

How to be a cellar master

Just like great wines, great wine collections are products of passion, patience and favourable climatic conditions, writes **Michael Cave**.

Craig MacPhee started cellaring wine when he was 14 years old. He started with a 1976 bottle of Henschke Edelstone he bought in 1979 for \$2.70. He still has the bottle – though it's empty now – and as he turns it over in his hands, it takes him back to the day he opened it. "It wasn't a bad drink, from memory," says MacPhee, who these days oversees the preservation of about 240,000 bottles – not all of them his, of course – at MacPhee's Wine Cellarage. "And when I look at that price tag it still makes me smile."

That's the key to wine collecting. It's about having the vision, the patience and the self-control to invest in your future drinking pleasure. It's about being able to pull out a bottle that will transform a meal into a memorable occasion. And as MacPhee's \$2.70 investment shows, it doesn't necessarily require a lot of money.

But could you start a cellar for just \$1000? Anywhere else in the world it would be nigh on impossible but given the quality and the affordability of Australian wine, \$1000 would be enough to get you started. It might not be the ultimate collection of Aussie classics, but it would be a start.

So where do you begin?

Steve Creber, wine buyer for Dan Murphy, says the difficulty comes in balancing the need for volume with finding wines of sufficient quality to be worth putting down. "It is a pretty tight budget when you consider that three bottles of the current vintage Grange Hermitage would cost \$1000," Creber says. "But if the money is spent wisely, there's no reason you can't at least lay down the basis for a well-balanced cellar."

He recommends starting with four to five dozen bottles and a 3:1 red to white ratio because reds cellar so much better than whites and a good selection of quality whites is available straight off the shelf.

Melbourne-based specialist

wine retailer Randall Pollard says the key to establishing a cellar lies in generating some volume in your collection with cheaper wines so you don't start drinking the good stuff straight away.

"You've got to have a bit of greed to get the numbers up and then maintain it by taking some pride in your cellar," Pollard says.

"When you get to the point where you replace every bottle

you drink, you are keeping the collection topped up."

John Duvall worked for Penfolds for 28 years, including 16 as chief wine maker, responsible for (among others) Grange Hermitage.

He says the diversity of a \$1000 cellar would be limited – maybe six varieties. He points out the importance of taking care in storing your wine in a purpose-built wine cellar, a temperature-controlled wine cabinet or in commercial wine storage.

"People put a lot of thought into their financial investments and this should be the same – you are looking after your investment in your future drinking pleasure," Duvall says. "If you paid good money

