



HOW TO

Incorporate the Perfect Wine Cellar

Making wine is an ancient art, but Cellar Masters is bringing storage solutions into the modern era.

BY SARAH TRELEAVEN

Cellar Masters builds custom wine cellars, rooms, and walls and ensures you have adequate climate control.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF CELLARMASTERS

Scott Berry doesn't exactly have wine in his blood, but he may as well. His formative years are full of memories of his aunt and uncle's Mendocino County vineyard—the passion, hard work, and shared fruits of their labor. And so five years ago, at age 50 and looking for a change from his work in IT, Berry turned back to the wine world and decided to buy **Cellar Masters**. “I have two passions—golf and wine,” he says. “And if you've ever seen me golf, you know I made the right choice.”

Cellar Masters, founded in 1990 in Newbury Park, now has 24 full-time employees and does business all across California. The company designs, builds, and installs beautiful custom wine cellars, rooms, and walls. They even have their own cooling department to handle climate control—unusual in a world where most businesses do either cooling or racking. “We can do the whole thing turnkey, whatever the project needs,” Berry says. >

The most dense and efficient way to store bottles is cork view, according to the experts at Cellar Masters.



An increasing number of Cellar Masters clients are looking to include elements like stainless steel, aluminum, or acrylic in custom-made hybrid racks.

1

Wine Stored Right, By Design

When it comes to designing a system to store wine, Berry encourages his clients to consider three things to optimize quality. First, temperature; wine does not like fluctuations. Second, light; wine should not sit in direct sunlight because the UV rays break down the wine in the bottle. And third, vibration; wines shouldn't be jostled, but instead allowed to settle so tannin molecules can polymerize and combine with other molecules—that magical process that softens a properly aged wine's velvety feel on the palate.

Another key element to establish upfront is the capacity goal—just how many bottles do you want to store? “Some people already have a fairly elaborate collection and they're looking to store a couple thousand bottles,” Berry says. “That gives me an idea of what kind of space we need to be looking at and what kind of racking we might need.”

A wine cellar used to conjure up images of a dark, musty basement. But over the last two decades, **wine storage has become a key feature of many home designs.** Berry says some of his clients—especially those not looking to store high-volume collections—are moving to highly aesthetic wine rooms, wine walls, or even wine closets on the main floor of houses—places where wine can be central to daily life.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF CELLAR MASTERS

2

Endless Fit and Finish Options

Cellar Masters offers many build and finish options that apply to racking. The woods they typically work with at their onsite woodshop include walnut, alder, African Mahogany, and white oak, with walnut at the top end of the pricing spectrum and alder closer to the bottom.

Berry finds more and more clients are interested in other elements, too, like stainless steel, aluminum, or acrylic, and his company now offers hybrid racks. More glass is also being used in contemporary systems. All racking systems support standard 750-milliliter Burgundy-style bottles, and modifications can be made to support magnums and other non-standard bottles. Virtually every system installed by Cellar Masters is now illuminated by LEDs, partly because of their low-voltage nature and partly because they don't generate heat to compete with the cooling system.

Clients also have three options for storing individual bottles. With cork view, the bottle sits perpendicular to the wall with the cork facing away from the wall. With label view, the bottle sits parallel to the wall with the label facing out. And with presentation view, the bottle sits perpendicular but at a bit of an angle—with the cork facing the wall. The most dense and efficient way to store bottles—ideal for those with big collections—is cork view.

3

Maintenance Made Easy

Once the cellar has been installed, the only mechanical piece to maintain is the cooling unit. Cellar Masters offers maintenance contracts that allow for once or twice a year visits, essentially offering a checkup for the health of the system. “If the condenser gets clogged with debris, it's not going to have an efficient heat exchange, which will shorten the lifespan of that unit,” Berry says. His business also partners with other industry experts—such as cellar curators—who can help clients manage their collection and ensure they're drinking each wine at its peak.

And that wine, Berry says, is ideally shared with friends. **Cellar Masters helps clients create not just storage but social spaces where people can come together** for an “all-encompassing sensory experience.” In his 40 years as first an observer and now a key player in the California wine industry, one of the biggest changes he's seen is the increasing accessibility and sociability of wine culture. “When you drink wine, it's not just the liquid in the bottle,” he says. “It's something you share, and your experience of the wine is driven by all of the factors surrounding you—including the people you're with.”