

Wine Cellar Musings

Don Bailey appreciates beauty as well as taste.

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COLLECTING FINE WINE is one of the great luxuries. It has the same personal value as collecting fine art. One collector with a passion for wine decided to display his collection in what looks like an art museum, instead of hiding it away in a dark cellar.

Don and Cheri Bailey have designed a 2,100-square-foot space that may be the epitome of home wine cellars. Bailey recalls that his original intention was to add space for a home theater. But when

Cheri mentioned they had outgrown their current wine cellar, he saw the vision and took it from there.

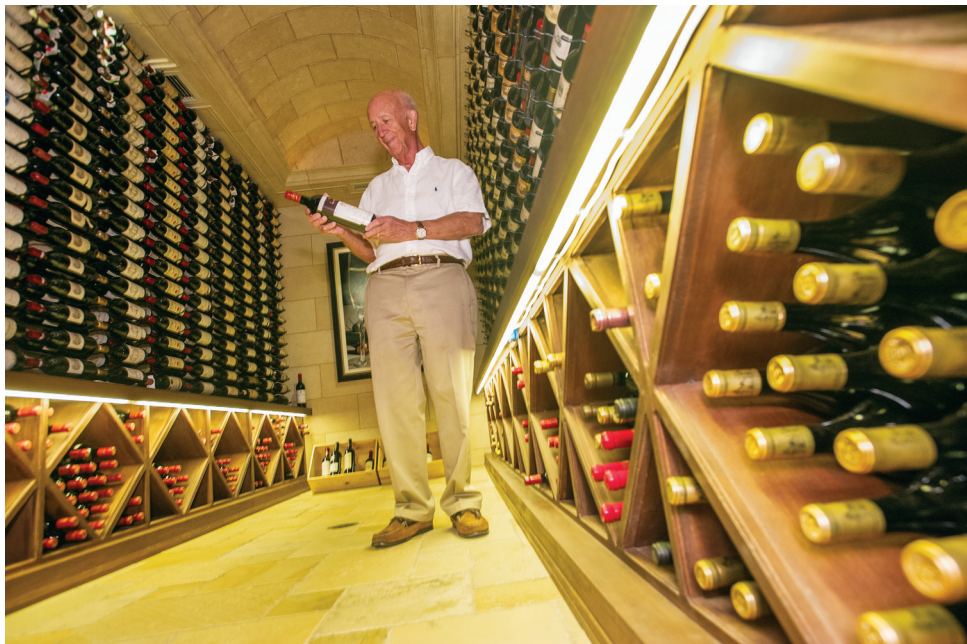
Bailey created a wine cellar that is viewed through transparent glass walls, that slowly slide open by a concealed remote control to enter the 55-degree F room. Every aspect of temperature and humidity is consistently monitored. A back-up generator ensures the controlled conditions in the cellar will never be interrupted, even in the case of power loss.

Inside the wine cellar, graceful domed ceilings arch over each of the three sections to continue the appearance of separate galleries. Rows of bottles many laid horizontally to reveal the label, fill custom-crafted racks stretching from the floor to the domes. Stone imported from Italy covers the floor and subtle light illuminates the collection. Not a single detail was missed.

The tasting room, somewhat reminiscent of a modern-day castle, adjoins the

Top: The magnificent wine cellar of Don and Cheri Bailey. **Below:** Don Bailey enjoys a glass of wine in his custom-designed tasting room with a view of the wine cellar.

Left: Graceful domed ceilings, handcrafted shelves and Italian stone decorate the Bailey's wine cellar. **Below:** An historical bottle opener still functions in the well-appointed tasting room.



cellar on the other side of the glass wall. The room seats 24 guests for dinner with the wine cellar as a backdrop. Wine lovers, wine collectors, and vintners and distributors of wine, as well as sommeliers, frequent Bailey's tasting room to introduce, taste and share new wines. Bailey also uses the space to entertain members of his wine clubs and gourmet dining groups. It's in continual use; family and friends spend time in this comfortable and accommodating room on a regular basis.

The detailing and appointments of the tasting room are stunning. Dark oak paneled walls detailed with exquisite molding cover the 70- by 30-foot area. The wainscot of the tasting room is made of bookmark walnut paneling, which Bailey admits is difficult to find. Oil paintings of wine bottles resembling still-life portraits by one of the great masters are placed throughout the area, including in the cellar. The paintings, by artist Thomas Arvid, formerly of Livonia and now of Charlotte, N.C., project an almost photographic quality.

A long, suspended staircase becomes a dramatic architectural feature leading to the cellar's circular foyer. Although an elevator is available, most people prefer the experience of the serpentine staircase. Coffered ceilings high in the tasting room create an inviting, cozy atmosphere in an otherwise large space. The fireplace, finished with imported Italian tile, brings welcoming warmth any time of the

year. But when you enter the tasting room, it's still the wine cellar that takes your breath away.

Bailey also houses a bar and kitchen in a corner of the tasting room. "We don't use it much, but you never know," Bailey says with a shrug. Countertops of petrified wood overlay the ebony bar enclosing the kitchen. It includes a full-size refrigerator, large icemaker, dishwasher, two sinks and two convection ovens, just in case.

Storage behind some of the paneling opens with a touch to reveal hundreds of wine glasses. Bailey says, "At a wine tasting party or a dinner, if you serve 10 wines for 20 people, you must have at least 200 glasses." To address this situation, his Meiko brand dishwasher cleans glasses in 90 seconds, keeping each protected from chips or scratches in a four-sided compartment. According to Bailey, "Each wine must be poured into a pristine glass."

He related a story about a fine restaurant where the sommelier twirled ice cubes inside the glass, presumably to chill it before pouring the wine. At that point Bailey said, "Please get me a new glass before you pour the wine. The water left by the ice will dilute the vintage; I want the pure, unadulterated taste of the wine." He also advises sniffing the inside of the glass in a restaurant before filling it because the glass may have a chlorine or soapy odor that will interfere with the wine's bouquet and

acidic balance.

Bailey started collecting wine in the 1970s as he acquired an interest in cooking. "It seemed natural to think about pairing wine to complement the food courses," Bailey said. To become a wine collector, or even a connoisseur, Bailey advises developing a good palette. "Some people, like my wife, are born with it; but most of us have to cultivate discriminating taste."

He advises against collecting wine for aging or investment purposes until "you have developed your palette to know what you like. When you start to drink wine, the palette typically progresses from sweet whites to rich reds and, by the time a wine reaches maturity, you may no longer enjoy it.

"The way to collect wine is to find a good value, such as a \$35 bottle of wine that tastes like a \$135 bottle. Attend wine tastings to cultivate your palette. Opportunities are everywhere if you look for them; country clubs, distributors, wine stores and even the Capital Grille have wine tastings that help you develop your knowledge of wine." Bailey's collection comes predominantly from France, Italy, Spain, Australia and California.

Bailey is a knowledgeable man with an equally keen wit. When asked to name his favorite wine he said, "I like two wines: red and white." **NS**