

Managed storage isn't just for wine snobs

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If you're serious about drinking wine, chances are you're serious about cellaring it too. And if you're serious about storing it, you'll know that under the stairs isn't the best place for your precious collection.

That's why many wine lovers opt to outsource their wine cellaring to storage facilities specifically designed for the purpose.

Dean Taylor, a former architect, credits himself with having "broken the ice" on managed wine storage in Australia when he set up Wine Ark 10 years ago.

"It was meant to be a one-day-a-week job but quickly became a seven-day-a-week job," he said from a Wine Ark warehouse in an industrial estate in Sydney's inner west, which holds an estimated \$A1 million (\$NZ1.23 million) worth of plonk.

There are now 11 Wine Ark sites around the country (others are in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney and the Sunshine Coast) plus a range of similar facilities run by other operators.

Dean says the average wine collection consists of 40-50 dozen bottles.

"It's a lot of wine to have in your house so rather than sacrifice a bedroom people prefer to use a facility like us.

"(It's also used by) people who are moving, renovating or relocating overseas."

The interest in managed wine storage also reflects social changes, he says.

"Households are smaller and lots of empty-nesters are moving from big family homes in places like Woollahra to small apartments in the city. Some (clients) are expats building a collection while they're away."

As well as convenience, managed wine storage also helps people protect their investment. At Wine Ark you have to get past cameras, finger print scans, PINS, and – at the Sydney site – 24 hour guards. That's not to mention seismic and infrared detectors and an automatic midnight lockdown.

"It's the sort of place that even Tom Cruise would have trouble getting into," Taylor quips.

Managed storage facilities also catalogue collections so clients can log on and keep track of what they have.

"People can often forget what they have in storage," Taylor says. "They can even put in when they plan to drink a particular bottle and then get a reminder."

But one of the main advantages of managed cellaring is that it allows wine to age in optimum conditions.

Wine Ark, with a concrete floor, chilled water system in the roof, air conditioning ducts and zone-by-zone temperature control is "very different from the dark and damp caves of France", Taylor says.

But it keeps the temperature at a constant 14 degrees Celsius and 75 per cent humidity – "perfect conditions for storing wine".

You don't have to be wine snob to take advantage of managed cellaring.

"(Clients) range from mums and dads who have one bottle of wine from the birth year of their child to clients with thousands of bottles," Taylor says.

Some of the facility's clients are celebrities, including musician Tim Freedman (he also uses the facility to store master tapes), actor Tony Collette and cricket legend Stuart McGill (an "avid wine collector with probably 200 dozen of Australia's best wines").

The most expensive wine in storage is a 1951 Bin 1 Grange Shiraz valued at \$A50,000 and the oldest is an 1834 Vinhos Barbeito Madeira.

Melbourne wine writer Jeremy Oliver says climate change and the capricious Australian climate make putting your wine in managed cellaring good sense.

"Most obviously with climate change in Australia you need some form of temperature control where you put your wine," he says.

"A place like this offers an opportunity for people who don't have purpose-built cellars or storage. Plus it has security and non-essential benefits like a computer system to manage your collection and a trading platform."

The optimum storage time varies from wine to wine and month to month, Oliver says. "But even cheaper wines will benefit from a minimum two years in the cellar. Allowing wine to age makes wine richer and smoother and brings out its character", Oliver says.

He says the fact that Australians are taking their cellaring seriously shows we are "growing up".

"Whether it's California, Tuscany or France, where ever there's great cellaring it's a building block in the understanding of what's quality wine," he says.

Quality storage facilities also give certainty to those buying wine on the secondary market. "In the past people thought, 'oh, cellaring wine, I'll put it under the bed or stick it under the staircase'," Oliver says

"In the mid nineties when people started collecting Grange they bought it and cellared it in atrociously. Those wines are now re-entering the marketplace. (Quality cellaring) gives confidence that when you buy mature Australian wine it's been cellared correctly."

Taylor says as an investment, fine wine is a lot like an art work. "People want to know who's owned it and where it's been stored," he says.

TIPS FOR STORING YOUR WINE

- Make sure you keep it somewhere where the temperature is stable from day to night and season to season. This can be a purpose-built facility or private cellar. That failing, avoid windows, external walls or anywhere near a kitchen. Between 12-18 degrees Celsius is optimum, and based on the average temperature of the great European cellars.
- Keep humidity between 65 and 75 per cent. Inadequate humidity will cause cork shrinkage and oxidation and too much humidity will damage labels and encourage mould growth.
- Store wine away from vibrations. This includes subwoofers, speakers, air-conditioners and hot water units. Vibrations affect chemical reactions in the wine.
- Keep wine in the dark and avoid sunlight at all costs.