

# L'ESQ

luxury lifestyle magazine

## SUMMER DREAMS

Fashion, Ferraris and fast boats, what could be better when lazing on a sunny afternoon

### TAKE A BOW

Are wheels good, or wheels better?

### PANERAI CLASSIC

Summer sails have a different meaning in the South of France

### LOOK EAST

Turkey's bid to steal some Riviera style glamour



# WINE CELLARS

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AUTHOR: THE  
SPIRAL CELLARS  
GUIDE TO  
BUYING WINE

**Well over 75 per cent of the wine bought in the UK is consumed within 24 hours of purchase. I suspect that most of the remaining 25% spends a few weeks in the fridge or a wine rack, at most. But a small yet increasing percentage of wine is bought to keep. More and more of us like the idea of 'cellaring' our own wine.**

It's easy to see why. At a time when society seems to value immediacy above all else, wine is one of the few things that is capable of changing for the better over time. Great bottles can last for decades or even centuries. There's something very moving about tasting a wine bought to commemorate an anniversary or a birthday, never mind one that was produced before the Second World War.

Some wines take to the ageing process better than others. Reds with plenty of tannin, such as Barolo, red Bordeaux and Port, are obvious candidates, as are top Rhônes and really good Burgundy. The Mediterranean offers us Tuscan wines such as Brunello di Montalcino, Chianti Classico and the so-called SuperTuscans, the best Spanish reds. Even New World wines can be suitable candidates: Australian Shiraz, Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon and a handful of South American and South African reds.

How long should you wait? It's partly

down to personal taste but there are what are known as 'optimum drinking windows' for most wine styles. Leave it too long and the wine will become brown; drink it too early and it will seem gawky and unfinished.

White wines that age well are rare. However, the most age-worthy grape varieties are Chardonnay, especially from top sites in the Burgundian appellations, Riesling, mainly from Germany but also from Australia, Alsace and Austria, Chenin Blanc, particularly from the Loire Valley and Semillon from Australia. I'd also include the fortified wines of Sherry and Madeira, both of which are made from white varieties and can age for a century or more and Champagne.

However, the first and most important rule is to buy what you like to drink unless you are buying solely for investment purposes. The most interesting cellars are the ones that reflect the personality and prejudices of the owner rather than those of a given wine writer or wine merchant.

A good cellar should include wines for a variety of occasions, from a neighbour popping in for a quick drink to a smart dinner party. I try to have a selection of ready-to-drink wines close at hand, as well as wines that are maturing.

A friend's father has the right idea about wine. He labels every bottle in his cellar with one of three tags to direct his children towards certain wines: 'You can drink this', 'I'd rather you didn't drink this' and 'This is your inheritance'.

In the absence of a relative like that, how do you know when a wine is at its peak? The best way to find out is to pull the cork. That's why I'd advise you to buy at least six bottles of a chosen wine, so that you can see how a wine develops over time.

Obviously in the UK, the wine market is dominated by the supermarkets but the so-called multiple grocers don't specialise in wines to keep. That said, they are making increasingly bold forays into the fine wine market; the likes of Sainsbury's, Tesco, Waitrose, Booths and Marks & Spencer all sell wines that wouldn't look out of place in the smartest cellar. It's especially worth looking at their on-line selections, where they tend to list small parcels.

The high street sector is having a tough time of it at the moment because of high rents, the growing power of the

supermarkets and a dwindling consumer base. Majestic is the leading name in the high street, although Oddbins, Nicolas and Thresher's/Wine Rack have some good wines too.

If you're serious about developing a wine collection, don't overlook the UK's splendid array of independent wine merchants. These companies aren't the cheapest places to buy a bottle of £3.99 Aussie Chardonnay but they often specialise in a particular region or country and can provide bespoke advice. Their wine lists are also a very good, and usually free source of information.

Temperature fluctuation is the single biggest problem for wine as it ages. Wine can cope with a certain amount of heat or cold but not extremes of both. Wines like a certain amount of humidity but not too much or the labels can turn mouldy. If you have a cool, deep cellar, then you're very fortunate. But where should you keep it otherwise?

There are a number of alternatives. If you don't have a lot of wine, one option is a Eurocave which is rather like a large fridge without the vibration, another thing that is detrimental to wine quality in the long term. Capacities range from 38 to 206 bottles.

If you're serious about wine, a Spiral Cellar works out as the best value option in the long run. These are installed on site and come in a variety of sizes. The Spiral Cellar is effectively a downwards extension. Think of it as a kind of honeycomb made out of pre-cast concrete modules that act as wine bins as well as part of the cellar's structure. It requires no heating or cooling and is ideal for wine storage, being cool (10°-12°C), humid and vibration free.

Another possibility is to store your wine with a professional bonded warehouse company such as Octavian, although the costs can add up if you store a lot of wine over a long period of time.

If you don't want to splash out on any of these options, the 'least worst' alternative is to store your wine under the stairs or at the back of a cupboard. Wherever you put them, wines should be stored horizontally, so that the corks stay wet and non-porous. Remember two things: watch out for nearby radiators and pipes and try not to expose your wines to direct sunlight. Otherwise, there's always the fridge. ■

