

case study II:

Part two of our cellar series looks at the best ways to deal with an overheated basement. NATASHA HUGHES reports

PHOTOGRAPHS: ROBERT GRESHOFF

FOR most people, the word cellar conjures up images of cold, musty dankness, a space in which mould scales moist walls. In some houses, though, basement spaces can have the opposite problem – too much warmth. Although the damage caused to bottles by excessive

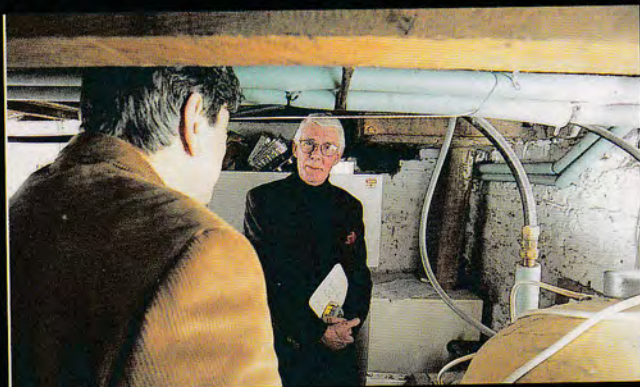
heat may not be immediately apparent, it is potentially a far more devastating problem as it causes wines to deteriorate rapidly. As temperatures approach 23–25°C, the wine ‘cooks’ inside the bottle – an experience from which it never recovers.

This was the problem facing George

Miller when he and his wine collection moved into a Victorian house in southwest London. ‘Initially, I was delighted to find a large basement in which I could store my wine,’ he says. ‘But that was before I realised that the boiler unit, located in the same room, heated the space to an average of 20°C. As things stand, I’m on my way to having the most expensive collection of mulled wine in the country.’

To make matters worse, Miller’s cellar was also home to a washing machine and

THE INSPECTION AND VERDICT



Noel Bell of Cellar Conversions comes up with a plan to combat the excessive temperatures in George Miller’s cellar



The culprit: the boiler unit located in Miller’s cellar keeps the temperature at a steady, overly warm, 20°C

dryer, whose vibrations were doing his wine no favours. Something needed to be done soon to remedy the situation.

The first expert to come to the rescue was Noel Bell from Cellar Conversions. He realised that the best way to save the situation was to create a room within a room to provide Miller's wines with a cool, quiet space in which they could mature, protected from the damaging household appliances.

After laying down a waterproof floor, Bell's plan was to put in a stud partition to box off a section of the room. 'I want to create an insulated wall as this will stabilise the temperature,' he says. 'This will have the added benefit of sealing the area off from the vibrations of the laundry utilities.'

The door to the new room, like a fire door, would have a heat-sensitive strip that would expand and contract when necessary to ensure that heat would not be able to leak in. The final – and most important step – would be to install a chiller unit on one of the walls facing out into the rest of the cellar.

The unit, about the size of a small suitcase, can heat or cool an enclosed space, ensuring that temperatures remain at a consistent predetermined level. 'As a general rule,' explains Bell, 'you fix these to an external wall so that heat can be dumped outside, but in many cases it's fine to channel the heat into an existing room, although it's important to have good ventilation if you're doing so.'

With the immediate danger over, it was time to move on to creating a rack system that would enable Miller to make the most of his collection of 1,000 or so bottles of

fine claret, Burgundy and Champagne, half of which are kept in their original cases.

Sebastian Riley-Smith of Smith & Taylor Private Cellars came along to offer expert advice on creating the optimal storage solution. His final design combines diamond-shaped bins for up to 16 bottles and individual slots made from birch ply with a display palette in the centre of the room where up to 50 cases can be stacked to provide ease of access. There is plenty of room for the occasional magnum or half bottle, although most of the space is geared towards the storage of standard sizes.

'The elements can be taken individually or combined,' explains Riley-Smith, 'but with this client we knew a combination was essential. This achieves the aesthetic – the simple framing of colourful bottles; the practical – secure storage of cased, binned and racked wine; and the versatile – enabling the collection to grow or retreat easily.'

One of the nicest touches of the plan is an adaptable labelling system in which engraved disks are integrated into the wooden forms to provide alphabetical (vertical) and numerical (horizontal) reference points for each bottle. 'This enables our clients to cross-reference their wines,' explains Riley-Smith, 'and create a flexible system that they feel at ease with.'

Miller is impressed with the plans for his born-again cellar. 'At long last I'll be able to get all my wine out of storage and bring it home,' he says. 'I'm going to get a great feeling of satisfaction knowing I can just go downstairs and fetch any bottle I feel like on the spur of the moment – safe in the knowledge that it won't be stewed.'



Smith & Taylor's complete combination of diamond-cell, individual and case storage

COSTS & CONTACTS

Cellar Conversions

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Web: www.cellarconvert.co.uk

Estimated cost of work to the cellar: £7,448+VAT

Smith & Taylor Private Cellars

Chelsea Bridge Cellars, 1c Broughton Street, London SW8 3QJ

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7627 5070

Fax: +44 (0) 20 7622 8235

Web: www.smithandtaylor.com

Estimated cost of storage and conditioning units: £9,750+VAT



Miller can only keep wines that are ready to drink in his cellar until the redesign – long-term storage will overcook them



Sebastian Riley-Smith from Smith & Taylor suggested installing both diamond-cell and individual bottle storage