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How to Build The Custom Wine Cellar of Your Dreams

Getting a beautiful wine cellar comes down to determining your needs and hiring a talented design/build firm. Here's how the MacAllisters did just that.

By Tracey Longo

Ever dream of building the type of wine cellar that will help you take your wine collection to the next level? That's exactly where Craig and Diane MacAllister of Fairfax found themselves back in 2007, when their quest for new wines for their growing collection was thwarted by their home's limited storage.

Their solution? Build the type of high-end, custom redwood wine cellar that encourages and even rewards their frequent wine-buying trips to Europe and California.

Today, the MacAllisters use their state-of-the-art wine cellar almost every day. The room is 100 square foot of retrofitted luxury, with custom redwood and mahogany racking and

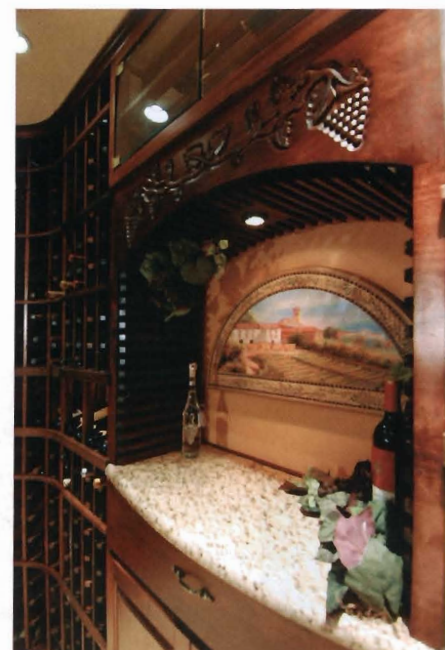
shelving, rich granite and tile work, glass front cabinetry and doors, two tiers of lighting and the kind of perfect 24-seven 55 degrees that fine wines require.

It's a sumptuous wine cellar that not only protects the MacAllister's growing wine collection, but gives them the perfect place to host impressive tastings and kick off wine dinners. "We love collecting wine and it's so communal," says Diane MacAllister. "We get to serve wines that our guests would probably never taste otherwise, and will probably never taste again. We also get to buy wines by the case when we find great vintages, like we just did on a trip to Napa and Sonoma." After a long search for the right builder, the MacAllisters chose

Michael Nash Design, Build & Homes, Fairfax, because of the firm's extensive expertise building wine cellars and storage. Customers get to see that experience and attention to detail first hand in the two complete wine cellars the company built in its 8,000 square foot Lee Highway showroom.

Wine cellars are complex and need careful attention to electrical, cooling, lighting and moisture control to protect wine collections—all facts that became apparent to the MacAllisters as they did their research and began to interview builders.

"Be careful," Diane MacAllister warns. "We had a gentleman come out and all of his work was subcontracted to others who could only work in the evenings and on weekends. Another





A granite tasting table, racks for a variety of bottle sizes, warm finishes, and custom climate control make this a beautiful yet functional wine cellar and a perfect venue for guests to experience fine wine.

gentleman showed us a glossy flyer with pictures of wine cellars we knew he hadn't built. Yet another firm had Better Business Bureau complaints. "We had certain expectations for quality and appearance and we wanted a company that had the on-staff people with experience in the multiple concerns necessary to take this on as a turnkey project," Diane MacAllister says. "When we saw the wine cellars in the Michael Nash showroom, we knew we found the right firm."

The award-winning design and build firm, which routinely wins national and regional COTYs (Contractor of The Year awards), is proud of the work it does for wine connoisseurs throughout Virginia, DC and the mid-Atlantic, says Michael Nash president and CEO Sonny Nazemian.

"I think what really sets us apart is we use our own skilled employees to design and build wine cellars and wine rooms, which gives us the ability and flexibility to really meet our customers' every need," Nazemian says.

The MacAllister's wine cellar was built into a 10 by 10 unfinished storage area in the basement of the couple's Fairfax colonial. "The project had a lot of the types of challenges we cherish," Nazemian says. "We had to seal the concrete foundation to prevent

moisture, build in electrical and an additional ductwork for cooling, as well as insulate, do a vapor barrier and wrap the walls," Nazemian says.

There was also extensive plumbing, mechanical and gas work involved in the project, all of it absolutely necessary. Wines not stored in a stable, cool, dry environment can begin to ferment or turn, in essence becoming undrinkable. "We connected to the existing electrical system, adding a split cooling system to their existing HVAC. The HVAC for the cellar has its own ductwork and compressor system, but ties into the existing system for drainage," Nazemian says. The firm had to build soffits to cover air ducts as well as hide a sump pump. The cellar holds up to 1,700 bottles of wine, using an amazing configuration of clear Hardy redwood cabinets and mahogany racking. "The MacAllister's chose custom-built double wine racks, traditional racks, open diamond racks, six-column racks, magnum racks and curved corner racks, to meet the MacAllister's design needs," Nazemian says

Custom glass doors adorn the top cabinets of the cellar and a custom etched-glass door enhances the cellar's entryway.

A custom granite tasting table with a barrel curved edge, tile and tile

border flooring and custom touches like murals of wine barrels and carved wood decorations on the cabinetry add to the ambience of the room. The wine cellar is completed by multi-tiered lighting, including recessed lighting and LED lights that run along the shelving to throw off a glow so the labels of the wine bottles can be read.

The room beckons the MacAllisters daily. "We go down to enjoy a glass of wine or grab a bottle for dinner. Now we get to wow our friends and family and kick off wine dinners with champagne and fruit served in the wine cellar. And it gives us the opportunity to buy cases from private wineries that don't sell in stores. We love pairing food with wine and hearing guests' "oohhhs" and "aahhhs." It's pretty amazing.

"We were also very pleased with all of the assistance we got from Michael Nash," Diane MacAllister says. "They thought of all of the things we didn't think of. We couldn't be happier. I don't think we'll ever sell our house, because we won't be able to part with the wine cellar."

---Tracey Longo is a Washington, DC-based journalist who covers real estate for the Washington Post. She is the author of several books, including her most recent, *CliffNotes: Investing for the First Time*.