

Keeping cool in winter is the goal for homeowners who love fine wines

■ Recent Fairfax project shows how remodeler Michael Nash adapts wine cellars, challenging spatial configurations

BY JOHN B YRD
SPECIAL TO THE FAIRFAX COUNTY TIMES

Most people don't worry about keeping cool in the winter. But for a wine enthusiast, "a slight chill" is one of the essentials for storing prized varietals. Or so says Sonny Nazemian, president and founder of Michael Nash Kitchens and Homes, a firm that has installed wine cellar of every size and shape throughout Northern Virginia for over 15 years.

"Interestingly, the market for wine cellars has remained pretty constant locally," Nazemian observes. "Consumption of fine wines has grown steadily in Fairfax County for decades. At the same time, there is much more interest in gourmet cooking and, of course, pairing fine wines and foods."

A wine cellar like the one Nazemian and team recently completed in a spacious home in Fairfax, however, is not so much about storage as maintaining an environment where temperatures are consistently 58 to 62 degrees. The goal for the owner is to always have a sublime vintage, in stock, appropriately aged-- the



PHOTOS BY GREG HADLEY

Michael Nash Kitchens and Homes created this 13-by-12 wine storage facility for a homeowner in Fairfax. The room accommodates 1,400 bottles on lacquered mahogany racks and is spacious enough for a wine dinner seating 10 to 15 guests. A dedicated thermostat keeps wines temperatures at 58 to 62 degrees Fahrenheit.

perfect match for the wine dinner you've been dreaming about for years.

"Temperature control is critical to keeping wines drinkable over the years," Nazemian explains. "If wines are not kept properly, they can go bad. One of the satisfactions for collectors is procuring fine wines before they mature. When wines are cellared properly they age into a perfect expression of their best characteristics. This is when a wine becomes an exceptional complement to spe-

cific foods."

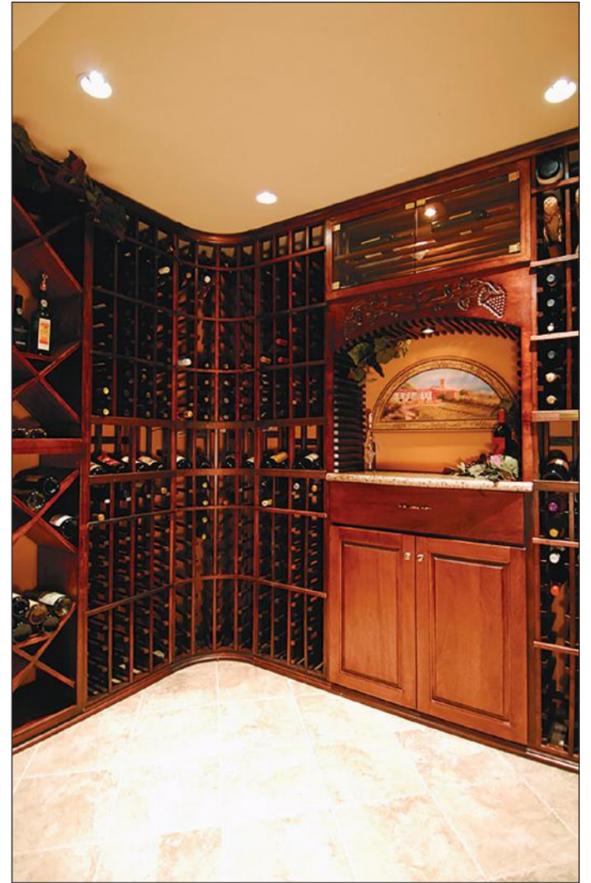
But not every house is optimally configured for a full-functional, state-of-the-art wine cellar.

A Fairfax homeowner Nazemian recently serviced originally thought he wanted a wine cabinet, and had researched several refrigerated cabinet options before deciding that there is just no substitute for a real wine cellar. Then, he decided he wanted a room spacious enough for the occasional soiree - enough room for 10 to 15 guests, for instance, dining on

shrimp and cheese, sampling chardonnay, comparing tasting notes.

As the dream's details coalesced, however, a practical question emerged: could the homeowner's two-level center hall colonial accommodate a wine cellar, and if so how? True, the home boasted a spacious lower level—partly finished—that featured an exercise area, a billiards parlor and a handsomely-appointed bar. It even made sense to have the

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The unfinished square footage converted into the wine cellar had previously been used for utilities. A hot water heater, furnace and sump pump occupied most of the available floor space. Designer Shawn Nazemian's detailed schematic rerouted several appliances - working around units that had nowhere else to go.

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5 bed, 4 bath

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wine cellar in the midst of all the recreational action.

The problem was that the unfinished part of the lower level was barely accessible. The hot water heater, furnace and sump pump—not to mention a tangle of ducting—obstructively claimed the targeted 170 square feet of unfinished basement as a virtual utility room. The walls in this portion of the lower level were exposed cinder block. Between the ductwork and the utility equipment, it was hard to find space for even a few loose crates—let alone 1,400 bottles.

Shawn Nazemian, the Michael Nash designer who executed the solution, recalls that space-planning was the real challenge:

“The most pressing feasibility issue was assessing how best to reconfigure the major infrastructure systems,” Shawn Nazemian explains. “Since over half of the lower level was already built-out, we needed a detailed schematic that would show us how to reposition most of the energy appliances—



While pleasing to the eye, the cellar’s frosted door is also an essential part of the thermally-efficient membrane that keeps temperatures and humidity consistent.

even working around units that had nowhere else to go. We also needed a practical way to route coolant drain-off—which is essential to a well-maintained cellar.”

Once alternative utility locations were identified, the designer’s next step was waterproofing and insulating the basement’s perimeter.

“A thermally-efficient membrane is essential to a wine cellar’s performance,” Shawn Nazemian says. “It’s important that the compressor – which is designed to keep temperatures and humidity consistent – won’t be over-tasked.”

To keep temperatures regulated, the cellar is equipped with its own thermostat. Humidity must remain in the 50 to 70 percent range with temperatures at about 58 to 62 degrees Fahrenheit. Even the cellar’s custom-designed frosted glass door is sealed to keep the cool air in.

To handle drainage needs, Shawn specified a “split cooling” system that ties in with the existing HVAC. The existing electrical system, however, proved adequate to all the new power needs.

Shelling in the 13-by-12 area designated for the cellar also required some unusually precise fabrications. The design team custom-fitted storage racks around mid-ceiling, bulk-heading created to re-route ducting and – as a final nod to the ambiance – faux-painted sections of the new ceiling to resemble wine barrels. On a similar note, they created access

to fixed utility units through a lacquered mahogany door undetectably integrated into the tasting room’s interior elevations.

Despite the expert craftsmanship underlying a space plan more intricate than it seems, the resulting facility is warmly inviting; a cozy spot for gathering with friends; a perfect complement to adjacent adult activity zones.

The cellar’s focal point is a granite “tasting table” with a barrel-carved edge set off by a lacquered backbar festooned with a carved grape and vine motif. The homeowner selected this decorative element, the floor tiling, the LED lighting and many other interior details in the Michael Nash show room in Fairfax.

“I’m told the cellar has really worked for holiday entertaining,” Sonny Nazemian says. “A New Year’s Day party is planned.”

For information call (703) 641-9800 or visit MichaelNash-Kitchens.com

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Worth the wait

Homebuyers save thousands in the off-season

Timing is everything, even in real estate.

Homebuyers in the nation’s densest metro areas could save thousands by purchasing a home in the off-season, according to a new analysis by NerdWallet. Sale prices fall an average of approximately three percent, or by \$8,300 on a median-priced home, September through November, the analysis found.

Sale prices, as well, tend to keep tracking downward through January and February. NerdWallet’s analysis, which dug into housing activity from the last two years as reported by Realtor.com, recognized an overall average declining trend of 8.45 percent, identifying January as the month with the most metros experiencing the lowest sale prices.

The most considerable drop-offs from summer (June through August) to fall were in three distinct markets: Hartford-West Hartford-East Hartford, Conn., Cleveland-Elyria, Ohio, and Birmingham-Hoover, Ala., according to the analysis. Sale prices in each fell around eight percent, or by \$20,417, \$11,450 and \$13,386, respectively.

In context, the median listing price in September is projected to be \$250,000, a new high for the month. Listing price, however, often differs from sale price - of the 50 metro areas NerdWallet analyzed, the difference between the median listing price and median sale price

averaged roughly \$17,000 from September to November. Given these findings, homebuyers this fall and winter can expect to have an advantage over sellers, even with record list prices.

Buyers in fall may also have leverage in terms of selection. Realtor.com forecasted the median age of listings in September at 77 days, five days more than in August. With listings longer on the market (and less buyers to compete with), those purchasing past the peak summer season could have the upper hand in negotiations.

Mortgage interest rates, additionally, remain low - though the Federal Reserve hinted at a benchmark rate hike this December. Homebuyers, for now, still have the opportunity to secure a low rate.

Overall, these signs - and now, significant savings - point to an off-season in favor of homebuyers.

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The holiday season is a great time to share the joys of togetherness and tradition. But for families whose aging relatives are showing signs of decline, the holidays can also be stressful and even, sad.

If you notice that a senior family member seems more overwhelmed than overjoyed during the holidays, then use this opportunity to pay close attention to signs of concern, such as depression or confusion. While family is all together, talk among yourselves to consider the benefits of assisted living at The Kensington, such as:

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