



Janie and Michael Hirsch like to store their wine bottles in the European tradition with the bottoms facing out.

Dynamic Duo

A couple explores new depths to build a private cellar

Story by Janila Dorsey

WHAT TYPE OF CELLAR would an interior designer and a wine distributor build in their home? One with beautiful Old World styling and modern comforts. Interior designer Janie Hirsch and husband Michael have always enjoyed wine, and after learning the art of truly appreciating fine wines from some friends, the two became avid collectors. "We've toured Burgundy and various wineries around the world and have really come to appreciate it," says Janie. Her husband

has become such an aficionado that two years ago he gave up his career as a golf pro to become a wine distributor.

When the Hirschs built their cellar, they had already been collecting for about 15 years. "Building a cellar had become a necessity for us," Janie says. "Our collection had grown so large and we were either going to take steps to store it properly or lose it." The space that was to become the Hirsch cellar was once the crawl space beneath their

Duluth home, accessible only from the outside. Janie enlisted Pat Kurek of Hedgewood Properties to help her on the project, which required knocking out a hall closet, excavating the space beneath her home, and pulling out all of the plumbing hardware that used to be in the space.

The first priority was to make sure that the new cellar was sizeable, that only hard surfaces were used in its construction (to keep out mold), and that a vapor barrier and other temperature controls were in place. After that, it was all about style. "We wanted it to look like an old European cellar," says Janie. The cellar was constructed of stucco walls with handmade brick cubbies in place of a more conventional racking system. The handmade bricks have an aged patina and, when mixed with the weeping mortar, make the cellar look as if it's been there for ages. The slate flooring, too, is in keeping with the cellar's aged appearance.

Just outside the cellar is the tasting room, which is worlds away from the old European look of the cellar and even further away from what one might expect in a tasting room. "We wanted to use this area for casual entertaining," Janie says, "just for having a few friends over for wine and cheese. When we have larger parties we entertain in the dining room." Not only is it a great space for a casual gathering, there is also a game area on the opposite side of the room for children. "This setting makes wine more of an experience," Janie adds.

The owners say they are "all about the magic of pairing wine with food," and that the best thing about having their own cellar is that they don't have to plan ahead for each meal to go and buy wine. Instead, they have the ability to go to their cellar and pick whatever they want to complement a great meal. Michael says that their wine philosophy is based on trying to find wines that are the truest expression of the terroir—and what could be better than such wines full of character and paired with an exquisite meal?

TASTING NOTES

Billecart Salmon Cuvee Elisabeth Salmon

"Champagne is a nice start to any evening. It is special, but it should be enjoyed more often," says Janie.

Giuseppe Quintarelli Amarone

"He actually lets his wines sit in the barrel for six years or more, which is unheard of," says Michael. "He is one of the finest artisan winemakers in Italy, and he doesn't put out a wine until he thinks it's ready—they are just now releasing the 1997 Amarone."

White Burgundy wines from Marc Colin

"They make small production, fine wines with a finesse and in the Old World style,"

Michael comments.

"Everything good about white wines is in those bottles."

WHO TO CALL

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