Cellars market

More and more people are choosing to age wine, writes **Cherry Ripe**, and increasingly there are more people willing to do it for you

"These new cellaring facilities are catering for the investment market, or for people living in small surroundings, or people who want to hide their wine from their partners.

"It's something that's going to grow. The wine investment market was once niche, with a small following, but now it's becoming a category. There are more people involved than ever before and more wine being cellared than ever before."

Caillard also points out that such facilities are particularly important for investors: "They don't want old bottles that are covered in dust and cobwebs. Private cellaring facilities are not good enough for the investment market, who want their labels in perfect condition."

Michael Jarman, operations manager for Millers Wine Storage in Sydney, the largest facility in the country, has more than 32,000 cases in private storage. It's a huge complex, with forklifts, stock pickers and scissor lifts whizzing around the warehouse. His customers range from doctors and lawyers to wine connoisseurs: "There are some investors that store their wine here — around 30 per cent would be investors. Also, we do commercial storage and distribution for restaurants and wineries, and for internet wine companies, and we take care of the logistics of distribution for them."

There is argument about the ideal temperature for storing wine. At Millers, wines are stored between 14C and 16C at 65 per cent humidity, all computer controlled. John reckons 14C to 16C is ideal "but Lindemans' temperatures would be on the upper side of that", about 17C. Caillard says some are too cold: "Some people like to have wine as low as 14C, which in many respects is a contrived environment because the ageing process is retarded."

Lynton Barber, of Perth's Sterling Auctioneers, is sceptical about humidity. "There is a slavish adherence to temperature and humidity, but there's no supporting scientific evidence of what is the optimum," he says. "If you keep wine too cool, the wine doesn't mature. But people who keep their temperature at 12C to 14C are putting away a legacy for their grandchildren because the wine is in suspended animation. It's the same as putting bread in the freezer. Between 8C and 12C, you can really slow it down. A lot of people are very disappointed when they bring out wine kept in these conditions because basically it tastes the same as when they cellared it.

"Also, extreme changes of temperature are not good for wine. It is very difficult to say [what] is the critical temperature over which wines will tend to go bad, but probably anything over 20C. Also worth noting is that white wine is far more sensitive than red wine and champagne is more sensitive again. It gets unpleasant characters, almost like a soapy character, if it hasn't been kept cool.

"If a bottle gets hot for any period of time, it cooks. Because wine is a food product, it is complex chemistry. If it sits in the heat for extended periods, it continues to cook. That's the problem. The thermal coefficients of glass and cork are very different. So if the bottle heats up on a hot day, the cork literally falls out.

"Also, keeping it out of the light is important because light does advance the process of deterioration. So dark is good and 20C is fine, but humidity is a lot of nonsense. You think about the physics of it. Most bottles have metal or plastic capsules over the cork, a lot of which don't have holes in them, so how is the humidity going to get to the cork? And if you have high humidity, you get mould growing. When you pull a $100 bottle of wine out of the rack and it's got mould all over the label, it reduces its value."

But whether you're hiding it from your partner or laying down an investment to flog it off later when its price — and rarity — has risen, or to drink yourself when it has reached optimum age, increasingly there are people willing to do it for you.

> ‘You've got to have ideal cellaring and that costs money’

PHILLIP JOHN, below

Where to store

- **Adelaide:** Adelaide Lockup and Adelaide Wine Vaults, Hindmarsh. Self-storage. Capacity for up to 500 dozen in one space, overall 10,000 dozen. Temperature controlled. Closed-circuit television. (08) 8346 4948.
- **Brisbane:** Millers Wine Storage, Bowen Hills. Increasing capacity to 25,000 cases, both personal and commercial. Climate-controlled at 14C-16C and 70 per cent humidity. Cases are bar-coded, inventories supplied. (07) 3257 3224.

  Fort Knox, Coorparoo. A boutique store, capacity 1100 cases, but happy to receive individual cartons. Climate-controlled 13C-15C, 75 per cent humidity. (07) 3392 2322.
- **Melbourne:** Millers Wine Storage, North Melbourne. Capacity 15,000 cases. Cataloguing, pick-up and delivery. Updated cellar reports via email or fax and best drinking dates. (03) 9329 0444.

  Liquid Assets, Abbotsford. Aligned with Wine Ark in Sydney. Capacity 11,000 cases. A secure warehouse where you can visit your wines. (03) 9415 8801.
- **Perth:** The Australasian Wine Exchange, Subiaco. The only properly refrigerated storage space in the city, with 5000-case capacity, wine inventory reports, cellar management. (08) 9388 8455.
- **Sydney:** Millers Wine Storage, Alexandria. The biggest private storage facility, with more than 32,000 cases. (02) 9699 2300.

  Wine Ark, Camperdown. The only other temperature-controlled storage facility in Sydney, for 10,000 cases. It also offers cellar advice and online cellar management. (02) 9565 4050.