



Cool and collected

If you have a growing collection of fine wine, but have nowhere suitable to store it, JOSIE BUTCHART has a simple answer: get a wine cabinet

THAT precious case of Haut-Brion has been languishing under the stairs since it arrived from the bonded warehouse six weeks ago. The time to find a more permanent home, so it can mature and develop undisturbed, is long overdue. But finding the ideal spot for your wine at home can be a mind-bending exercise.

Most wine lovers would prefer to have at least some of their collection close at hand for spontaneous celebrations, but many modern houses don't have cellars, and with central heating systems all too pervasive, your best bottles won't last long unless a suitable location is found.

If a basement cellar isn't an option, a wine storage cabinet, complete with

temperature and humidity controls, is the next best thing. Such cabinets come in various sizes and are one of the more economical ways to create cellar conditions, making the most of any spare corner. Most can cope with ambient temperatures as low as -5°C , allowing any redundant areas, such as the garage, to be transformed for wine storage. The added advantage is that, unlike a wine cellar, you can take a cabinet with you when you move.

TEMPERATURE

The good news is that for long-term ageing, one storage temperature suits all types of wine. Think of a traditional stone cellar, where all the wine would be at one

immediately. Multi-temperature cabinets are also less suitable for garage locations as they need an ambient temperature of around 10°C.

CAPACITY

Make sure you plan ahead. Rather than buying a cabinet to hold the amount of wine you own now, try and estimate whether your collection is likely to grow, and at what rate. It is almost inevitable that once you have the perfect conditions for storing wine you will be encouraged to buy more. And before you know it your collection will have outgrown your cabinet.

'Considering the cost increments, it's better to buy a bigger cabinet than you need, and grow into it,' says Alpern. It is more cost effective to buy the right size at the outset as it's impossible to 'extend' a cabinet. And trade-in values can be low, due to transportation costs, along with the need for a complete check and reconditioning before the cabinet can be sold again under warranty.

It is also cheaper to buy one larger cabinet than two smaller models. A single-temperature cabinet from EuroCave's Classic range starts at around £1,100 for the 75-bottle capacity – but you can more than triple the size for a little extra with the 210-bottle capacity unit, from £1,500.

AESTHETICS

The location of your cabinet will be an important consideration when deciding on finishes and outer casing. If the cabinet is to be kept in a garage or utility room, then the appearance is something you could save money on. There are, though,

a huge range of designs available if you want a cabinet that will blend in with the furniture in your living room, in which case it's worth shopping around.

SHELVING

The interior of a cabinet can be fitted out to suit your needs. Most manufacturers offer a choice of shelving, allowing for a



ESSENTIAL FEATURES

TEMPERATURE: 10–14°C. Multi-temperature cabinets allow some wine to be kept at serving temperature. Temperature should be constant.

HUMIDITY: 50–80%. Keeps corks supple – excessive humidity can ruin labels.

CAPACITY/LAYOUT: from 40–1,000 bottles. Choose a cabinet with space for your collection to grow.

VENTILATION: Constant, external fresh air supply. Prevents unpleasant smells or fungal growth.

DARKNESS: Protection from UV rays. Light, especially ultraviolet, damages wine (through the oxidation of tannins).

INSULATION: Good insulation to reduce vibrations and improve energy efficiency. Vibration disturbs the biochemical development of wine.

temperature,' says Michael Alpern, director of Autour du Vin. Furthermore, some cabinets also offer a separate 'chilling section' for whites, or a section where red wines can be brought to room temperature in the cabinet. Essentially, though, this extra is unnecessary for most people and will reduce capacity in the main, long-term storage section.

'It's not so much the cost but the capacity penalty,' says Alpern. 'You won't always need 12 bottles chilled.' And, of course, if six spaces are lying empty in the chilling section, you have six fewer spaces for long-term storage, making the section only really worth considering if you need to have wine ready to drink



Left: Vinosafe AVR1P (125–150 bottles) from L'Amour du Vin Ltd; £1,613.

Above: Dometic CE48 (36 bottles) from Wineware and Wine Cellars (£1,122–1,469)

balance between convenience and capacity. Sliding shelves make it easier to find the bottle you are looking for, but stacking shelves will hold more wine. If you are a fan of a particular region or have a good collection of magnums, you might want shelves that are specifically designed to hold that size of bottle.

Another consideration is depth of shelving. 'Shelves designed to allow the necessary extra depth for tall wine bottles give a cabinet a far greater overall capacity,' says Roy Wilson of Vin-Garde Ltd. It is also →

