

Why Cellar Wines? *Part II*

IN THE MARCH/APRIL 2009 ISSUE OF *QUINTESSENTIAL BARRINGTON*, I wrote an article titled, “Why Cellar Wines?” (see www.qbarrington.com). Although it suffices as a standalone introduction to this topic, I wish to expand upon this matter. The article categorized benefits in several subtopics, i.e., great wines improve with time, have appropriate wine on hand, capture great buying opportunities, asset appreciation, and joy of collecting.

Since I wrote this, I have realized that I wrote it as a testimony to my experience and since then I have had many opportunities to expand my understanding of some of these reasons as well as to add more.

Several years ago one of Barrington’s top home builders was talking to me about home wine cellars. He said that when he is designing a house for a prospective client, he always advises inclusion of a wine cellar, even if the prospective owner is a teetotaler or a member of a non-imbibing religious order. His logic was simple. The owner will recoup the investment at resale even if not in use, and it offers a plus in the upper echelon houses, which appeal to many.

Obviously, if you build and use a cellar as intended, it can become a major focal point of the house. Over the past decade, *The Wine Spectator* has featured numerous cellars in the magazine, ranging from pretty, but utilitarian styles, to works of art cellars and in between; the larger and more ornate, the more expensive. Some people like to incorporate a dining area, separated from the cellar contents by an insulated glass wall. Materials run the gamut from commonly available construction materials to imported antique products such as tiles and bricks used in European wineries and cellars.

I recently read an article by Eric Asimov regarding the cellars of Park B. Smith. Even in his seventh decade of life, notwithstanding selling

14,000 bottles at one auction, he reached a total of 65,000 bottles. He realized with much help from his wife that he had 119 years of wine left based on one bottle per day. He started a wine-focused restaurant in New York City named Veritas, but that did not eliminate the need for three more cellars. I resonate with some of his quotes: “If I’ve had a crummy week, I just come down here for a few hours and talk to my bottles.” His wife retorted, “That’s alright, as long as they don’t start talking back to you.” As I’ve always said, “Cheaper than therapy.”

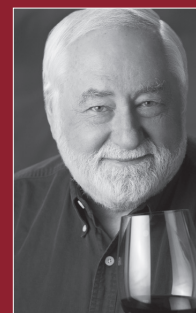
I particularly enjoy working with clients and builders to ensure that all expectations are met and exceeded wherever possible. Even more rewarding is working with clients to stock the cellar to maximize enjoyment and appreciation and to avoid common stocking mistakes.

I have had numerous experiences over the past four years where I have shared properly aged, world-class wines with others and feel even stronger that the greatest reason to cellar is to appreciate how great they become with proper aging. As many of you know, I lead an annual seminar to explore the joys of marrying food and wine. We use one of Crystal Cruises ships, the Serenity or the Symphony. In addition to a wine and food pairing on two days, we include a magnificent dinner in the Vintage Room where the best possible cuisine is married with world-class wines. The people selected to experience this have been witness to a ‘life event’ and it makes me happy to be able to share my knowledge in such special circumstances.

However, the greatest return has been on the cruises when several of us have brought a case each from our cellars, featuring wines to accompany the top Italian cuisine of Piéro Selvaggio’s Valentino’s of Santa Monica and Nobu Matsuhisa’s Nobu of New York City and Tokyo. These restaurants, Prego and Silk Road respectively, represent

the peak of Italian and Japanese culinary art. To be able to experience well-aged trophy wines with such cuisine is almost over the top.

Both on the ship and closer to home, I have found the greatest joy watching people experience such a rare marriage of top food and wine and feel compelled to educate people as to the possibilities. While mature wine is so magic in such a marriage, it can be elusive. Unless you buy the wine upon release and properly cellar it, you cannot be guaranteed of its provenance, alas at a significant cost peril. This was recently ‘proven’ to me when I used the software Cellar Tracker to inventory my wine. In most cases, the wine prices paid for the same wines I have were much higher, often by multiples. This implies the wines were not bought upon release and it impacted the indicated ‘drinking window.’ Although personal preferences vary toward younger or mature wines, the reported drinking window for most of the comparable wines I have is much shorter than for those I actually have in my cellar, having been properly cellared since release. Ergo, no matter your age, there is no time like the present to become serious about buying, storing, and protecting one of life’s greatest assets. À votre santé! 🍷



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