

# AND MORTAR

## CELLARS ARE A REAL BONUS

Bespoke wine vaults are the perfect home for any spare cash, writes Damian Barr

THE SUPER-RICH are different from the rich, as anyone reading about the divorce of Mr and Mrs Abramovich will have noticed. Will she get £1.5 billion or just £150 million? The townhouse or the super-dacha in West Sussex? Oenophiles will be wondering who will win custody of the extensive and expensive wine collection that the couple doubtless possess.

"We have noticed a growing demand for homes with wine cellars," says Lucy Russell, managing director of Quintessentially Estates. The bespoke wine cellar is the latest status room. "Many of our clients travel extensively and some own vineyards," she says. "They eat at all the best restaurants and want their home, or homes, to be just as good. Wine is a big part of that. A wine cellar is a big bonus, especially for those with big bonuses. Buyers at that end of the market are always looking for that extra edge."

She adds: "In London, big white stucco-fronted Georgian townhouses usually have a wine cellar, if it hasn't been converted into a basement flat. Sometimes you stumble across them in Notting Hill. It's mostly men who want them."

One cellar she knows of is the ultimate underground bachelor pad — it includes a humidifier and gun safe. Lined in a combination of wet wenge and antique "gun case" leather, it has a limestone floor and mahogany racks that are designed to take vintage magnums and jeroboams.

Alex Michelin, director of Finchatton, a property company, says: "In some circles the £50 bottle of wine is now quite standard. If you spend lots on wine, you want to show it off. Wine cellars have graduated from being a damp, dark room in the basement to a well-designed, well-lit space where people actually want to spend time."

"We are currently working on installing a 4,000-bottle wine cellar in a 5,000 sq ft flat in Chelsea. The client wants a space where guests can relax and taste wines at their leisure. We created a glass-fronted room lit with fibre optics. The wine is housed in shelves of beautifully carved black Makassar ebony. Each area — white, red, dessert and champagne — is

temperature and humidity-controlled. The cellar is bigger than most bedrooms."

What about the cost? "An existing cellar can be converted for as little as £15,000," says Michelin. "We've done a few for £150,000. Planning permission is usually required. Conversions are usually faster than new-build and take around three months."

Ray Bowden is chairman of the Wine Society and has about 3,000 bottles of wine in his collection. "It's irreplaceable, but I suppose the cost of doing so would be around £30,000," he says. "In our previous home we converted the coal hole. When we last moved, in the early 1990s, we had difficulty finding a cellar." Finally he and his wife bought a detached 1920s house in North London. Without a cellar.

He now has two cellars, both installed by the Spiral Cellar Company. "A builder quoted

'There is a growing demand for homes with wine cellars'

£40,000 to dig a wine cellar. I got two Spiral Cellars for a quarter of that price." A Spiral Cellar is basically a concrete cylinder containing a spiral staircase surrounded by wine bins.

"They dug a cylindrical hole, made it watertight and assembled it like Lego. It took a week and I didn't need planning consent. I just lift the door and walk down — it can't fall shut and lock, but if it did I'd be all right with a corkscrew."

A mini Spiral Cellar can store up to 770 bottles and costs from £7,000. A large Spiral Cellar can store up to 1,600 bottles — prices are on application and depend on finish.

"The Spiral Cellar allowed us to buy a house we liked," says Bowden. "Otherwise we wouldn't have bought it — that's how important having a cellar is to me."

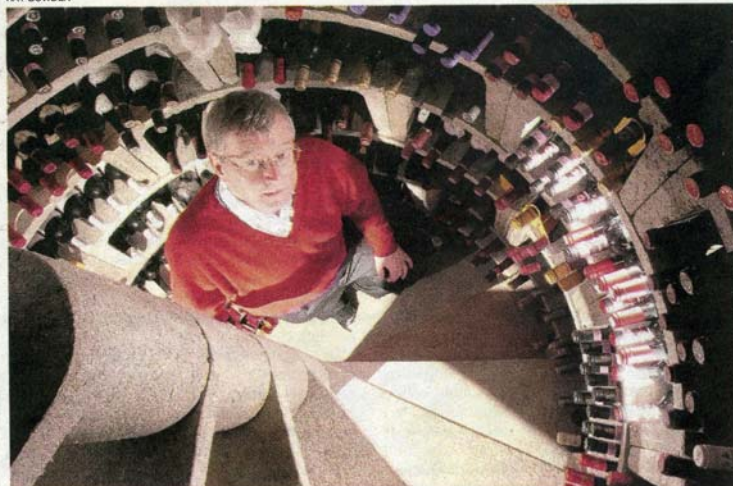
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RAY BOWDEN



Well-rounded: Ray Bowden installed two Spiral Cellars for his extensive wine collection