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Exploring a Custom Wine Cellar

By Cathy Tyson



Photo Doug Kohen

About seven years ago when Vickie and Jeff Martin were remodeling their Moraga home, they thought the odd space that lead to their basement and a furnace could be converted into a wine cellar. By rearranging the area, and cannibalizing some subterranean space under a stairwell, they were able to create a custom wine cellar that officially accommodates 1,200 bottles. The ever-growing collection has spilled over into an adjacent tasting area; Jeff jokes, "we need to start drinking more."

They wanted to give the space an old world look, reflected in the dark wood and wrought iron leaf details. A cooling system keeps the cellar at a constant temperature of 56 degrees, just right for storage. A variety of decanters and a lovely antique cabinet, purchased locally, along with overflow wine bottles and a sink round out the space.

Jeff is the primary wine enthusiast of the family, having been interested in wine for the past twenty years. Son Tyler shares his fascination; he's a wine and viticulture major with a concentration in enology at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo; he hopes to go into the wine business. Younger brother Cole, a sophomore business major at University of Colorado, Boulder, is not a wine fan at this point in his life.

Vickie focuses her attention on their property in Sonoma that's planted with chardonnay grapes, "I oversee the Vineyard Manager," she explains. Their grapes are sold to the Schug Carneros Estate Winery and end up in Carneros Chardonnay. Oddly enough her favorite wines are Sonoma County chardonnays.

The Martin's are on a number of winery and retailer mailing lists, so the wine keeps accumulating. "It's a buyers market, some limited releases just aren't selling like they used to," he said. Two favorites are Shafer Vineyards Hillside Select and Saxum Vineyards - known for their Rhone blends.

His goal for the new year - get more organized, "It's the bane of anybody who collects - most don't have a good

grasp on their inventory." While the cellar is organized by type of wine, chardonnays here, cabernets there, then arranged alphabetically by producer within those categories, it's difficult to determine which vintages are ready to drink and which should age longer.

Some folks enjoy collecting stamps, snow globes or Pez dispensers - perhaps it's the lure of finding something rare and unique. For the Martin family, collecting and sharing their delicious drinkable bounty with friends and family is its own reward.



Vickie and Jeff Martin Photo Cathy Tyson



Photo Doug Kohen

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