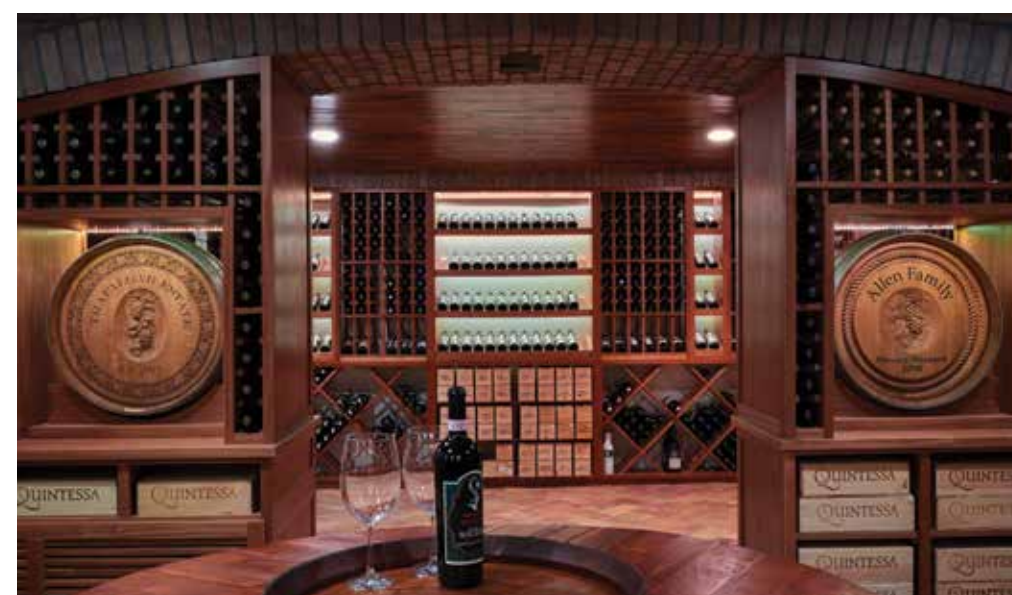


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Stellar Storage

Blasting through bedrock, an oenophile creates a home for his extensive wine collection. *By Lauren Payne*

Robb Allen had been collecting wine for years, but rarely opened a bottle. Instead, he kept his collection of nearly 4,000 bottles in a wine and fur-storage center in Jersey City.

“For about a decade, I mostly collected and didn’t take much out,” says Allen. “I grew my collection by forced denial. I couldn’t get to it.”

That changed in 2015, when Allen and his wife, along with their two children, Haley, 17 and Collin, 11, moved into a 12,000-square-foot home on a hill in Tenafly. The hallmark of the new house: A 600-square-foot wine cellar in the basement.

The sprawling stone structure—set in lush natural landscaping—has just the traditional look that Allen had in mind. “I didn’t want anyone to be able to figure out if it was built yesterday or 100 years ago,” he says.

Allen, founder and CEO of DataPipe, a global technology

company, worked alongside Curtis Dahl and Joseph Kline, owners of Joseph & Curtis Custom wine cellars, to design the space. Allen is particularly fond of Italian wines, so the team created a Tuscan masterpiece with a barreled ceiling, terra cotta floors, brick niches and wrought iron. “I wanted that feeling of age and history,” Allen says.

Since much of Tenafly sits on bedrock (the same rock cliffs that line the Hudson River extend westward underground, Allen explains) the first step was significant excavation. “We dynamited massive amounts of rock,” Allen says. As a plus, the remaining rock creates a cool sub-floor, helping to maintain the cellar’s temperature around the 56-degree mark. (The rock works naturally with the elaborate climate control system installed behind cabinet doors.)

Materials were chosen to emulate old-world Italy. The rich mahogany barreled ceiling is intended to mimic wine barrels and is finished with actual staves. Dividing the two rooms are custom-made wine barrels hand-carved with the name of the family and the street where the house sits. The tasting table and

me,” he says. Allen primarily collects Italian wines from the Piedmont region of Northern Italy. His favorite: Soldera. He also has a significant collection of French Bordeaux and even a few California wines. He admits to being popular among friends and family. “My friends are more than happy to share my collection,” he jokes.

The Allens are still putting finishing touches the home, despite having moved in more than a year ago. In fact many rooms are largely unfurnished, including the 10-seat theater room and the home gym, other features of the sprawling basement level. The wine cellar stands alone, finished. “This house is still a work in progress,” says Allen, “but the wine cellar is complete. I’m passionate about this wine and this cellar. This is my baby.”

RESOURCES

LED Lighting Design and Installation, Managed Home Systems, Randolph, 973-400-2650. Managedhomesystems.com.

Keep it Safe

Curtis Dahl, owner, with partner Joe Kline, of Mountainside-based Joseph & Curtis Custom Wine Cellars, offers these tips on wine storage:

- The majority of wines made today are “ready to drink”—especially the less expensive ones—and should be consumed within 6 to 12 months of bottling. Red and especially white wines that are made to improve with age will only do so with the proper storage.

- For optimum storing and aging, wine should be housed in an area where the temperature stays in the 55- to 60-degree range. It is ideal for white wines to be stored at the lower limit of this range.

- Wine bottles should always be stored either horizontally, at a 45-degree angle with the cork facing down, or somewhere in between. This will keep the wine in constant contact with the cork ensuring no air gets into the bottle.

- Store wines away from other foods or liquids with strong aromas so those aromas are not absorbed. (One terrible culprit: vinegar!)

- If you don’t want to invest in a wine cellar, wine can be stored in a passive space—like a basement—that hovers around 55-degrees. Track the highs and lows before committing to storing wine this way. If it fluctuates too much, a wine fridge is your best bet.

For more information, consult Joseph & Curtis Custom Wine Cellars, 888-681-5888; josephandcurtis.com

stools are from Napa Valley; the stools are made from actual wine barrels.

LED lighting illuminates the space in a spectrum of colors from red to purple to blue, and, importantly, protects the wine from exposure that can cause spoilage. “Bottles are dark so as not to expose the wine to light, but getting the right lighting is important,” Allen says. Another safekeeping measure—Allen has a generator that kicks in if power fails.

Although there is plenty of room to store all the wine in racks, Allen keeps some in wooden boxes. “Some of the boxes are really beautiful,” he says.

Allen continues to grow his collection. “My love of wine came first from my love of food,” he says. In fact, much of his knowledge of wine was learned while dining at his favorite restaurant, Manhattan’s Del Posto. “The sommelier there really educated

Photographs by MICHEL ARNAUD