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Somerset Style

NOVEMBER 2004

The Wine Cellar

Jay Rosen's love of wine is more than a passion

Define by design

Crystal Celebrations

The Return of the Wine Cellar

By Tim Schoch

Whether it is a renewed interest in wine because of the health benefits, or whether today's wines have garnered a whole new audience, the wine cellar is back as a featured part of the American home and lifestyle.



THE PASSION

Jay Rosen, wine collector and president of Washington Valley Cellars in Martinsville, will tell you that a true love of wine is more than a passion...it is a lifestyle. And he is living proof.

"My passion for wine was sparked decades ago and I quickly progressed from a wine enthusiast to an ardent collector," he says. "As my collection grew, so did the realization that a wine cellar is not a luxury, it is indeed a necessity. So, I set out to build my own cellar and have been building them for others ever since."

Mr. Rosen, 49, founded Washington Valley Cellars as a division of his own contracting firm, Washington Valley Construction Company, Inc. Since 1992, he has built more than 100 custom wine cellars for oenophiles in the tri-state area. As his business grew, so did his wine collection.

"A love of collecting wine can easily become an obsession," he says. "For example, I once met a man so wealthy he didn't have to work. He admitted to me that all he thought about all day long was what wine to choose with dinner that night."

In his 30s, Mr. Rosen's passion for wine and thirst for knowledge propelled him to Europe and California to visit wineries and enhance his understanding about the nuances of fine wine. He describes himself as a self-taught expert and connoisseur, often sharing as much information about how to stock a client's wine cellar as to how to properly build one.

THE CELLARS

A handsome, custom wine cellar and tasting area can transform a room and add value to your home. Most wine cellars you will find in the basement, but Jay Rosen created a unique, creative solution for himself when his 3,500-bottle collection out-grew his basement. Instead of expanding his cellar out, he went up.

"My new wine cellar is off my dining room in a kind of loft that I created from the second story of the garage," he says. Now, when the Rosens entertain for dinner, the wealth of his collection of wines, champagne, port and sauternes becomes part of the ambience, as well as the conversation.

Contracting Jay Rosen to install a wine cellar is a bit like hiring a designer to tailor a new suit. When Mr. Rosen first meets with a client, he accumulates all the details of the client's collecting preferences and how the collection will grow. The goal is to make absolutely certain that every bottle of wine, present and future, no matter what shape or size, finds a comfortable home in the cellar-to-be. Along with taking all the proper measurements, he will discover the client's tastes in wood, flooring, décor and ambience. Then, he will submit his designs, get the client's approval, and the work can begin. Although there may be only a total of 12-15 days working on-site, the building of the wine cellar can take 4-6 weeks from inception, due to the care that Mr. Rosen and his craftsmen take in finding appropriate material, then precision-cutting and custom-fitting the cellar piece-by-piece.

"We build from scratch, just like fine furniture craftsman," he says. "We don't use racks or kits. Everything we do is customized, not only in shape and color but also for the number, size and circumference of the bottles." Wine cellars, on average, are generally built to accommodate anywhere from 1,000 to 2,000 bottles.

Along with the collection, the wood and the amenities, Mr. Rosen possesses the expertise to control one more extremely important element: the environment.

"Wine responds to its environment," says Jay Rosen. "Our cellars do far more than hold wine, they pamper it." >



Lighting, humidity and temperature each play a vital role in ensuring the longevity of a collection of wine.

"Most wines that you will buy-about 80 percent-are not meant to age. They are meant to be consumed and will last a maximum of two to four years in a controlled environment, and only one to two years in an uncontrolled environment. Consistent temperature is the most important factor. 56 to 58 degrees is optimal for wine storage. Even wine kept above those temperatures, say at a consistent 63 degrees, will keep far longer than wine stored under temperatures that fluctuate drastically."

These facts are important for all wine lovers to know, especially those who keep a few bottles in the dining room by a window, where the on-off heat of the sun and the cool of the night could fluctuate the wine temperature drastically, quickly shortening the quality of the wine.

From proper framing, vapor barriers, lighting and temperature control, to statement-making cellar doors and aesthetics, the master wine cellar craftsman must attend to every detail and respect the wine lover's wishes while creating a superior showcase for his or her prized collection. No one knows this better than wine lover and cellar artisan Jay Rosen.