

DRINK BEST CELLAR

Here and over the following months, **Johnny Ray** will show how to start a wine cache... and what to put in it

When I moved house not that long ago, all I craved was a whitewashed, cobwebbed cellar.

What I got was a dingy cupboard under the stairs. But I'm allowed – very grandly – to call it “the Cellar”, which makes me happy, and nobody else is allowed in, which makes me even happier.

I later appropriated a bit of wall that nobody seemed to want, and put in some rather dandy self-designed racks. They haven't fallen down yet.

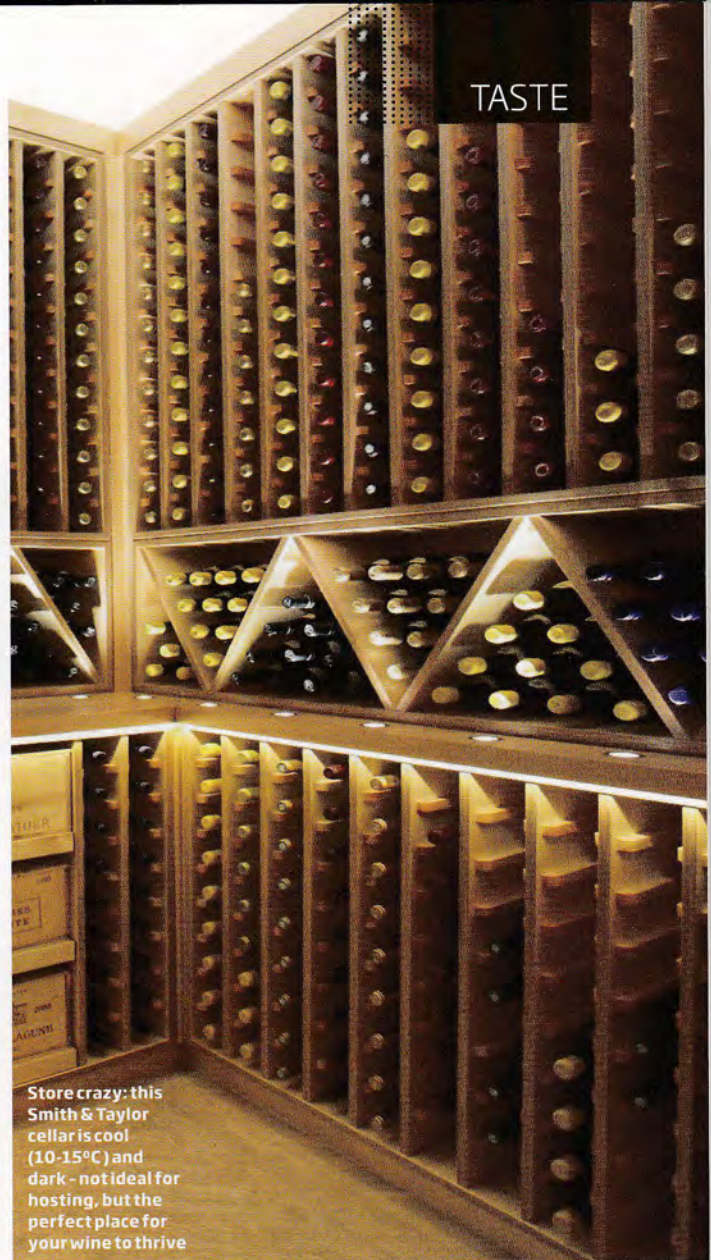
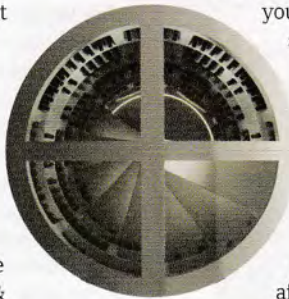
Of course, I could have invested in a fancy bespoke cellar such as the ones provided by Smith & Taylor (smithandtaylor.com) or Spiral Cellars (spiralcellars.co.uk). Not only does S&T store wine for customers in the company's own warehouses, it also designs and constructs anything from 500-bottle wine cabinets to entire rooms that can hold thousands of bottles (and which can cost upwards of six figures). They come complete with individual temperature and humidity

controls, maple, oak or birch plywood shelves and alcoves, low fibre-optic lighting, computer cataloguing, decanting benches and so on. They look amazing and are as much about showing off some swanky interior design as they are about simply storing bottles of vino. I bet clet-loving designer Kevin McCloud has one.

Spiral Cellars, by contrast, specialises in digging holes in the floor of your kitchen, dining room, study, garage, or wherever you see fit, and sinking a watertight, pre-cast cylinder topped with a trap door and lined with shelves with space for almost 2,000 bottles. No need to get rid of the billiards table after all – simply dig under it. I pine to have one.

Wine, though, is like a small baby, much more robust and sturdy than you might imagine. And, like a small baby, although it deserves to be looked after properly and shown off, it doesn't have to be overly pampered.

The simple truth is that a cupboard under the stairs will often suffice. Indeed, almost any space that is dark, free from vibrations and strong



Store crazy: this Smith & Taylor cellar is cool (10-15°C) and dark – not ideal for hosting, but the perfect place for your wine to thrive

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AN EVERYDAY DRINKER

2006 BERRYS' EXTRA ORDINARY CLARET
France

(13 per cent volume)
£12.25. At Berry Bros & Rudd. bbr.com

A succulent, Merlot-rich blend from the Graves, this should be a staple claret. More than ready to drink, it is rich and robust with buckets of ripe, dark berry fruit and a touch of earthiness. Don't let it hang around the cellar though; just drink it and buy more.



A CELLAR STARTER

2007 DE BORTOLI NOBLE ONE BOTRYTIS SEMILLON
Australia

(Ten per cent volume)
£18.99. At Majestic. majestic.co.uk

Ideal for picking oneself up after a bad day, Australia's most celebrated dessert wine is intensely honeyed with a touch of bitter orange. Glorious on its own or with rich starters, puddings or cheese, it's worth tucking away to see how it develops.



A COPPER-BOTTOMED KEEPER

2002 BOLLINGER LA GRANDE ANNÉE CHAMPAGNE
France

(12 per cent volume)
£65. At Waitrose. waitrose.com

The latest vintage of one of my favourite prestige cuvées hits the shelves this month. A Pinot Noir-based blend, it bears all the Bollinger hallmarks of weight, elegance and style. A special occasion-only wine, it'll last for ages. JR



THREE WINES FOR A STELLAR CELLAR