

**CASING THE JOINT**  
Storage specialists such as MacPhee's (right) can take away the guesswork for serious collectors.

Every wine lover remembers his first cellar, whether it was a small spot in their parents' cellar, a case in the corner or something more grand. Mine? The third drawer on the right-hand side of my desk. It only took two bottles, but that was the extent of my collection at the time, so it didn't matter. I'd been given the bottles, and, late at night, when supposedly studying, I'd pull them out, peer at them, turn them over, examine them closely and then put them back. One was Lindemans Nyrang Hermitage, probably worth about \$1.60 – and that was the good one.

Before long, they were joined by a few more and the drawers started to fill. Soon it was time to move them to the bottom of a cupboard and eventually under the bed. Even though this was in Brisbane, and a Brisbane summer is not a wine's best friend, I convinced myself that because we were next to the river, it was cool enough; all would be well. So I learned that lesson the hard way.

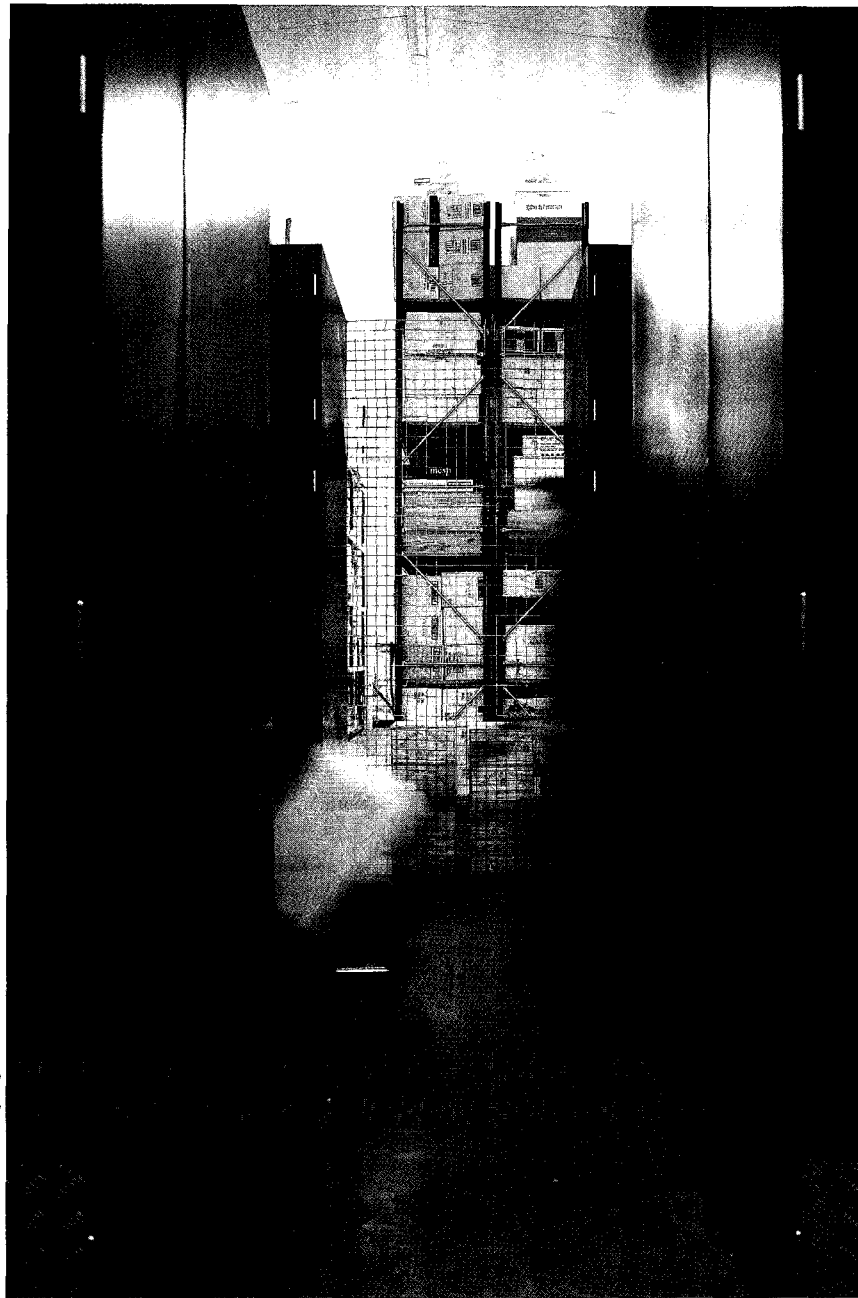
With cellars, there are many lessons and potential pitfalls, although the rewards make it worthwhile. But

### *MacPhee has seen it all: the good, outside toilet and laundry*

anyone who thinks that establishing a quality personal cellar is just a matter of setting aside space and sticking in an aircon unit is in for a shock. Few in the industry are as familiar with cellar problems as Craig MacPhee of Eurocave and MacPhee's Wine Cellarage in Melbourne. He's seen it all: the good, the bad and the innovative, including an outside toilet and laundry converted into a cellar holding almost 50 dozen bottles, and a former rainwater tank cleverly fitted with spiral racking. He's met everyone – from wine lovers with such deep pockets they can fill a cellar with as many great wines as they desire, to younger people, often in the trade, who spend every spare cent they can muster to add another prized bottle to their collection.

Interestingly, it's the people with the big bucks who often get it wrong. They'll rush in and buy multiple cases, often without much thought, simply wanting to ensure they have all the wines from the latest hot vintage. Yet in time they realise they have made mistakes and that their precious cellar needs reviewing and culling. On the other hand, many young and less affluent collectors take a more measured approach and are thus often more successful. Granted, this approach is largely the result of budgetary constraints, but the result of cherry-picking a special bottle here and there is that, over time, you are more likely to establish a more varied and interesting cellar.

MacPhee has many tips for anyone thinking of establishing a cellar, but says that there are three main issues to contend with to ensure disaster is avoided. First, never assume that going underground will automatically provide a cool home for your wine. Subterranean often equals hotbox. MacPhee says he has seen more than 100 underground cellars and he "could count on one hand those that stayed naturally



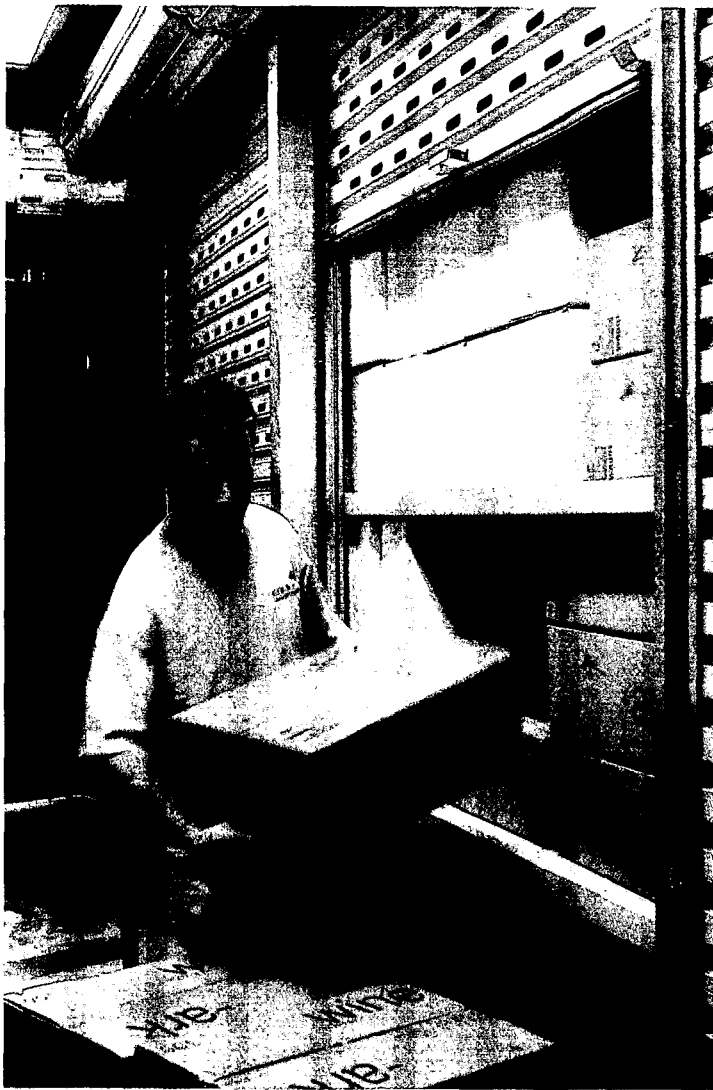
below 20C, let alone 15C". Placing a concrete slab over the cellar will only exacerbate the problem; it will still be necessary to install appropriate temperature controls.

Second, he counsels, cellars must be properly insulated. If this is done at the beginning of construction it is easy and inexpensive, but if it has to be rectified or installed later the cost can be prohibitive.

Third, take care with the doors to your cellar. It is essential they provide an airtight seal, otherwise all the good work can be lost. Remember also that wood, no matter how thick or how attractive it may look, is not a good insulator.

Other issues relate to ensuring the most appropriate racking for your needs, and temperature control. MacPhee suggests anyone establishing a cellar eschew the traditional use of an airconditioner and install a refrigeration unit. Aircon will struggle to maintain a constant temperature below 18C and also introduces humidity problems. MacPhee is not alone in believing that consistency of temperature provides a better environment for wine than a fluctuating climate, even if at lower levels. He also believes the ideal is a constant 14C or 15C.

The issue of humidity is one that divides experts, some believing it is not as important an issue as many would have us believe. MacPhee is not among them. Too often he has seen cellars using airconditioning units that need strategically placed buckets of water, requiring regular



WHAT'S IN STORE  
 Craig and Tania  
 MacPhee of MacPhee's  
 Wine Cellarage.  
 Left: Wine-ark.

attention, to ensure appropriate humidity. Too little humidity and there is the danger the cork will start to dry and allow oxygen ingress, spoiling the wine. Too much can promote the growth of mould which, although less harmful to the wine, is not aesthetically attractive and may damage the label, a consideration if the wine has been bought as an investment because it will affect its resale value.

Cellaring wine is a personal thing. A wise man thinks carefully before volunteering to help a mate. A friend of mine, for instance, who has far too much money, recently built a magnificent new house and requested some assistance with the cellar. We discussed the design and he also consulted appropriate experts. The result is a wonderful 3000-bottle masterpiece, a work of art yet extremely practical, with a glass front allowing prized bottles to be displayed. Being a cigar aficionado, I tried to convince him that a matching walk-in humidor was necessary, but that was considered a little too extreme.

As soon as construction was finished, I got a call: "We need to fill it." I explained this was something one did over time. It was important to identify the sort of wine you wanted to drink in the long- and short-term, and which wineries, styles and vintages appealed. Planning, I said, was essential; build the cellar over the next decade. But this was a kid with a new toy, and he wanted to get started.

My friend said he mostly drank red, and although several special bottles were fine, most should be good Aussie drops in the \$20-30 range. That meant, he added, that he could open a bottle and not worry that he'd liberated something ridiculously expensive or rare.

No problem, I replied. The first thing we need is some 2001 Château d'Yquem (at the time, it had just been released). A month or so later, I picked up the phone to a torrent of abuse. Clearly, my mate

was not happy. It seemed the much-anticipated Yquem had arrived. This was obviously not the cause for celebration I had anticipated.

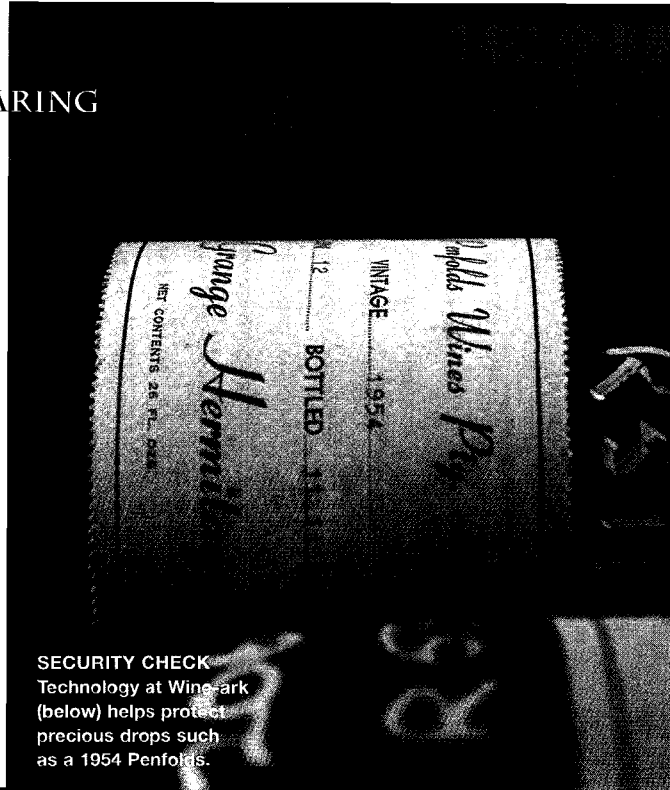
What, I politely inquired, was the problem? My extremely irate mate screamed down the phone: "Did you know that this Yquem stuff was white? I don't drink white!" A word of advice here: this is not the time to start laughing. "Hang on a minute," I said. "There is something else you should know – it's also sweet."

The moral? It's good to try to expand the cellar owner's horizons, but if you know exactly what he wants, make sure he gets it.

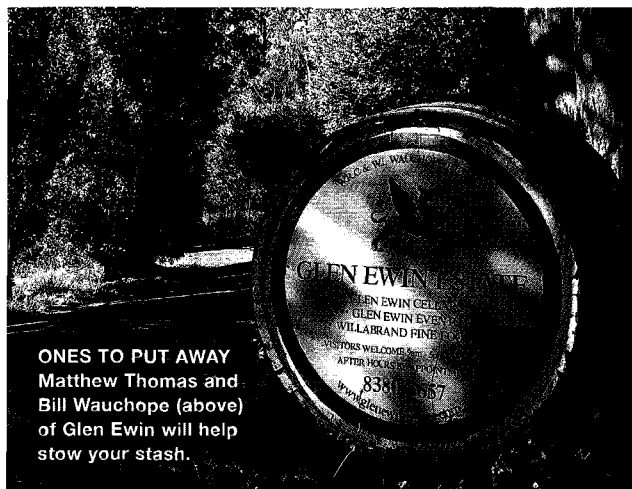
My favourite cellaring story was related to me many years ago by a well-known wine writer. (Apologies if I don't have the exact vintages, but I think they are close.) A wine merchant in country England sold a friend many cases of great port, including the famous 1927 Cockburns. Sadly, the friend was killed in World War II and the merchant heard nothing from the widow for many years. One day she arrived at his store wanting to buy more Cockburns. It seems she'd finished all the stock he'd carefully accumulated. As her husband had been such a good friend, the merchant sold her one of his personal bottles, at a considerable discount. A few days later, she was back for another. Realising he'd soon exhaust his meagre supply, he suggested some of the great '45s. The next day she was back and clearly unhappy. After some time, the bizarre truth was revealed. She had been continuing the practice enjoyed with her husband before his passing. He'd drink the port in the evening and the next morning, she'd spread the sediment on toast for breakfast. After her husband died, she'd been emptying the contents down the drain but still used the sediment. Back then, the 1945 had been too young to throw a crust and so was unsuitable.

Which just shows how versatile a cellar can be.

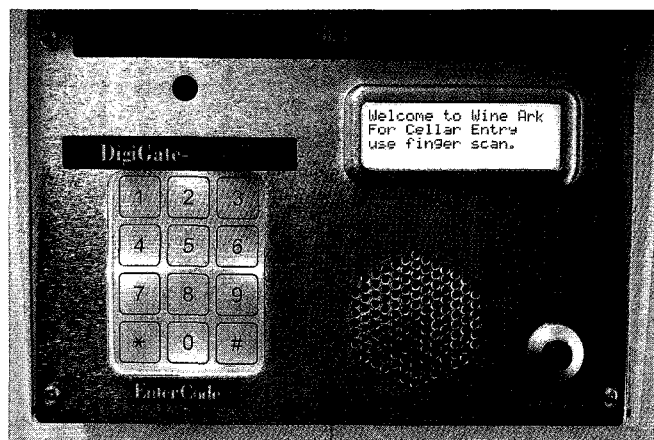
## CELLARING



**SECURITY CHECK**  
Technology at Wine-ark (below) helps protect precious drops such as a 1954 Penfolds.



**ONES TO PUT AWAY**  
Matthew Thomas and Bill Wauchope (above) of Glen Ewin will help stow your stash.



### PROFESSIONAL HELP

Professional storage units should provide ideal conditions for your wine (by chance, they also provide near-perfect conditions for storing cigars, if you want to preserve your collection and do not have sufficient space in your humidor). This incorporates temperature, light, humidity and, importantly, security. Most will provide a website where you can monitor your collection and post advance notices of removals and entries. Some provide 24-hour access to the unit-holder – to their collection only, of course – though most operate on specified opening hours.

Fees for these services vary, depending on what is on offer and the size of the collection. Also, separate fees are usually charged for withdrawals and deposits. It is worth ensuring that you are aware of these fees as they can sometimes come as a surprise. Remember that charges may seem high, but they're nothing compared with losing or damaging your precious collection.

Most professional storage operations will take a cellar, no matter how small, even just a few bottles. They know that once the bug has bitten, it will grow. Following are some of the best wine storage facilities in Australia and New Zealand.

#### NEW SOUTH WALES

*Wine-ark, 1800 111 275, [www.wineark.com.au](http://www.wineark.com.au).*

#### VICTORIA

*MacPhee's, (03) 9696 5200, [www.macphees.com](http://www.macphees.com).  
The Winebank at Guardian, 1800 235 523,  
[www.thewinebank.com.au](http://www.thewinebank.com.au).*

#### WESTERN AUSTRALIA

*Australasian Wine Exchange, 1300 653 946,  
[www.winexaccessories.com](http://www.winexaccessories.com).*

#### SOUTH AUSTRALIA

*The Tunnels Wine Storage, (08) 8277 2853,  
[www.thetunnels.com.au](http://www.thetunnels.com.au).  
Glen Ewin Cellars, (08) 8380 5657, [www.glenewinestate.com.au](http://www.glenewinestate.com.au).*

#### QUEENSLAND

*Ewine Cellaring, (07) 5532 5993, [www.ewinecellaring.com](http://www.ewinecellaring.com).*

#### TASMANIA

*Coal River Storage & Packing, 0408 652 296,  
[jrdpooley@hotmail.com](mailto:jrdpooley@hotmail.com).*

#### AUSTRALIA-WIDE

*Kennards Wine Storage, 1800 658 855, [www.kss.com.au](http://www.kss.com.au).  
National Storage, [www.nationalstorage.com.au](http://www.nationalstorage.com.au).*

#### NEW ZEALAND

*Fine Wine Cellar Storage, (09) 377 2300, [www.finewinecellar.co.nz](http://www.finewinecellar.co.nz).*