

walls contrast with a red-tile-and-white-marble chequerboard floor. Midnight-blue velvet sofas are grouped around a stone fireplace

versation," she says. "That's why I prefer keeping things casual - letting people sit where they want to and to come and go during the

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than tasteful'

piece of furniture. And the design can be adapted to suit a classical or contemporary interior."

Bernerd explains. "And it doesn't feel pretentious because it tumbles naturally out of the kitchen and provides another space, away from

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'Anyone who entertains wants a bit extra in terms of wine storage'

Some like it stored discreetly in cellars or basements. Others prefer it on show and close at hand in bespoke cabinets or temperature-controlled units. But there's no doubt that increasing numbers of party-loving homeowners are installing wine storage areas or buying properties that have them.

Take the 84 residents of Park Towers, a 20-storey apartment block developed by Steve Wynn and Irwin Molasky in Las Vegas. Each apartment has its own private bins, big enough to store three cases, in the property's subterranean wine cellar. This temperature- and humidity-controlled space is built from French limestone with mahogany fittings and furnished with tapestries and fountains. It's so grand that one tenant, Richard Worthington, president of The Molasky Group of Companies, uses the cellar for private dinners. "Dining in the cellar makes the experience unique for even the most jaded of dinner guests," he says. It also doubles as a venue for the homeowners association's monthly wine-tastings, giving residents of this luxury condo the opportunity to socialise.

In London, developer

Candy & Candy offers wine storage in all its flats. Options range from 32-bottle wine fridges to tailor-made units housing hundreds of bottles. And others are following suit. "People are much more sophisticated about their knowledge of wines," says Barry Glantz, joint managing director of London-based boutique developer WillowAcre. "Anyone who entertains wants that little bit extra in terms of wine storage."

The cellar is the most traditional place to store wine ("In the days before refrigeration, it was the coolest part of the house," explains Tom Cave of wine specialists Berry Bros & Rudd) and many still favour subterranean storage.

Caroline Partridge and her husband live in Tonbridge, Kent, in a house built around 1810 that has its original cellar - three brick-floored rooms covering 60 sq ft. The "port room" has concrete bins in which bottles of port have rested for nearly 200 years; the second room is lined with cedar racks, some for individual bottles, some for cases; and the third has been left empty, for stacking more cases. The space now houses a collection valued at about £100,000, which

Caroline, a self-described "cellar stockpiler", believes is "enough wine for the next 10-15 years and port for our lifetime".

Storage space is key, she says, because about 70 per cent of their wine is Australian, "which is extremely difficult to buy with any age on it, hence the need for buying and laying down". They keep the cellar at 12°C, have an automatic sump pump, which prevents water from collecting and keeps the humidity high, and have covered the collection under a Chubb Insurance home and contents policy. The latter means they must keep an inventory of all wine purchased and drunk and update her broker within 90 days of any deliveries of cases or significant changes in the value of stock held.

Those oenophiles who can't find houses with cellars often build them from scratch. This was the case with William Bentley, who runs a wine shop in Ludlow, Shropshire, and lives in a three-bedroom flat above it with his wife, Helen.

A long-time Berry Bros client, Bentley had always wanted to become a wine merchant himself. When he quit the City, where he worked as a fund manager for

Prudential Insurance, he and Helen travelled for a year visiting vineyards all over the world. Back in Britain, they found a five-storey renovated Georgian townhouse in Ludlow's market square that could serve as both home and business (as well as housing two other apartments). And, with help from local builders, they turned the lower ground floor into a wine cellar. This now houses Bentley's personal wine collection and his stock - about 2,500 bottles in total.

"We insulated a 10 sq ft area with internal walls using very thick material, so there's no need for a special temperature-control device," he explains. In his office he keeps the EuroCave cabinet

he brought from his previous London property, while three further EuroCave cabinets, each containing 200 bottles, stand in the shop.

"The EuroCave cabinets do a brilliant job but they're expensive to buy and have ongoing costs because they run off electricity," he says. "In comparison, the cellar is naturally cool with no running costs. In an ideal world most wine-lovers would have their own cellars but a cabinet gives those who don't have this option the chance to store wine properly and avoid drinking fine wines too early."

EuroCave is just one of a number of companies offering purpose-built tempera-

ture-controlled units. Others include Sub-Zero, Liebherr and Viking. Each offers a range of models including units with dual-temperature compartments to keep both red wine and champagne/white wine at serving temperatures. (Cave recommends wine be stored at between 10°C and 15°C - ideally 13°C - although it may cope with room temperature for a few weeks without spoiling.)

Other companies offer modern takes on conventional underground cellars. Spiral Cellars, for example, builds extensions below kitchens, dining areas, conservatories, halls, utility rooms or garages using a modular concrete cylindrical construction and accommodating up to 1,600 bottles.

Matthew Witt, a director of online hotel booking company www.activehotels.com, and his wife Helen, a molecular biologist, contacted the company after moving into a new five-bedroom house with a detached garage-cum-studio at St James Homes' Kew Riverside development in south-west London. "Wine is a real passion for us and also an emotional investment because we buy direct from producers on trips abroad and have such an

enjoyable time doing [it]," explains Witt. "But there was no temperature- or humidity-controlled environment in the house and it would have been impractical to use cabinets for the quantity of wine we wanted to store."

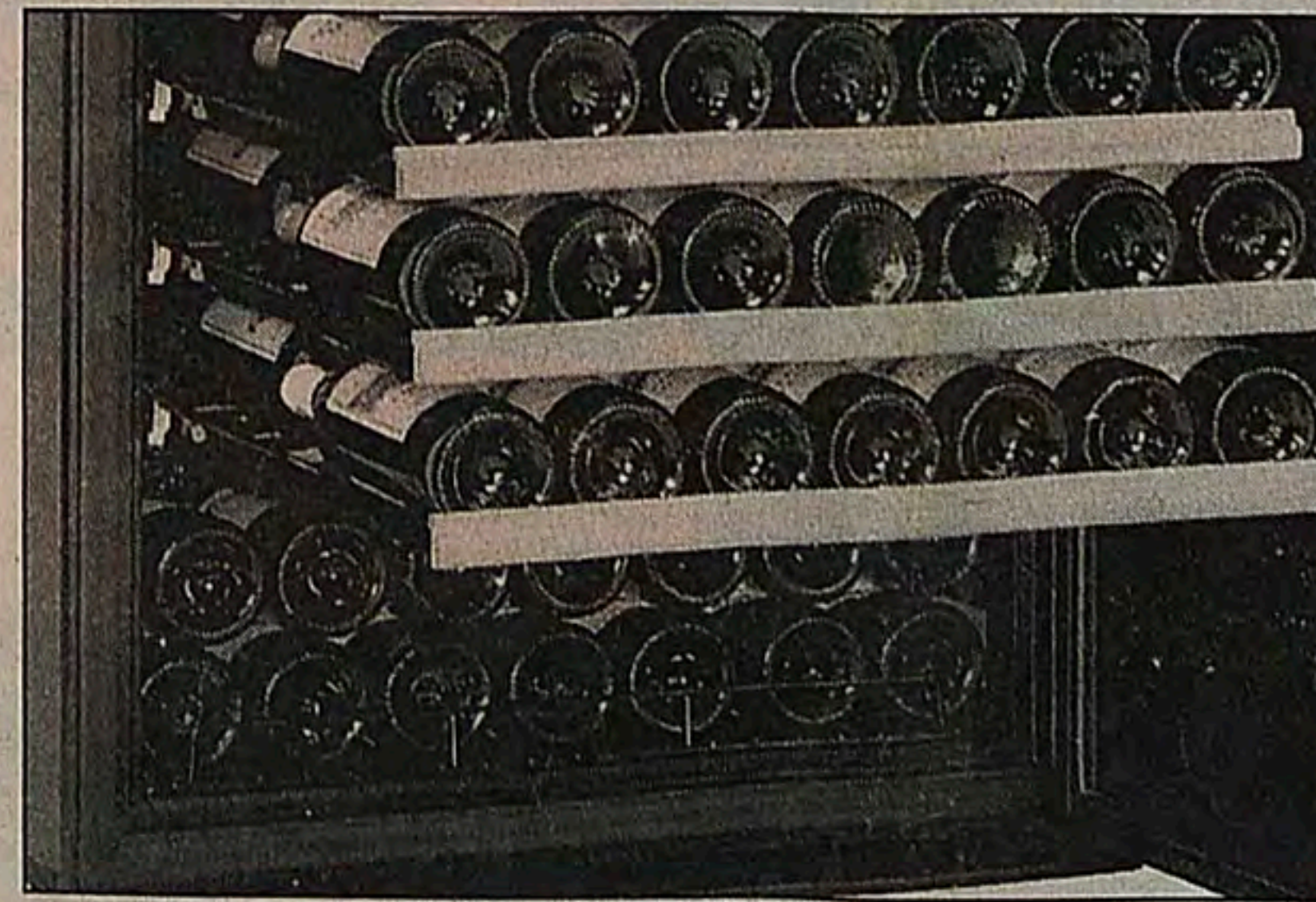
Spiral Cellars built down from the garage, providing access via a 6ft x 3ft trapdoor in its floor. The bottles are housed in integral concrete bins around a spiral staircase with a diameter of 2 metres at the foot of which are further bins. It is now in a clean, dark area that is kept at a constant temperature and remains slightly damp but with good ventilation. Witt is delighted. "The company did an excellent job, very cleanly, within the week and we now have storage for 800 bottles," he says. "It's a cost-effective and space-effective way of storing such a large quantity of wine."

Smith & Taylor, which specialises in designing and fitting out wine cellars, recently created storage for 700 bottles in the under-road vault of a Chelsea house. "We glazed over the light well between the kitchen and the vault to create a dining area that looks directly into the cellar," says

Sebastian Riley-Smith, who owns the company.

Architect Louise McDonnell, meanwhile, designed an above ground wine space in her newly built London home, putting a walk-in, temperature- and humidity-controlled room with glazed doors at one end of her open-plan kitchen. Tilted metal racks are used for storing 1,300 bottles behind coated glass doors designed to retain the correct temperature.

"My husband, Milko, is passionate about wine and wanted his collection close at hand and on display so there is a voyeuristic aspect to the design. It's decorative as well as functional," says McDonnell.



Under control: one of EuroCave's wine cabinets

CHILL FACTORIES

- Bentley's Wine Merchants, tel: +44 (0)1584 875520, www.bentleyswines.com
- Berry Bros & Rudd, tel: +44 (0)1256 340123, www.bbr.com
- EuroCave, tel: +44 (0)20 7935 4679, www.eurocave.com
- Smith & Taylor, tel: +44 (0)20 7627 5070, www.smithandtaylor.com
- Spiral, tel: +44 (0)20 7371, www.spiralcellars.com