

THE LOOP HOME

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WINE AND DANDY The Arceneaux's rich and warm in-house wine room in the Heights and, in images at left, the Behou's contemporary and moody Tanglewood space

SAVE ROOM FOR WINE *Houston homeowners sip stylishly—in their own tasting rooms*

The home wine cellar—either above ground or subterranean level—has become a necessary indulgence for the avid wine collector. And now the latest extension of the trend—building full-fledged “wine rooms”—elevates the romance and mystique. “When it comes to building new homes in the \$800,000 range, it’s [often all about] wine,” says Lambert Arceneaux, founder of Houston’s Allegro Builders. “Even people who lack vast wine knowledge want to impress their friends with all their wine stuff, including the perfect place to drink it.”

A wine collector himself, Arceneaux built the prototype for the now highly requested wine room in the basement of his circa-1910 Heights home in 2001. The result is a cozy respite with distressed concrete floors, rustic inlaid brick and natural stone walls, there’s even a kitchenette and a petite powder room. He and wife Heidi can entertain without TVs blaring or young children running about. Worn brown leather couches, woven New Mexico style rugs and polished wood kitchen cabinets add to the rustically chic style of the room. “A wine room needs a sense of character and should feel warm and romantic,” says Arceneaux. “Now that I have a wine room for entertaining, we drink all the wine.”

Lately, Allegro’s clients have been requesting temperature-controlled wine storage vaults, stairwell vaults or entire tasting rooms. Every wine room is custom designed—no two are alike. One client has a complete ventilation system in his tasting room for cigar smoking, ratcheting the wine room price up to the million-dollar mark. Another sports a cheese locker for storing fine fromage and a few personal lockers for their friends to store wines.

Contractor Bob Jackson has also become an expert in building wine rooms, especially in adding them to existing homes. “We do mostly remodels and above-ground cellars and wine rooms,” says Jackson. “The cooling system is the heart of the remodel. The walls have to be re-insulated to control the temperature and the humidity—a big problem in Houston. The room must stay at an ideal 55-to-57-degree range. The lighting is also important and affects the mood.”

For their part, real estate investors no longer consider wine storage an amenity but an essential feature, an enhancement that increases the value and appeal of a property, says John Behou. He and wife Jan are both investors and share a love of wine and entertaining, which is why they asked architect Allen Bianchi to add a designated wine room to the blueprints when he designed their Tanglewood home in 1997.

The Behou’s contemporary-styled wine room is on the first floor, just a few steps below ground level. It’s not technically considered a cellar because the wines are stored on a shelf—soon to be encased behind temperature-controlled glass. “It’s a nighttime room,” says Behou. “perfect for dinner, wine tasting and storytelling.” A few tiny skylights in the creamy grape-colored room let moonbeams in, and an entire 18-foot-tall wall of metal sconces, each holding a flickering votive, adds drama.

“We didn’t want a low ceiling, because it feels cavernous in some wine cellars. We wanted a cozy but airy feel. Plus it has a nice resonance for singing,” say the Behou’s, who obviously love a good party. ■