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FOR DRINKERS AND COLLECTORS, WINE ROOMS ARE ON THE RISE

BY AMANDA N. WEGNER

To quote the venerable Benjamin Franklin,
***"WINE IS CONSTANT PROOF THAT GOD
LOVES US AND LOVES TO SEE US HAPPY."***

And anyone with a wine room should be constantly happy.

"Full wine rooms are popular in our larger homes," says Scott Lowell, president, Lowell Management Services. "We are including wine rooms in approximately 50 percent of our homes. In our smaller homes, we have started offering reach-in wine closets that, while functional, have also become architectural features with full-glass viewing walls, wonderful architectural backgrounds for the wine and unique flooring. Smaller wine areas have become very popular."



PHOTO COURTESY OF ORREN PICKELL BUILDERS

ABOVE: This wine room designed by Orren Pickell Builders includes an elaborate entrance with stone columns, entry lighting and an arched stained glass window above the door. A dedicated bar area outside the wine room is an inviting place for wine tastings. BELOW: The proper shelving and storage is essential to any wine room and comes in the form of racking systems that can be customized to lay bottles down or stand them upright.

John Engerman, owner of Engerman Contracting, is seeing equal interest in wine rooms in his business: "It's really getting more popular. Wine rooms are one of the biggest trends."

With the nation's average annual wine consumption on the increase since the early 1990s, a wine room can be a great investment for those who enjoy this nectar of the gods. Here, we've talked with four local builders about the ingredients for a well-designed wine room that will ensure your reds and whites are ready at a moment's notice.

WHO ARE YOU? A DRINKER OR A COLLECTOR

Before you even design your first (or next) wine room, ask yourself: "How am I going to use this?"

"You have to design the space to your needs, not someone else's," says Orren Pickell, president and CEO of Orren Pickell Builders. "For instance, if you love to drink wine,

you don't need tons of space to lay bottles down to store and age for 30, 40 years with the intent to sell."

In short, are you a drinker or a collector?

For instance, a wine room for a drinker will likely have less storage and more design elements, such as decorative lighting, space for a small bistro table or a countertop to arrange a tasting. For a collector, there's greater emphasis on tools for temperature and humidity control to maximize your investment.

"Because a wine room for a drinker will be designed differently from a space for investment wines, what kind of wine connoisseur you are is an important first question," says Pickell.

HIT THE BASICS

While a dedicated wine room can come in any shape and size, it has to be properly insulated and cooled using either a chiller, which is like a big refrigeration system, located directly in the room or ducted from a remote location, says Lowell. For someone who is serious about wine, "a chiller dedicated to that room alone is the way to go," says Pickell.

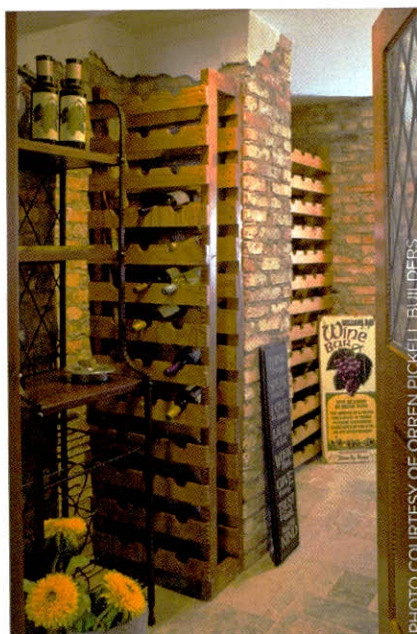


PHOTO COURTESY OF ORREN PICKELL BUILDERS



Thelen Total Construction incorporated a combination of design elements in this wine room, including an arched top door and intricate tile work on the back wall to complement the floor. Two styles of shelving hold different size bottles of wine.

With a chilling unit, you need to vent out the heat it generates, either to the outside of the home or to a large interior space like an unfinished mechanical room. Engerman cautions that to do it right, spend the extra money to vent your wine room to the home's exterior to keep it from breaking down prematurely.

"That's a boring, technical fact, but it's true," says Engerman. "This is a pricier, lengthier process, but it's the superior setup for serious wine rooms."

For drinkers, a wine room can be kept in the 66 to 68 degree range, says Pickell; for collectors, a temperature of 55 is considered perfect. And regardless of the temperature, consistency is key.

"Heat is no friend to wine," says Pickell. "You want to keep the temperature constant. The warmer it gets, the faster it ages."

For many wine room owners, humidity shouldn't be a concern, especially in Wisconsin, where the humidity at certain times of year can be oppressive. But for collectors who intend to store their wine for 10 years or more, humidity is a serious consideration, particularly as corks can shrink and expand, allowing air into the wine over a long period of time.

LIGHT IT UP

The vast majority of wine rooms are in the lower level, in part to minimize UV light from reaching the bottles.

"UV light can be an enemy of wine," says Randy Thelen, owner of Thelen Construction. "UV rays can break down the wine as well; that's why you typically see at least red wines in darker bottles."

With wine rooms, it's best not to incorporate a ton of lighting as over lighting is bad for the wine, says Lowell. And what lighting you do incorporate should be LED lighting to minimize heat gain in the room, says Pickell.

In particular, Engerman likes backlighting the walls of a wine room with LED lighting to illuminate the bottles.

"If we can utilize LED to have a brilliant glow behind the bottles, we strive to get that design element anytime we can," says Engerman.



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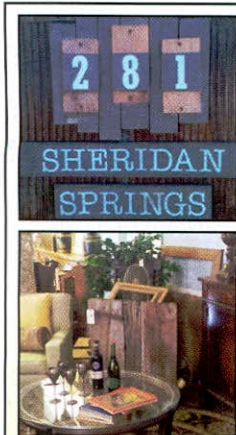
The ability to display your collection and bottles in different ways is important, says Thelen, noting that he likes to incorporate various display options to handle everything from smaller artistic bottles to magnums. "There are a lot of unique bottles out there. If you're investing in this kind of space, invest in good storage and display options, too."

For basic storage and display, Engerman says there are a variety of racking systems that allow customization to give you plenty of storage, from big bin to single bottle storage, laying down to standing up. Redwood is the standard wood type because it is naturally decay resistant, but his company has built wine storage out of other woods as well, including walnut and alder.

When designing your wine room, don't forget storage for other items: maybe a small refrigerator for beer, cabinets for spirits and liqueurs, or a humidor for those cherished cigars.

"One interesting thing is incorporating a humidor for the guys who like wine and enjoy a good cigar," says Engerman. "A humidor can easily be incorporated in a wine room as it requires similar conditions."

Particularly for lower-level wine rooms where natural light is less of a concern, solid plate



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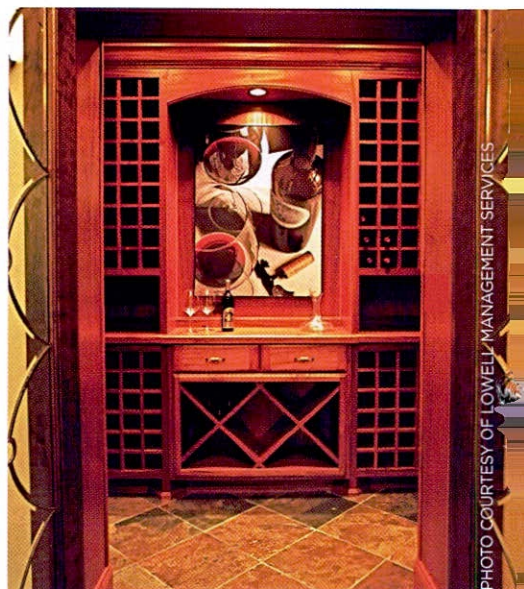
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Scott Lowell, president of Lowell Management Services says his company is including wine rooms in 50 percent of the homes they build. Beautiful architectural backgrounds for the wine like the rich, wood cabinetry adds warmth to the space.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LOWELL MANAGEMENT SERVICES

The focal point of this wine room built by Lowell Management Services is an interesting piece of artwork surrounded by millwork and flanked by stone. The entire wall is accented by subtle lighting.

glass and full glass doors help to maximize the view of the room, says Lowell.

This is not to say that wine rooms should be relegated to the lower level, though it is more cost-effective on the lower level. In fact, Pickell loves first-floor wine rooms.

"I love first-floor wine cellars," says Pickell. "I think they are practical for people who use them all the time or have parties, so you can walk right in and use it for tastings as well."

DO IT FOR YOU ... NOT THE FUTURE

"If you enjoy wine and it's a passion, then it should be something to consider," says Thelen. "But it's not for everyone."

Along that same line, when it comes time to sell, it's important to remember that a wine room could be a benefit ... or a liability.

"In a resale market, there are people who are looking for wine rooms, but not everyone will pay extra. There's a good chance it's not as important to the next buyer as it was for you," says Thelen. "Building a wine room is all about what suits you, not the next owner." 🍷

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