

# Remodeling a Cellar

IMPROVING A  
WINE COLLECTION  
DEPENDS ON A  
COLLECTOR'S TASTE...  
AND TIME.

BY ADAM PENENBERG

**It's** a dream of any wine collector. This past fall, a connoisseur put up for auction 100 bottles of wine, many of which had, over the years, been stored in his family's cellar rather than enjoyed with dinner or shared with friends. Two particular bottles of Burgundy—bottled in the same year, 1945, by the same vineyard, Domaine de la Romanée-Conti—caught the eyes of other oenophiles. Sotheby's, the auction house offering the bottles, estimated that they could each sell for \$22,000 to \$32,000. One went for \$496,000. The other set the record for most expensive bottle of wine sold at auction, \$558,000. Together, the 100 bottles from the personal cellar of a French collector brought in \$7.3 million.

We can't all have a collection of Burgundies that fetch the equivalent of \$100,000 a glass, of course. But a bit of expertise can help any connoisseur take his or her wine collection up another notch.

## Buy what you like.

You may want to add a bottle of Château Lafite Rothschild 2009 (\$1,249 a bottle) for personal consumption or buy cases of this Bordeaux as an investment. Just don't spend your time and money aging wine if you don't like older flavors in your wine. "Collect what you're passionate about," says Dave Lofstrom, a sommelier at Manhatta in New York. This even goes for someone who views a wine collection as a future annuity. When she first advises new clients, whether they are building a new cellar for enjoyment or investment, or refining an existing cellar, Julia Gilbert, vice president at Sotheby's Wine Advisory, wants "to figure out what [their] taste is and have fun with it."

## Timing is everything.

Not surprisingly, one of the biggest factors in upgrading a collection is time. “All wines can age, but not all wines are meant to age,” says Lofstrom. “If everything in your cellar is meant to be enjoyed in 10 or 20 years, what will you drink tonight or this weekend?”

Depending on where a wine originates can determine how long you should wait to drink it. Red wines from Barolo, Barbaresco, Bordeaux, and the Northern Rhône have pronounced tannins and can benefit from considerable aging. Zinfandels, pinot noirs, and chardonnays are best drunk within five years. But rosés, pinot grigios, and Beaujolais are all good to drink now. Cellaring those for years won’t improve their tastes or values.

## Great wine may not pay.

Finally, experts say it’s important to remember that even highly rated wines don’t necessarily make a good investment. “The world is full of good wines today, but only a handful are truly collectible and investment-worthy,” says Steven Washuta, master sommelier at The Pool, the restaurant set in the former Four Seasons in Manhattan.

As investments go, two wines that offer a robust rate on return are Château Mouton Rothschild and Château Latour, which are first-growth Bordeaux from Pauillac. Both benefit from at least a decade in the bottle before being opened and have the potential to age for many decades (depending on the vintage). The longer you hold a bottle, often the higher the rate of return. “There’s a finite supply of any wine,” Gilbert says. “People are drinking the wine, so supply is decreasing. Meanwhile the population looking for these bottles increases. It’s fundamental supply and demand.” ▀



# Bottle Rocket

## 5 WINES THAT WILL MAKE FINE ADDITIONS TO YOUR BURGEONING CELLAR.

| WINE   | PRICE   | TASTING NOTES  |
|--|---------|--|
| Rombauer<br>Chardonnay 2017<br><i>Carneros,<br/>California</i>                         | \$37    | <i>A rich chardonnay with heft; the bargain price often leads to shortages.</i>                              |
| Tenuta San Guido<br>Sassicaia 2014<br><i>Bolgheri,<br/>Tuscany, Italy</i>              | \$200   | <i>A recent vintage from the originators of the “Super Tuscan” style of Italian reds.</i>                    |
| Château Latour<br>2006<br><i>Pauillac,<br/>Bordeaux, France</i>                        | \$680   | <i>A warm, comfortable Bordeaux blend. “A cat wrapping around your ankles,” says one New York sommelier.</i> |
| Château Margaux<br>2009<br><i>Margaux,<br/>Bordeaux, France</i>                        | \$1,130 | <i>2009 was an extraordinary year for Bordeaux in general and this famed vineyard in particular.</i>         |
| Screaming<br>Eagle Cabernet<br>Sauvignon 2012<br><i>Oakville,<br/>Napa, California</i> | \$3,600 | <i>The wine Robert Parker’s Wine Advocate calls “perfect.”</i>   |