

Keeping cool in all seasons is goal for homeowner adding wine cellar

BY JOHN BYRD

Cellar is tops

Most people don't worry too much about keeping their homes cool in the winter.

However, for an oenophile such as Craig MacAllister, "a slight chill" is one of the primary requirements for housing his prized wine varietals.

Specifically, a wine cellar like the one MacAllister recently installed beneath his Fairfax home is not so much about storage as maintaining an environment where temperatures are consistently between 58-62 degrees. The goal is to always have a truly sublime vintage in stock, appropriately aged, the perfect match for a wine dinner you have been dreaming about for years.

"Temperature control is essential to keeping wines drinkable over the years," MacAllister said. "If wines are not kept properly, they can go bad. So one of the satisfactions to collecting is procuring fine wines before they mature. When wines are cellared properly they age into a perfect expression of their best characteristics. This is when a wine becomes an exceptional complement to specific foods."

Although MacAllister and his wife, Diane, did not really become committed oenophiles until their children had grown up and moved on, the couple's passion developed quickly once they started visiting wineries in southern California, Germany, as well as Virginia.

As their collection grew, MacAllister researched several refrigerated cabinet options before deciding that there is just no substitute for a real wine cellar. Moreover, he envisioned a room spacious enough for the occasional soiree with perhaps 10-15 guests dining on shrimp and cheese, sampling a chardonnay, comparing tasting notes.

As the dream's details coalesced, however, the more practical question was whether the couple's two-level, center-hall colonial could even accommodate it.

The home has a spacious lower level — partly finished — that features an exercise area, a billiards parlor and a handsomely appointed bar. It certainly made sense to have the wine cellar in the midst of all the action.

However, the problem MacAllister foresaw was that the unfinished part of the lower level was scarcely accessible. The water heater, furnace and sump pump — not to mention a tangle of ducts — loudly claimed the targeted 170 square feet of unfinished basement as a virtual utility room. The walls in this portion of the lower level were exposed cinder block. Between the ductwork and the utility equipment, it was hard to find space for a few loose crates, much less 1,400 bottles.

It was at this point that MacAllister learned about Michael Nash Kitchens and Homes of Fairfax, a full-service

design/build remodeler who operates a division exclusively devoted to custom wine cellars.

"I had seen one of their cellars in a home nearby," MacAllister said, "but I was also impressed by this firm's reputation ... and I knew my situation called for real space planning skills."

Tasty table

Shawn Nazemian, one of the Michael Nash's top designers, was MacAllister's chosen project manager.

"The most pressing feasibility issue was assessing how best to reconfigure the major infrastructure systems," Nazemian said. "Since over half of the lower level was already built out, we needed a detailed schematic that would show us how to reposition most of the energy appliances — even working around units that had nowhere else to go. We also needed a practical way to route coolant drain-off — which is essential to a well-maintained cellar."

Once alternative utility locations were identified, Nazemian's next step was waterproofing and insulating the basement's perimeter.

"A thermally efficient membrane is essential to a wine cellar's performance," Nazemian said. "It's important that the compressor, which was designed to keep temperatures and humidity consistent, won't be overtasked."

To keep temperatures regulated, the cellar is equipped with

its own thermostat. Humidity must remain in the 50 to 70 percent range with temperatures between 58-62 degrees.

Even the cellar's custom-designed, frosted-glass door is sealed to keep in the cool air.

To accommodate drainage, Nazemian specified a "split cooling" system that ties in with the existing HVAC.

The existing electrical system, however, was adequate to meet all the new power needs.

Shelling-in the 13-by-12-foot area designated for the cellar required some unusually precise fabrications.

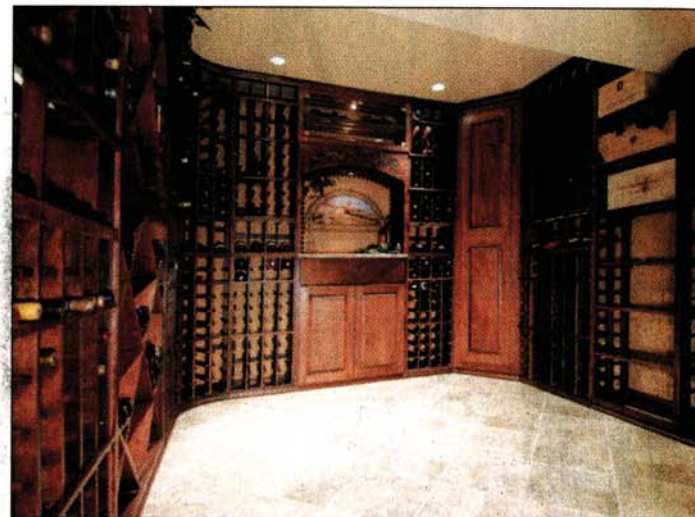
Nazemian custom-fitted storage racks around a midceiling bulkhead he created to reroute ducting and — as final nod to the ambiance — faux-painted sections of the new ceiling to resemble wine barrels.

On a similar note, the remodeler created access to fixed utility units through a lacquered mahogany door seamlessly integrated into the tasting room's interior elevations.

The cellar's focal point is a granite "tasting table" with a barrel-carved edge set off by a lacquered backbar festooned with a carved grape-and-vine motif.

The MacAllisters selected this decorative element, the floor tiling, the LED lighting and many other interior details in the Michael Nash showroom in Fairfax.

Thanks to the expert craftsmanship underlying a space plan more intricate than it seems, the



Michael Nash Kitchens and Homes created this 13-by-12-foot wine storage facility for homeowner Craig MacAllister, including a dedicated thermostat to keep the room temperature between 58-62 degrees F, space for 1,400 bottles on lacquered mahogany racks, and room for 10 to 15 guests.

resulting facility is inviting; a ment to adjoining activity zones. cozy spot for gathering with friends, and a perfect comple-

Fairfax County Times

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