



CellarSelect

Whether collecting wine is your hobby or obsession,
two in-home cellars meet the particulars

BY ALI BASYE PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX HAYDEN

Washingtonians are a wine-loving people. But when it comes to holding on to the stuff, the majority of us settle for a dinky accordion rack on top of the refrigerator, or, more likely, can't even keep a bottle in the house long enough for it to actually collect dust.

There are discriminating souls, however, who, for a variety of reasons—love of entertaining, frustration with jacked-up prices on restaurant wine lists, borderline obsessive behavior—take the whole collecting bit to a higher plane, building separate quarters for their prized collections. A mere decade ago, a personal wine cellar was a luxury reserved for grand country estates, whose regal owners kept matching mastiffs and a butler named Chauncey. Today, whether making use of an existing, underused room or creating one with detailed designs and specifications, wine cellars are no longer just for the *crème de la crème*.

There are generally two kinds of collectors: the gatherers, obsessed with amassing, dutifully filling the gaps in their collection and forever hunting for the next great bottle; and the others, who just really like good wine.

The Bellevue couple who designed an Italian-themed wine cellar fall in the latter category. John and Cheri (who asked that we not print their last names) live in a playful multitiered home surrounded by horse farms and a forest. When they decided to utilize an unfinished laundry room and build an elegant cellar to store their mostly Northwest and California wine collection, they approached the challenge with the same sense of fun and whimsy that defines the rest of their home.

The existing architecture was ideal for such a venture. Built into a sloping landscape, the crawl space under the house keeps the 8-by-13-foot cellar naturally cool. Tutmarc Associates Architects in Kirkland was hired for the remodel, which included an arched, grotto-like ceiling, slate tiles and cedar shelving for about 500 bottles.

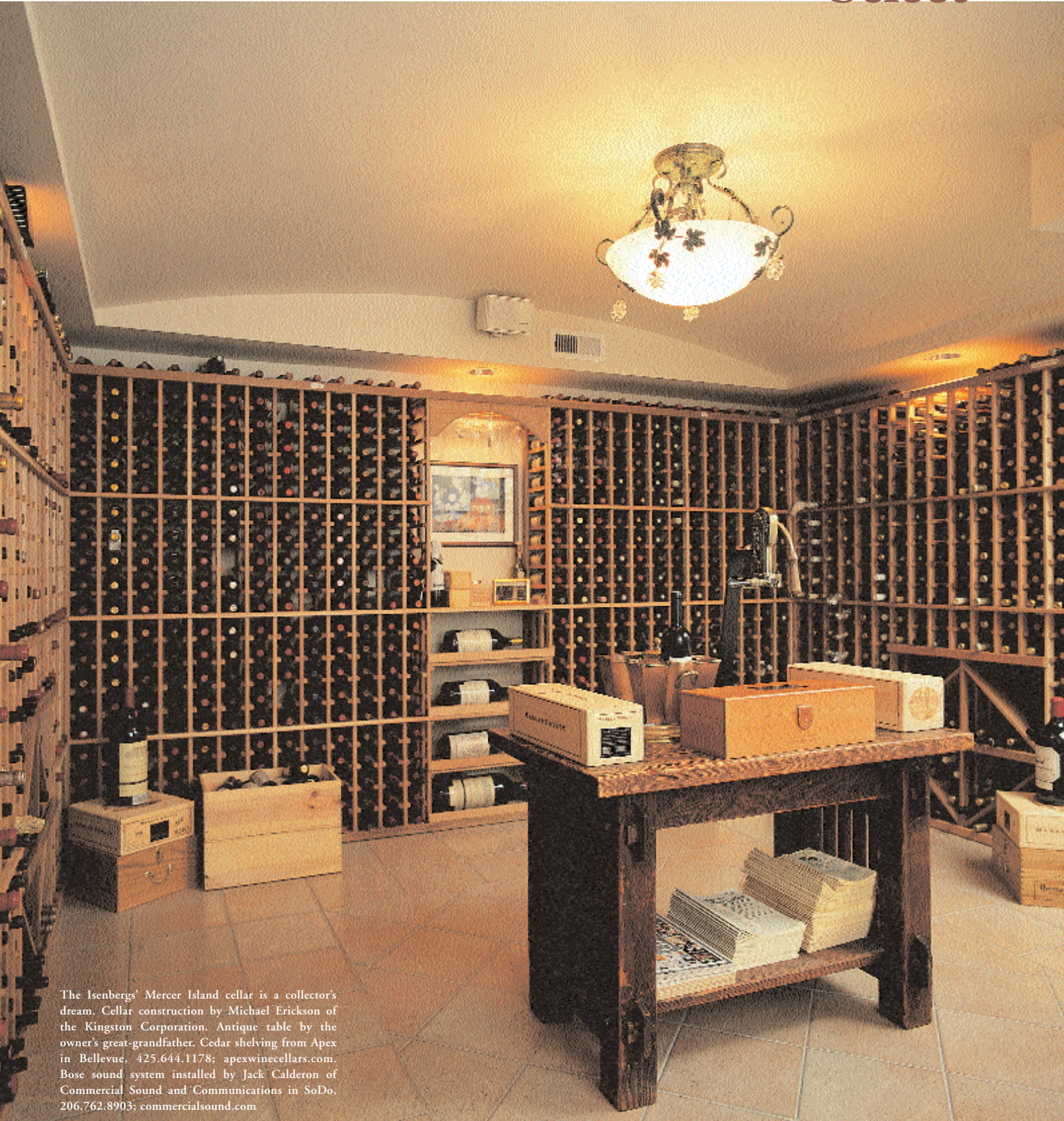
"We really wanted to bring in a sense of Tuscany," Cheri says of the full-scale trompe l'oeil mural they commissioned from Joel Nilsen and Janet Brelsford of Poulsbo. The idyllic, sunrise-sky scene shows rolling Italian vineyards from a trellised patio. The detail is meticulous: An actual existing water faucet was painted into the image to look like an old-fashioned, metal pump. The finished work was so convincing that one of their grandchildren mistook the two-dimensional scene for the real thing and briefly sported a serious goose egg.





John and Cheri's Bellevue wine cellar brings a bit of Tuscany to the Eastside, and makes a great place for a morning latte. Construction by Tutmarc Associates in Kirkland, 425.827.6561. Mural by Joel Nilsen decorative arts in Poulsbo, 360.598.6001. Cedar shelving from Apex in Bellevue, 425.644.1178; apexwinecellars.com. "Raja" multicolor slate tile from Oregon Tile & Marble in Georgetown, 206.762.1858. Table and chairs were independently commissioned from Pilchuck artist Jill Bernard, who has since relocated to the East Coast. OPPOSITE PAGE: The view of the Tuscan mural from the cellar entrance

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The Isenbergs' Mercer Island cellar is a collector's dream. Cellar construction by Michael Erickson of the Kingston Corporation. Antique table by the owner's great-grandfather. Cedar shelving from Apex in Bellevue, 425.644.1178; apexwinecellars.com. Bose sound system installed by Jack Calderon of Commercial Sound and Communications in SoDo, 206.762.8903; commercialsound.com



FILLING THE CELLAR When their Tuscan dream cellar was finished, Bellevue wine collectors Cheri and John sought the help of Kevin Novack, owner of **d’Vine** (303 S River St.; 206.762.3232; d-vine.net), a wine consulting, retail and accessories business in Georgetown that opened earlier this year. Novack assists both beginners and seasoned wine vets in selecting wines to match their tastes, as well as introducing them to the new and unexplored.

“My clients already have the enthusiasm for wine,” Novack says, “so they’re eager to expand their palate but might find all the labels and pricing confusing or intimidating.” D’Vine is also a retail shop, so Novack doesn’t charge for the sometimes lengthy consulting service, unless he visits their home for a full cellar reorganization. At initial meetings, Novack asks his clients a lot of questions to get an idea of their palate, budget and consumption level. “I find out the needs of my customers and write down everything they order,” he explains, “and I call them when a good deal comes in—rare bottles or anything they’d like.” A.B.

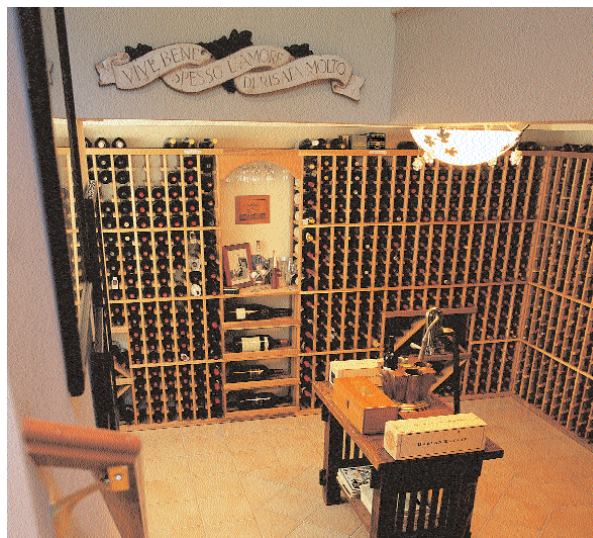
John and Cheri like to decorate with custom-made, one-of-a-kind furniture. Their chair and table, for instance, were created by Pilchuck alum Jill Bernard. Cheri admits that although the cellar isn’t used often for entertaining, she makes good use of the cool and quiet space with a morning latte and a book.

Then there are the gatherers. Dr. David Y. Isenberg likes to joke that he built a wine cellar and put a house on top of it. Get a look at his jewel of a room and the jest rings true. Isenberg is serious about his wine collection, a hobby that began about 12 years ago and has grown to about 2,000 bottles of mostly European wines, most of which were picked up during vacations, at auctions and from various retailers. His Mercer Island cellar is beautiful, a masculine haven balanced with soft color, graceful lines, dramatic lighting, piped-in stereo sound and lots of personal touches that serve as a testament to Isenberg’s love of family, friends, travel, faith and the grape.

The construction, finished three and a half years ago, was done by Mike Erikson of the Kingston Corporation, which built all the homes on the Isenbergs’ cul de sac. David worked closely with Erikson in planning the 14-by-14-foot cellar, digging 9 feet below ground to keep the room temperature naturally cool. A switchback staircase is capped with a glass door etched with entwined grapevines and an Italian inscription—*SALUTE RICCHEZZA AMORE E TEMPO PER POTERSELI* (TO HEALTH, WEALTH, LOVE AND THE TIME TO ENJOY THEM ALL). Next to the door is a mezuzah—a small case holding traditional Jewish blessing—with a grape/wine theme. Shelving along the stairwell serves as a showcase for the more impressive bottles quaffed

through the years—a Rothschild here, a Sauternes there—as well as baskets of corks and various wine trinkets and collectibles.

In the cellar, aromatics of cedar waft about even before one enters. Another Italian inscription, *VIVE BENE, SPESSO L’AMORE, DI RISATA MOLTO* (LIVE WELL, LOVE OFTEN, LAUGH A LOT), painted above the bottom doorway, serves as an Isenberg family motto. David’s wife, Lorna—the couple have two children, Kate, 14, and Jacob, 11—though a fan, doesn’t collect wine as David does, but says that she “loves that he has a hobby that he enjoys sharing.” The couple entertain often, and the cellar sees a lot of foot traffic, including David’s poker club of fellow oenophiles.



Lighting and shelving play an important part in the look of the room. The grape-themed lighting fixture is from a design catalog. Recessed lighting illuminates the rows of bottles, though David has found that having lights close to the top row produces too much heat, and therefore keeps them dimmed low. The cedar racking was custom-designed by David to suit the size of his collection and various bottle sizes, and installed

by his brother-in-law Michael Steiner, a master builder. Two cabinets feature big bottles, as well as favorite artwork, prints and keepsakes. The antique table is more than 100 years old and was made by James Davidson, Lorna’s great-grandfather. A tile floor, arched ceiling and framed maps of wine regions on the walls complete the cellar—and stellar—effect. 5