

HOMESCAPE

Ideas for interior design & decorating



A VINTAGE YEAR

It's always the best time for building a wine cellar | BY VERA LAWLOR

A wine rack in the kitchen may be substantial for holding ten or twenty bottles. But what if you have — oh, let's say — a thousand bottles you'd like to stock for those special moments? The answer is simple. Build a wine cellar, of course.

That's what Jay Rosen did when his collection of 3,500 bottles of wine, champagne, port and sauternes outgrew his storage space in the garage and basement. Rosen, owner of Washington Valley Cellars, carved his own cellar out of a space over the garage that conveniently opens into the dining room.

Rosen had plenty of experience at building the mahogany racks that hold his collection. Since 1992, Rosen, whose company is based in Martinsville, has designed and built more than 100 custom wine cellars in homes throughout the tri-state area.

The popularity of drinking wine is growing — and along with it the need to increase wine storage in homes. While the most common option is a 60-bottle storage unit that can be placed under a bar or kitchen counter, a growing number of wine enthusiasts are opting for built-in cellars in newly con-

structed homes. A survey conducted by The International Furnishings and Design Association predicted that by 2020, the interest in fine food and wine would lead to more elaborate dining rooms along with built-in wine cellars to show off collections.

Indeed, Rosen has seen orders for cellars increase during the last four years. Protecting valuable wines makes perfect sense to the connoisseur whose collection includes many bottles priced at \$2,500.

Rosen's first encounter with a wine cellar
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occurred at an early age. While he was in college, a cave-like wine cellar in a liquor store near campus piqued his interest — especially when he noticed the vast varieties of wine it contained. But it wasn't until he was in his thirties and owned his own construction company that the passion really took off, when he tasted top-notch wines in client's homes.

Now an avid collector himself, Rosen uses his home cellar as the showpiece for clients looking to add some ambiance to their own homes. This is where he does the initial interview and introduces clients to the various racking options. Diamond-shaped racks are appropriate for displaying the corks of bottles. Larger storage units hold magnums — those extra-large bottles of wine — because they allow a clear view of the labels. And stepped racking — also known as waterfalls — is the highlight of any cellar.

“The whole purpose of the cascading racks is to display unique, one-of-a-kind or hard-to-find wines, so when people walk into your cellar they can ‘ooh and ah’ over your collection,” Rosen said.

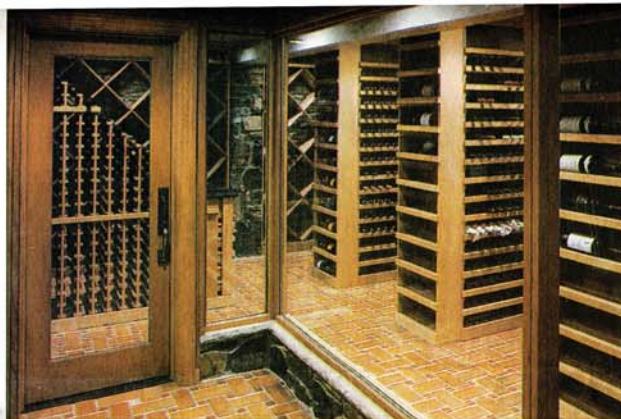
The good news is you don't have to own a mansion to have a wine cellar. In fact, anyone with a closet space or a basement can have one, the designer said. However, if you plan to use a closet space you need to make sure it's large enough to store your collection.

“A small wine cellar that costs \$12,000 to build and only has room for 200 bottles is not a good investment. There are other options that are considerably less expensive,” Rosen said.

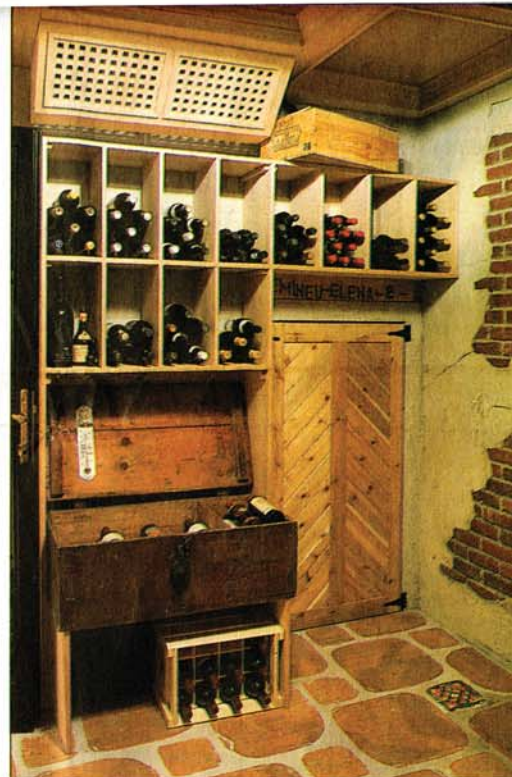
Those include do-it-yourself standardized kits with racking for a few hundred bottles and priced between \$1,600 and \$5,000, depending on size. The kits come with window space for a cooling system. For smaller collections, there are refrigeration units that sell for as little as \$700.

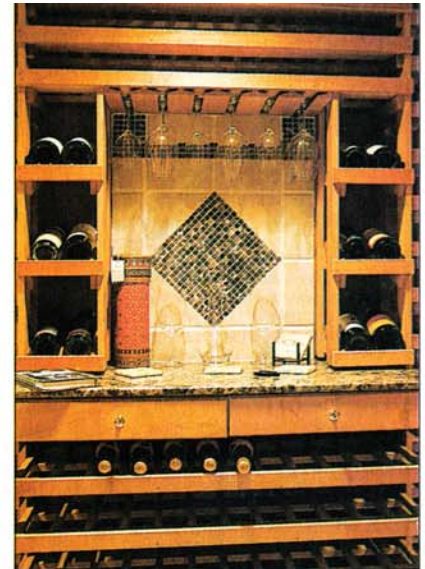
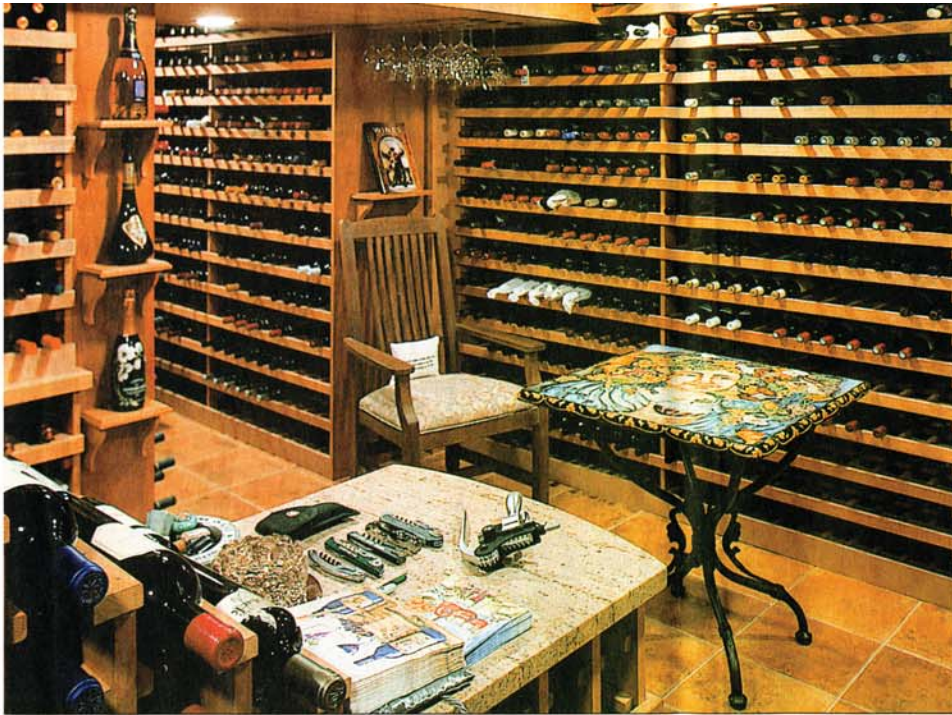
The smallest cellar Rosen has built can store 500 bottles while the largest holds 17,000. His cellars range in price from \$14,000 to \$80,000, depending on size and amenities.

While all the cellars feature similar racking systems, the styles can be either formal or rustic, depending on a client's taste. With its plastered ceiling, earthen-color, limestone-tiled floor and slate countertop for wine tasting, Rosen describes his own cellar as rustic. A wrought-iron design on the outside of the cellar door features grape vines and clusters of fruit, designed by Arteferro Iron Art Design in Plainfield.

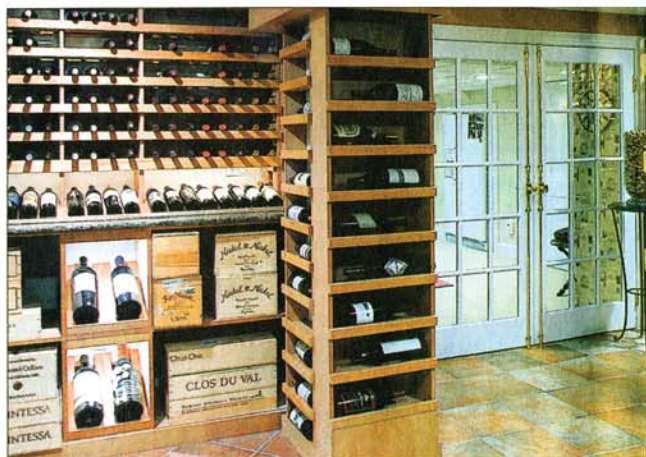


Front page: A lion's head over the arched doorway and an iron door from a French flea market welcome visitors to this Chatham wine cellar. Inside, the Old World theme continues in the form of red bricks. This page, top: In this Madison home, the former basement living room has become a comfortable seating area for admiring or tasting the fine wines displayed on racks from floor to ceiling. Far right: The owners of this Mendham home had wine racks designed around an antique chest to create a compact storage area. Near right: Jay Rosen measures racking for a wine cellar in the basement of a home in Westchester County, N.Y. Above, the owner of this Short Hills home requested a cellar with lots of windows to give his guests a full view of his prize wine collection.





Left, the wine cellar of this Chatham home features ceramic tile floors, a granite-topped tasting table, formal chairs and a mosaic dining table with a Bacchus motif. Above, the tasting table in this North Jersey home is accented by a diamond shape in black granite tile, surrounded by larger ceramic tiles which also appear in the flooring. Below left, elegant French doors open into the wine cellar of this Madison home, which includes the sitting room shown on page 8.



Home wine cellars at a glance

■ The style of home wine cellars is a matter of personal taste. Many homeowners are not interested in blending the cellar with the style of their home. It's not unusual for clients to ask for designs inspired by cellars they saw when touring wineries in Europe.

■ Typical designs for home wine cellars include Old World – lots of stone work and sometimes decorated with stone busts and including ironwork on old wooden doors; formal or contemporary that is square in design and often includes a sitting area for tasting; and rustic that would include earth-toned tile on the floor and backdrop of tasting tables, as well as ironwork designs on

entrance doors.

■ Designers steer clear of aromatic woods when building racking for cellars because the corks on the bottles are porous and over time the smell of the wood can affect the taste of the wine. Woods typically used in cellars include mahogany, white oak, alder, redwood, teak and chestnut.

■ The cooling system in a custom-built wine cellar is part of the design and the system is programmed to keep the cellar at a desirable temperature, usually never dropping below 48 degrees.

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The ironwork blends in with the earth tones in the dining room that was redesigned by the Art Etc., a company in California, to complement the cellar.

Besides the racking that's built from scratch, Rosen also installs the tiling for floors and tasting-table backdrops. In some cases he will work with construction companies hired to do the masonry work. Additional touches such as light fixtures and mirrors are introduced by clients or their interior designers. In a Madison home, Rosen surrounded couches and chairs in a basement living room with wine racks, and knocked out a wall to expand the cellar into an adjoining room. Elegant French doors lead to a comfortable space where the homeowners can sample their prize wines or entertain guests.

"Some clients like us to introduce stone and brick into the cellar to make it more cave-like," Rosen said.

The entrance to one cellar in Chatham is paved with lime-

stone tiles and the large iron door (purchased at a flea market in France) is framed in limestone brick. Over the arched doorway, a gargoyle welcomes visitors inside the cellar where the stone theme is continued in the form of red bricks.

The inspiration for the wine cellar in an English-style country home in Harding Township also came from the Old World. "We lived for 10 years in a 15th-century converted barn in England," said Madeleine Fleming, who immigrated to the U.S. just over a year ago. "The floor in the barn had Cotswold stone and the walls

were brick, so I designed my wine cellar to look like that."

The walls are built of reclaimed brick that came from an old building in Jersey City, while the Jurassic period limestone on the floor was imported from France. Both were installed by the New Castle Construction Company in Elmwood Park. Rosen designed and built the white oak racks to accommodate 3,000 bottles of wine, collected over ten years, and shipped over from England. The only accessories in the cellar are stone busts to add that extra European touch.

Although Rosen will honor special requests from clients,

he prefers to use mahogany wood for racking because it looks good, weathers well, and is reasonably priced as compared to other exotic woods.

"I wouldn't use redwood because it will turn brown when it gets damp, and I don't like pine because it's white and not as elegant looking for a cellar," he said.

He also steers clear of aromatic woods.

"The corks on the bottles are porous and they breathe," Rosen said. "So, I couldn't use something like aromatic cedar, for example, because that smell would eventually

find its way into the wine and could possibly corrupt the taste."

Cellar temperature is also important.

"There are certain wines you will never kill but there are some that, if you don't keep them at a certain temperature, you will destroy them," Rosen said.

The cooling unit for cellars costs \$3,100 and is similar to a cooling system used in a restaurant's walk-in refrigerator. The fan runs constantly while the compressor only goes on if it needs to cool the air that never drops below 48 degrees.

"Some people ask me what it costs to run this cooling system and, quite honestly, I've never tried to figure that out," Rosen said. "What I can tell them, though, is that if they are worried about that, they can't afford a wine cellar."

When forced to guess, the designer figures it wouldn't cost much more than what it takes to run a refrigerator fan.

"If you've got \$100,000 worth of wine, what's \$12 more a month to protect it?" Rosen said.

Vera Lawlor is a freelance writer living in Washingtonville, N.Y.