

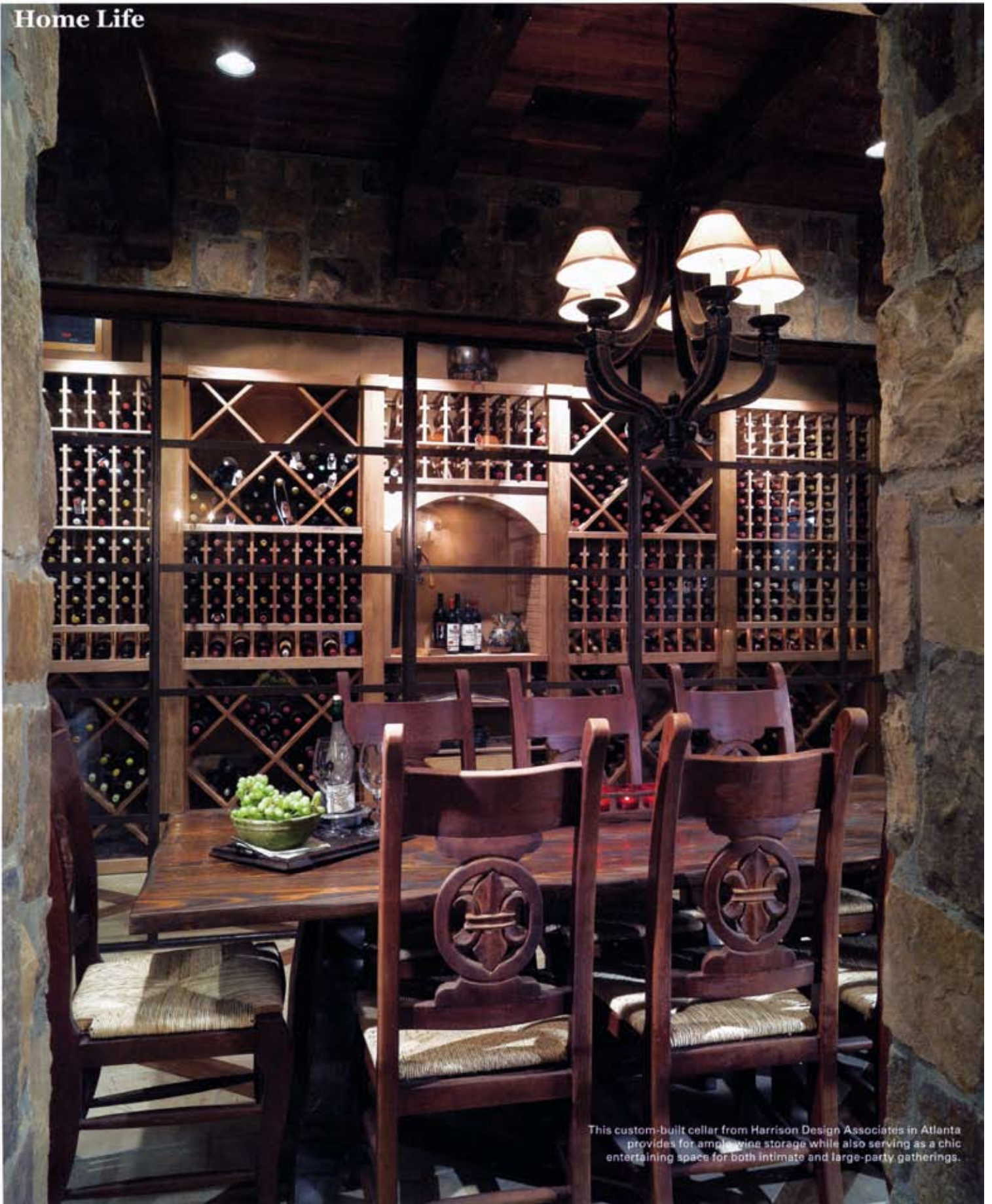
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This custom-built cellar from Harrison Design Associates in Atlanta provides for ample wine storage while also serving as a chic entertaining space for both intimate and large-party gatherings.

Best Cellars

TR's underground exploration of custom-built wine storage from the ground up.

By JP Thornton

Thanks to technological innovations and a variety of storage and cellaring options, at-home wine collecting is now a thriving pastime, especially among members of the well-heeled, many of whom associate an exceptional bottle of wine with the finer things in life and are armed with an above average knowledge of viticulture. Tapping into this spirited enthusiasm and growing trend (one that shows no signs of dissipating), builders, designers and architects of custom-designed and constructed wine cellars are giving discerning collectors with grape expectations even more incentive to amass their favorite libation by crafting functional and intricate wine cellars in which to house them. With the help of Bill Harrison, AIA, of the Atlanta-based Harrison Design Associates, and Erik Kuehne with Wine Cellar Innovations serving clients throughout Georgia and beyond, *TR* explores the world of luxury wine cellars and discovers several compelling reasons to start construction.

On average, the larger and increasingly detailed a cellar is, the more vast and discriminating its collection. The sheer scale of many cellars explains a great deal about the profile of the current market buyer, which varies according to our experts, but is typically an affluent and educated professional. Though advances in wine storage have made cellaring possible for people of all demographics with a variety of different residences, custom-built wine cellars, such as the ones featured in this article, are still considered a luxury, one usually reserved for those with the monetary means to build them.

Harrison attributes the growing public demand for cellaring to not only the number of quality storage and racking options, but also the wide acceptance of wine as an increasingly everyday beverage. "Americans are finally adopting the European practice of serving wine as an essential element of the formal and informal dining experience," he says.

Aspects of Building

Prior to building a custom-built cellar, Harrison advises prospective buyers to consider creating one as part of a new construction project or renovation, when access to crucial mechanical and electrical systems is easily accessible. After all, Kuehne adds, "If someone

is interested in truly exploring wine, refrigerated wine storage is a must." Other considerations prior to the start of construction must include collection type and space. Are you an entertainer most concerned with the social aspect of cellaring? If so, you may require a separate tasting area. Or are you what Harrison terms a "serious collector," requiring advanced storage configurations? Aesthetics are also important. Will you need space to display collectibles other than wine, such as books, tasting journals or glasses, all of which help create an environment rather than a compartmentalized utility space where function is its only purpose?

Determining the right locale also is imperative. Harrison recommends that serious collectors build cellars in a "low traffic area to minimize vibration," and advises casual collectors to situate their cellars with accessibility and frequent entertaining in mind, such as adjacent to a main living space. "All of these considerations will help you customize your cellar for long-term functionality and enjoyment," he says.

Finally, factor in budget and bottle count. "Budget may dictate many things, including design options and even [the] position of the wine cellar," Kuehne explains. "Bottle count can also dictate how much room will be necessary." He adds that, on average, prospective buyers of a custom-built, 1,500-bottle wine cellar—which includes build-out, racking and refrigeration—can reasonably expect to spend between \$30,000 and \$40,000. Estimations for smaller, custom-built cellars range from \$5,000 to \$10,000, while approximates for mid-range cellars land between \$15,000 and \$30,000.

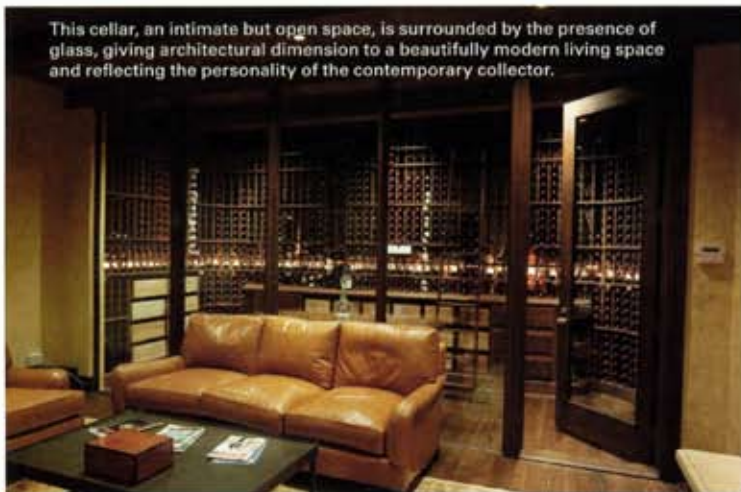
The Building Process

Many people believe they easily can handle construction of their own custom-designed cellars, but such an ambitious undertaking requires the careful eye and hand of seasoned professionals who have considered and attended to all facets of the process. Crucial components of wine storage include temperature average (cool temps slow the aging process), temperature stability (fluctuations in climate cause corks to contract) and humidity levels (which should be high, ideally at 50 percent to 80 percent, to help prevent cork-mildewing moisture). Low

Home Life



A unique combination of function and artistry, this custom-built unit from Wine Innovations personalizes contemporary cellaring, seamlessly integrating into a modern luxury home, while also serving a utilitarian purpose.



This cellar, an intimate but open space, is surrounded by the presence of glass, giving architectural dimension to a beautifully modern living space and reflecting the personality of the contemporary collector.

vibration, limited rays of UV light and minimal chemical presence also are important. For these reasons, homeowners should seek the comprehensive assistance of professionals, like those with Harrison Design Associates or Wine Cellar Innovations, who are practiced in handling complex projects and their often overlooked details, the success of which hinge on experience and know-how.

In this vein, Harrison explains that even though it is important for clients to consult an expert, it is equally vital they be clear about their objectives, taking the time and steps to educate themselves about the building process in order to avoid common pitfalls associated with it (over-spending, poor use of space, etc.). They also should rely on experts to assist them in defining their ultimate goal, determining a cellar's overall design and executing it. Because collaboration is vital to the success of all cellaring projects, it is important that all contributing parties maintain a realistic view of what's possible within the boundaries and scope of the project and a particular standard of building. Understandably, a cellar's complexity usually will dictate members of the team, which may be small or extensive, involving a number of participants including architects, contractors, interior designers,

vintners and sommeliers, as well as racking or display manufacturers.

Working collaboratively yields many rewards, not the least of which is a balance between technological understanding and creative execution. "Wine incorporates multiple senses," Harrison says. "To enjoy the experience, a space must be inviting [and have] specific areas for proper preparation and presentation." Mechanically speaking, preservation and cooling systems require expert understanding and installation, but so, too, does artistry, which is why interior designers are vital to a successful group dynamic. In this respect, materials play a significant role in creating a cellar's overall style and commonly include wood, stone,

brick, iron and stucco—all of which yield a sense of historic authenticity, which is hardly surprising given wine's historical significance.

Selected materials should be based upon durability first and foremost. Harrison endorses the aforementioned materials, calling them ideal for their protection against rot. Indeed, they are able to withstand the cold, humid environments required for wine storage. When dealing with wood cabinetry, toughness cannot be overlooked. Kuehne says mahogany is a good option, commonly used for its aesthetic value, but also for its rot-resistant properties in cooler, humid conditions, and endorses redwood for its resiliency. Walnut, pine and oak are also popular.

Cellaring Options

The choices are limitless. Harrison breaks down wine storage into four basic categories: racks, refrigerators, cabinets and cellars, all of which store wine on its side to prevent the cork from drying and ruining the wine it helps age. Wine caves are another option. Located underground, they depend on the earth's natural temperature to chill wines in lieu of the mechanical cooling systems used in traditional cellaring. If interested in the latter, Kuehne cautions, "Building a true wine cave is difficult in Georgia unless one lives on the side of a mountain. True, consistent 55-degree temperature is at least 10 feet below grade. Below [that] usually brings issues with the water table."

Regardless of what wine storage option is right for you, one thing is abundantly clear: The growing thirst for local cellaring proves once and for all that Atlanta is becoming an increasingly savvy wine populous. Harrison points to a very good reason: Southern hospitality. "Atlanta has attracted some of the finest restaurants and gourmet stores in the country," he says. "The tremendous popularity of wine dinners and tastings has converted our iced tea-loving city into a haven for savvy hosts who understand and want to share the joys of wine with friends. Armed with that bit of inarguable logic, *TR* happily toasts Atlanta! ▶