

SML-Uncorked



The Wine Newsletter of Supermarket Liquors
Fort Collins, Colorado

Special Issue, August 2006

Storing Your Wine

by Steve Kershner

It makes good sense to purchase wine by the case. First, you can save 10% or more, especially when on sale. Secondly you will always have a handy supply to draw upon when unexpected guests arrive at your door, or when the expected guests stay later and drink more than expected. You won't ever have to run out at the last minute for a bottle or two. Also, having wines that will improve with age at home will add some value to them as they mellow and gain added complexity and bouquet. As wine ages the tannins soften, flavors integrate and the wine becomes more complex, more multi-dimensional, more delicious tasting. The value I am referring to is not added to the dollar tag, like an interest-bearing account, but to the inherent beauty of the product itself, as the true value of wine is in its flavor and food enhancing ability.

Most modern white wines are ready to drink upon release from the winery. There are exceptions though, like fine estate-bottled German Riesling, Sauternes from Bordeaux, many of the finer white Burgundies, Champagnes, upper level Alsatian whites, and a few others here and there which greatly benefit from several years or more of cellaring. Most other whites will drink very well at three or four years from the vintage, or less. Careful selection, and/or very good advice is required to select wines that will stand the test of time if you plan to put them away for a special anniversary or occasion, say longer than ten years. The white wines that will survive this length of time in cellar are few and specialized. *continued...*



"A house with a great wine stored below lives in our imagination as a joyful house, fast and splendidly rooted in the soul." - George Meredith



Storing Your Wine

Red wines have changed some through recent years, but many, excepting the cheaper, lighter versions, and those grape varieties and styles that are not expected to or intended to age, will be greatly enhanced from at least a few years of bottle age. Reds are commonly being made in a softer, riper, more lush style that requires less aging than most red wines needed even ten or fifteen years ago. But those wines with firmer acidity and tannins will really blossom with five or more years in a good cellar.

So you just purchased a case or two of some of your favorite wines, but now where and how to store them? Some collectors and wine businesses have temperature and humidity controlled “vaults” for the safe keeping of their products. Elaborate to be sure, and much more than any but the most serious collector will ever need.

Yet wine is a living thing, constantly changing in bottle, and subject to harm if not properly stored and cared for, much like fresh food produce, where shelf life is greatly influenced by storage conditions. There are a few simple criteria that should be met in the home or apartment to ensure that your bottles do not suffer the consequences of a hard life while waiting to be consumed.

KEEP THEM COOL

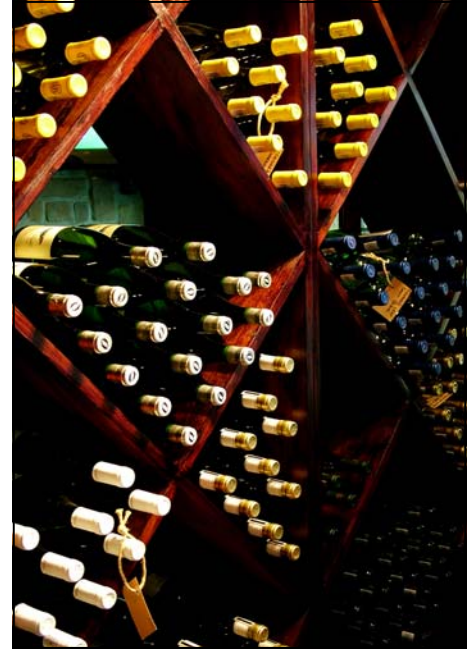
The best storage place for you wine will probably be the coolest spot in your castle, aside from the refrigerator or freezer. It should be and area that maintains a temperature around 58 degrees much of the time, or as close to that as is possible. It is also important that your wine storage area does not fluctuate much in temperature either rapidly or widely. It is much better for the wines if they are stored either a little too warm, or a bit cooler than the optimum, so long as it is fairly steady. You will not want to have wide swings through the day, or through the year as the seasons change, as a constant, consistent temperature is preferable to the stressful and damaging swings. Large fluctuations stress a wine to where it will not remain youthful as long and will not reach as high a peak of development. Temperature changes also cause the corks to expand and contract thereby running the risk that wine will leak from the bottle and oxygen enters spoiling (oxidizing) the wine.

KEEP THEM DARK

Prolonged exposure to either the sun or strong light can “bleach” the wine of both color and flavor.

KEEP THEM STILL

Frequent movement, rattling or constant vibration are stressful to wine and these conditions should be avoided.



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KEEP THEM LAYING DOWN

If the wines have cork closures and long term storage is required, the bottles should be laying on their sides. This helps to keep the corks moist and the closure air tight, helping to prevent leaking and air getting into the wine and causing oxidation. Screw cap closures and synthetic/plastic “corks” can be stored either standing or laying down.



So that’s about all there is to it: COOL, DARK, LAYING DOWN and UNDISTURBED. There are probably a few decent places in most any home that will fit the minimum parameters for a wine storage area. The amazing thing to me is that most of the time when I see wine stored in peoples’ homes they are stored in the absolute worst of locations. How often do we see a wine rack on top of the refrigerator- it’s hot, usually well lit and constantly vibrating. How about in the living room in a very elegant looking wine rack, lovely as fine furniture, where the room temperature hovers around 75 degrees or more, sunshine blasting in the window on the wines.

Look around your home. The bottom of most closets in the interior or on the north side of the house will work for a small, shorter-term space. Maybe under the kitchen counter tucked away in the back of one of the cabinets would work. If you have a below ground basement this can be the nearly ideal spot with a small bit of transformation. Even garden level closets or under stair casings can provide suitable cellar locations with cooler, more constant conditions. There are many possibilities for storing a few bottles of wine. In the end it will save money, time, and may even give you a bit of self-satisfaction in knowing that you have a bit of wine tucked away. You can then brag to your friends and neighbors about the “wine cellar” in your castle.

I understand why people will hesitate about storing a bit of wine: we tend to move around a lot; temperature controlled units are scarce and can be very expensive; most people do not know one wine from another as far as aging potential. Certainly not all wines are created equal when it comes to their life curve, and a bottle that is aged into senility, a madeirized or oxidized mess, is a useless waste. How then will you know which wines will age and which will not, especially as wine styles continue to change on the production end, and many wines, even the richer reds are made in a style that is far more ready and approachable when young. Taste first and let your palate and preferences be your guide, and always ask for advice from an experienced professional.



Please contact the staff at Supermarket Liquors for any questions concerning your wine cellar. We offer complete wine cellar services:

- *personally selecting wines for your palate and lifestyle
- *recommendation and guidance for cellar locations in your home
- *cellar arrangement and set-up
- *wine evaluations
- *referrals to cellar construction contractors