

Decatur Package Store
1220 Clairmont Road Decatur, GA 404-633-5250
DecaturWine@aol.com www.DecaturPackageStore.com

How to Start a Wine Cellar on a Reasonable Budget

Introduction

- 87% of all wine is consumed within 24 hours of purchase
- Hopefully after my talk today, you'll help break this trend.

Ideal Storage Conditions

- **Temperature**
 - Temperature between 50°-65°, avoid areas over 70°
 - Gradual temperature change between seasons is acceptable
 - Large temperature swings are bad (espec. from store to your trunk to your cellar)
 - Biggest problem is Georgia summers
- **Humidity**
 - 50-70% humidity, although no definite target is recommended
 - Too dry, corks can shrink and let air into the bottle oxidizing the wine
 - Too wet, mold/mildew occurs which is simply a cosmetic issue
- **Light**
 - Long term exposure to sunlight or incandescent light causes oxidation in wine
- **Vibration**
 - Movement disturbs the aging process

Types of Cellars

- **Passive Cellar**
 - Your basement or a closet
 - Pros
 - Everyone has one
 - Cons
 - Greater temperature and humidity changes
 - Faster aging of wines
 - Best for longer aging wines (i.e. fuller-bodied, red wines)
- **Active Cellar**
 - Insulated room or refrigerated, stand-alone unit
 - Pros
 - Constant temperature
 - Slower, even, aging process (i.e. better long term results)
 - Better for lighter-bodied wines (whites and Pinot Noir)
 - Cons
 - Expense of unit
 - Time required to build insulated room

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As you start your wine cellar...

- **Practice, Practice, Practice**
 - The more you taste the more you'll know
 - Helps develop what you like and don't like
 - Try before you buy
 - Go to tastings at local restaurants, go to Wine Festivals, have tasting parties
- **Keep a wine journal with tasting notes**
 - Helps you know what you like and dislike
 - Helps develop your own adjective system (my cherry might not be your cherry)
- **Develop a relationship with a local retailer**
 - Retailers want a long-term customer, so they'll recommend good wine
 - They'll let you know about special buys or limited release items
- **Develop a budget and buying strategy**
 - Set a budget
 - Match size of cellar to consumption habits
 - Length of time you want to hold your wines
 - Determine allocation of everyday wines and special occasion wines
- **Buy from better vintages**
 - Not as important for West Coast wines
 - Especially true for European wines – lower priced wines are better in good vintages
 - Download a current vintage chart – available online from Wine Spectator, Wine Enthusiast or Wine Advocate
- **Buy more than one bottle**
 - Ideally 3-6 bottles
 - Have a backup if one is corked
 - Can track the evolution of the wine (better to drink too early than too late)
- **Develop verticals of your favorite wines**
 - Taste the same wine from different vintages
- **Remember you're buying today for your future palate**
 - Your palate and tastes will be much different/advanced in 5 years
 - Don't buy too much of a particular variety or region
 - Experiment – set aside a small portion of your cellar for experimental wines – Napa Chardonnay, vintage Champagne, Zinfandel
- **Track your cellar**
 - Can use a simple spreadsheet
 - Helps avoid drinking wines that are over-the-hill
- **Use a decanter and/or Vinturi aerator**
 - Decanting helps to leave sediment in the bottle instead of your glass
 - Cellared wines need to aerate to bring out their best flavor