

[wine]



**CHRIS ANSTEE** LISTS THE WORLD'S BEST PROVIDERS OF SECURE, LONG-TERM WINE STORAGE UNDER IDEAL CONDITIONS

# CELLARS MARKET

Berry Brothers operates from vaulted brick cellars which run deep under London's streets

**Recently, on a flight from Hong Kong to Bombay,** I found myself chatting to a fellow passenger about wine. Let us call him Mr Patel. I don't recall how the ice was broken but one of the best things about wine is that it helps even relative strangers to quickly relax and, from there, the conversation flows. As it happens, on this occasion we both were drinking tea but the conversation was lively and animated nonetheless! My polite enquiries revealed that Mr Patel was the owner of a multi-national chemical company and he seemed fascinated to learn that I was in the wine business. It quickly emerged that my companion was a highly knowledgeable wine drinker with a large collection. His particular passion was Bordeaux and he wasted no time in quizzing me about my current recommendations, which he quickly stored in his Blackberry.

## [wine]

I commented that he must find it difficult to buy reliably sourced and properly stored wines in a hot climate like India's, leave alone cope with the challenge of keeping and maturing them in optimal conditions. His response was that most of his best wines weren't in India at all! Some were stored in a classic underground cellar at his 'summer residence' in Provence and the rest were in his (air-conditioned) apartment in New York. He wasn't too happy with the conditions in the apartment: the room temperature was rather too high and, given the size of his collection and the temptation to succumb to the recommendations of people like me, storage space was becoming a serious problem.

Mr Patel's dilemma is an increasingly common one for well-heeled wine lovers the world over. Fine wine always represents a significant investment. And even if one has a large residence, proper storage is not always readily available. To be enjoyed at its best, wine must be stored at constant, low temperatures (around 55°F is ideal) and at relatively high humidity. Fluctuating temperatures can quickly spoil a wine, usually because they cause it to seep out and minute amounts of air to be sucked in, past the cork. Vibration and light are also undesirable and a lack of humidity in the storage area can cause a fatal drying-out of the corks—but more about that later!

Happily for Mr Patel, and the many locals who are fed up with unreliable storage by middlemen and India's huge import duties, elegant solutions to these problems are available in many of the world's great commercial centres. While London and New York are probably foremost among these, Hong Kong, Singapore and Sydney are not far behind. In these cities, there are a number of prestigious companies who offer spe-

cialist storage facilities, with the option of prompt home-delivery of single or multiple bottles. Traditionally, the companies also take responsibility for the stock-keeping and insurance of the owner's entire range of wines. Generally, these records are computerised, meaning that an owner's cellar records are accessible by him at any time even from a remote computer.

One of the first and finest companies to offer such bespoke services is the venerable London wine merchant Berry Brothers and Rudd. Established in 1698, it is surrounded by some of London's most prestigious restaurants, art and antique dealers and "gentlemen's suppliers" in the heart of what is often called Clubland. Still trading from the same site after 300 years, Berry Brothers is the holder of multiple Royal Warrants. It provides a wide range of wine advisory, valuation and other services to a diverse and prestigious international clientele. Despite its antiquity, the company has a thoroughly modern approach to its wine offering and maintains an

award-winning and extraordinarily informative website.

Should you not have a London  *pied a terre*  in which to entertain your guests or sample your carefully stored wines, Berry Brothers offers its customers a choice of luxuriously appointed tasting and dining rooms (some of which are located in the vaulted brick cellars which run deep



The storage companies even help clients choose wines for special occasions and offer tasting rooms

[wine]

under London's streets, right up to the foundations of St. James Palace). It will also advise you on the best wine for such occasions, either from your cellar or its enormous range of wines and spirits from all over the world.

Hong Kong, as wine aficionados know, is the centre of the fine wine business in Asia; and Berry Brothers and Rudd have had a shop there for years. Given its steamy climate, it should be no surprise that the city offers high net-worth individuals several options for optimal wine storage. Crown Wine Cellars is one of the finest, providing its members with climate-controlled, underground cellars in addition to full Club facilities in a historic garden setting on Hong Kong Island. The Crown has been the venue for dozens of spectacular private wine tastings. For members who, like Mr Patel, normally cellar their wines in other countries, it arranges shipping or air freighting of wines, as well as handling of customs duties and documentation for the owners.

New York, home to hundreds of private wine collections, is served by several of the world's most expert fine wine merchants, auction houses and commentators, and enjoys a wide

## CONTACT DETAILS

London	Berry Brothers and Rudd	<a href="http://www.bbr.com/">http://www.bbr.com/</a>
Singapore	Richfield Cellar Solution	<a href="http://www.richfieldbrands.com/">http://www.richfieldbrands.com/</a> <a href="http://www.cellar.com.sg/">http://www.cellar.com.sg/</a>
Hong Kong	Crown Wine Cellars	<a href="http://www.crownwinecellars.com/">http://www.crownwinecellars.com/</a>
New York	Wine Care Storage D Sokolin	<a href="http://winecare.com/services.htm">http://winecare.com/services.htm</a> <a href="http://www.sokolin.com/shop/">http://www.sokolin.com/shop/</a>
Manhattan	Manhattan Wine Co	<a href="https://www.mwcwine.com/">https://www.mwcwine.com/</a>
San Francisco Bay	Adventures in Wine	<a href="http://www.adventuresinwine.com/">www.adventuresinwine.com/</a>
Sydney	Wine Ark	<a href="http://www.wineark.com.au/">http://www.wineark.com.au/</a>

The best cellars store wine at a constant temperature of around 55°F and at least 75% humidity

range of wine-related services. Some of the best known are D. Sokolin, which is also one of New York's leading fine wine merchants, Wine Care Storage and, in Manhattan, The Manhattan Wine Co.

Singapore and Sydney, too, offer a good choice of specialist storage. Two of the best—which also offer attractive tasting and entertaining venues equipped with the best accessories like Riedel glasses, crystal decanters and experienced staff are—Wine Ark in Sydney and Richfield in Singapore.

Finally, a cautionary tale which

may illustrate why so many wine storage companies have sprung up across the world's great cities. During the boom years of the 1980s in the US, a wealthy American bought over a 200-year-old British wine importer/wholesaler, and its treasure trove of vintage wines, many dating back to the late 1800s and early 1900s. A large selection of these was then shipped to the American's palatial beachfront home in Florida where it was stored in a locked but air-conditioned room.

On arriving there as his guest, he asked my birth year (1952 as it happens—a respectable but unspectacular year in Bordeaux). A few moments later, he returned with a 1952 Chateau Haut Brion and a 1952 Chateau Latour. To our horror, on opening the wines, both were brown and rank smelling; their corks shrivelled and leaking. Muttering darkly, my host revisited his storage room and returned with Chateaux Lafite, Figeac and couple of great Burgundies, all from the 1952 vintage. Each one was spoilt and utterly undrinkable—in every bottle, the cork was shrivelled and leaking. It emerged later that he had carefully equipped his secure wine storage room with a standard domestic air-conditioning unit, with its usual drying effect on air. Not knowing how vital it is that wines stored in air-conditioned surroundings must have at least 75 per cent humidity had cost him hundreds of thousands of dollars and considerable embarrassment. Little wonder that the prudent Mr Patel is concerned about the growing amount of wine in his New York apartment. 🍷

