



STORED FOR PERFECTION

September weather in the foothills is still perfect for activities like water sports, motorcycle rides and a swim in the pool. But the warm weather that we enjoy is less than perfect for your favorite wines. It only takes one sip of vinegar at an anticipated opening of a favorite Merlot to discover the importance of proper wine storage. Light, heat and humidity play an important role in aging and developing the delicate balance of flavors that the wine maker intended.

"If you plan to age wine, it's critical to store it properly," says winemaker Justin Boeger of Placerville's Boeger Winery. "Temperature is the most influential factor after wine is put in the bottle. Even a single day at 85 degrees changes the character of a wine," he added.

Perfect Execution

If you plan to store your wine for only for a few weeks, there are some good short-term guidelines for keeping your vintages at their best. Some good care instructions include:

- Keep your wine bottles in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight and vibration.
- Store wine on its side to keep the cork moist and prevent air from penetrating into the bottle.
- Chill white and sparkling wines just before serving rather than storing them in the refrigerator.

If you plan to store and age your collection, there are also some proper storage guidelines you should follow. These include:

- The ideal temperature for proper wine storage is between 55 and 65 degrees, which should be constantly maintained throughout a bottle's cellaring life.
- Humidity – It must remain between 60 percent and 70 percent to prevent corks from shrinking or drying out.
- Light causes premature aging and color deterioration so place your collection in a dark or shaded location. Ultraviolet light can ruin the intended blends and flavors as the wine ages.
- Keep the cork moist, store each bottle on its side.
- Keep a proper level of ventilation throughout your wine storage area. Strong odors can penetrate the cork and effect taste, sometimes dramatically.
- Cleanliness – Wines should be stored where no insects or rodents can infiltrate the cork.
- Tranquility is good for both you and your wine. Vibrations, sound waves and movement all disturb the subtle chemical changes that go into proper aging.

Ideal Conditions

All wines will benefit from proper storage – from crisp Sauvignon Blancs to rich, deep Merlots. However, the wines that will benefit the most from proper storage techniques are those that are sweet or very concentrated. These include the intensely flavored whites and reds that benefit from spending long periods of contact with the skins of the grapes. This helps the wines take in the rich grape pigments and tannins as preservatives.

But short of owning a cave in a temperate climate, how can you find a perfect wine storage environment that meets all the ideal conditions? Options include building your own private cellar, or renting a wine storage locker from a local wine expert.

There are many advantages to building and maintaining your own in-home wine cellar. The obvious benefits are convenience, the joy of adding to and enhancing your personal collection and the fulfillment of adding to your homes' character and potential value. Keeping your own cellar also assures that the wines will be stored correctly, and not carelessly where they might spoil in their bottles as they do in many stores or warehouses. However, there are also as many disadvantages to building your own wine cellar for enjoying your collection and insuring the safety of your investment.

"We intended to build a wine cellar and tasting room under our home in El Dorado Hills," says Merrill Lynch Financial Advisor and wine collector Bill Bartok. "However, after a lot of research, we just couldn't justify spending \$175,000 on a luxury item at the present time."

Bartok and his wife Gina did what many foothill area residents are now doing with their collections – renting a private wine locker in a storage facility designed to meet the strict cellaring conditions. "Cellaring our collection in a controlled environment will only enhance the perfect aging of our collection and from a cost standpoint, its unbeatable," says Bartok. Carrie Boyle, owner of Wine Merchant in Roseville says, "Professional wine cellars provide the best wine storage conditions available for wine enthusiasts."

Boeger sums it up well by saying, "I want wine lovers and customers to enjoy every flavor nuance of my wines. I adhere to the proper storage guidelines after bottling and I regularly suggest that collectors do the same to protect their investment and enhance their enjoyment." ▲

– Tracy Campbell
Gold Key Cellars

Gold Key Cellars is located at 4980 Golden Foothill Parkway in El Dorado Hills. You can contact them at 916.933.8989 or visit the website at www.GoldKeyCellars.com.