thirsty for knowledge and keen to travel to visit vineyards from Bordeaux to Colchagua Valley are amassing collections not for investment, but for their personal use and enjoyment. Oenophiles want to fully integrate their passion for wine into their decor.

Wayne Visbeen, a world-renowned architect who designs more than 50 custom luxury homes each year and has designed projects including resorts in 20 different countries, says: "Our projects range in budget, and we find that most homeowners want some display of wine in their homes—from a 20-bottle display to a full tasting room. Today, wine cellars are meant to be seen and shared with others, and there is a definite aesthetic element as well."

## MODERN SPACES

For centuries, cellars themselves were typically located away from the main living areas, often in the back corner of a basement. Modern ones, however, are frequently located adjacent to central entertainment spaces. In some cases, they might even be the center of attention.

The tasting experience formerly occurred while shivering inside a cold, damp cellar. Today it most often takes place from the outside looking in, with separate but incorporated tasting areas next to the wine room with the bottles visible through glass or ornate doors. Now, kitchens, family rooms, dining rooms and living spaces are



A residential wine cellar designed by Beckwith Interiors

## TIPS FOR STORAGE SUCCESS

• Temperature is the most important factor; about 55 degrees Fahrenheit is the standard. It is also very important that the temperature remain constant, as fluctuation can cause the cork to move, thus compromising the seal.

• Cooling units specifically designed for maintaining the ideal wine cellar environment will balance both temperature and humidity in the cellar.

• Moderate humidity is important to keep the corks in good, resilient condition, thereby preventing them from shrinking. A relative humidity of 50–80 percent is the acceptable range, but about 70 percent is recommended.

• Light will prematurely age a bottle of wine, so glass-enclosed cellars should use double-paned glass with UV protective coating.

• Excellent insulation along with a moisture barrier is critical. Special wall materials are needed instead of standard drywall, such as green or purple board to ward off mold and mildew.

• For wood wine cellars, hardwoods such as mahogany, walnut, cherry, maple and purpleheart are good options.

• Plan for a little more storage than you think you'll need, if possible. Figure 12–15 bottles of capacity for every square foot of floor space, assuming 8-foot ceilings.



Left: Many modern wine cellars are located in the main living and dining areas. Bottom: Revel Custom Wine Cellars' Designer Series towers feature rotating plates that make bottle identification and retrieval completely effortless.

Above: This ultrachic Key Biscayne, Florida, wine cellar incorporates steel, glass and chrome in the heart of the kitchen. Right: Ensconced in glass, this Lake Charlevoix, Michigan, wine cellar beautifully merges walnut cabinetry with the transitional flair afforded by Revel-ution Towers that are studded with aluminum dowels, 16 tiers high on each side of the panel.

able to reveal collections. In fact, some of today's collectors and connoisseurs hold their wine collections in the same esteem as they would the latest acquisition of a work acquired at Art Basel. They are eager to share their vintages, even if only visually, with friends and family via magnificent, open cellars.

Traditionally, glass and light were taboo in the confines of a wine cellar. Now, thanks to double-insulated, ultraviolet light-filtering glass and low-voltage LED lighting—which uses little energy and generates almost no heat—light and glass are both central design themes. Materials such as steel, stone and acrylic are trending in homes and restaurants, and even light-filled kitchens are becoming the latest setting for some very chic, ultra-modern wine displays. These state-of-the-art technologies maintain the temperate environment of a wine cellar.

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Left: Barry Grossman; right: Mike Galion

making access and identification (turning the bottles and tugging them out from under each other) frustrating, time-consuming and often damaging to the labels. But the old adage, “form follows function,” proves true again in this case.

Serious collectors are also embracing cutting-edge wine preservation and home automation technologies. Cellar management, once a laborious, manual process, today involves a simple smartphone snapshot of the label to identify the wine and confirm whether it's in its prime age for consumption, thanks to highly rated apps such as CellarTracker and VinoCellar.

Innovative new designs address the unique geometry of a wine bottle. Instead of being hidden in deep cubicles of wine racks, wine bottles can now be prominently

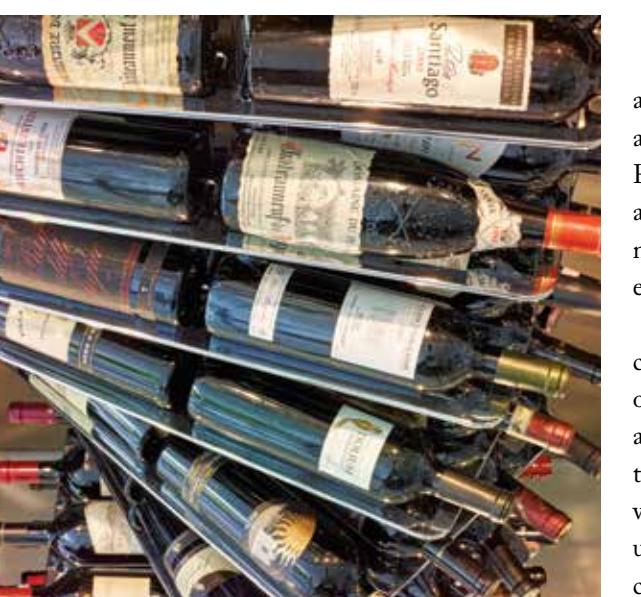
proper cellar humidity and temperature controls are essential, and there are now systems such as Elertus and La Crosse Technology that continuously monitor minute fluctuations and instantly notify the collector of climate changes. With the provenance of a wine being equally important as the producer and vintage, the conditions under which a wine is stored can be validated

through online logs that provide historical data. Verifiable data can significantly raise the attainable price at auction or sale.

Collectively, all the above advances not only improve the aesthetic value of today's wine cellars, they also greatly enhance the collecting experience itself.

### FUTURISTIC FEATURES

Storage features are improving as well. As recently as 10 years ago, most wine cellar designs still incorporated clumsy, restrictive square cubicles to store bottles,



displayed to provide swift visual identification.

One of the industry's recognized change agents in reimagining the modern wine cellar and creating proprietary designs to meet the latest trends is Jim Cash, founder of Revel Custom Wine Cellars. Cash developed the dowel-bottomed sliding pullout drawer, which embodied his belief that the wine and its label should be the star of the show—not the racks that hold it. The patented geometry at the heart of this system enables one tray to store multiple size bottles, side by side, with label visibility of even overhead bottles when viewed from below. Revel also shook up the wine cellar world by manufacturing the patented Wine Wheel—space-saving and stylish rotating wheel “towers” that make efficient and beautiful use of wasted corner space.

Taking into account the trend toward modern themes and materials, Revel merged steel and wood into storage-dense, user-friendly, show-stopping designs: Its Revel-ution Towers bridge the gap between Old World and contemporary motifs. The towers utilize 21st century materials such as chrome-plated steel, clear acrylic and eco-friendly bamboo to cradle and display the bottles.

Cash, who spent a career in award-winning commercial construction before he founded Revel Cellars, did so out of personal frustration. “When it came time to create a home for the 700 bottles amassed in my basement, I thought I would easily find storage methods online that would remove the anguish I was experiencing when using the flimsy, inferior wood rack with individual cubby holes,” he says. “To my surprise, nothing had been invented that captured the vision I had for enjoying my collection. Nothing showcased the wine.”

Colorado-based VintageView also shifted from the cork-forward method of wine storage, inventing designs that embrace label-forward viewing with metal racks offered in a range of styles and configurations, from free-standing displays to custom-built cellars for homes and the hospitality industry. Its Vino Series line presents a minimalist approach to bottle storage. The Vino Pins and Vino Rails single-bottle racks allow you to break from linear wine racking to invent artistic expressions that hold one bottle or thousands. They can attach directly to drywall, concrete and wood surfaces with no backer board needed for installation.

Across the pond, United Kingdom cellar designer Spiral Cellars offers bespoke underground cellars capable



A modern wine cellar design from Beckwith Interiors

of holding up to 1,900 bottles of wine. These can be installed under any ground-floor room, whether it be a kitchen, utility room or living room and do not require an existing cellar or basement. See-through in-floor glass doors provide a bird's-eye view to the cellar below. The concrete shell enables the absorption of the natural ground temperature just like a traditional cellar, and the natural insulation of the earth helps keep vibrations to a minimum.

#### DARING DESIGNS

While architects and interior designers lead the way for the structural and architectural changes in home design, they rely on the skill and experience of a dedicated wine cellar designer when their clients want to include one in their plans.

Wine cellars have become so revered by some ardent collectors that instead of designing the house first and then drafting the details of the wine cellar later, they're doing the reverse. Piyush Patel is one example. Patel is the founder of Conclusion Wines in Napa Valley (previously known as Canyon Lakes Winery). The cellar is the focal point of his new home, and he began working on the design of the 1,700-bottle cellar well in advance of a

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shovel going into the ground.

“The process of making wine is almost equal parts art, science and tradition,” says Patel, who also founded Digital-Tutors, a visual effects and digital animation online training library, which he later sold to Pluralsight. “We wanted to design a cellar that not only functioned as the state-of-the-art in terms of bottle storage, security and environmental conditioning but also paid tribute to the history and tradition of cellaring wine. Building a brand-new home from scratch, we didn’t want our cellar to look to the past in terms of design. So, we were ecstatic when we discovered Revel’s art and design approach to cellars along with their ability to store our wine without damaging the labels.”

For Erik Ackerman, vice president of the Spire Collection, the luxury portfolio from Jackson Family Wines, having a superior cellar is a business decision.

“Today’s collector is much more discerning,” he says. “Gone are the days of just having a high score to help sell your wine. Great scores will always help, but our collectors are much savvier about vineyard sourcing, winemakers and consistency in quality. The experience they have when they visit is an important opportunity to engage them. The cellar we built for our Cardinale library collection and the new Lokoya tasting room was designed to accomplish that. The feedback we have gotten to date has been phenomenal.”

The digital age has made fine wine collecting infinitely more accessible. Today’s collectors are younger and span the globe, with Asia and South America emerging as hotbeds of the industry. In addition, wine as a commodity—not just as a consumable collectible—has become an investment vehicle that is likely to trend upward, creating more demand for proper wine cellar spaces. •