

Robb Report Home LUXURY

Home Technology:

The Wine Organizer

Tame your collection bottle by bottle

By Karen J. Bannan

Wine collectors know that some of their bottles are worth more than their weight in gold. Keeping track of those bottles, however, is no easy task. Thomas Turner has spent the last 20 years collecting his favorite vintages and storing them in the basement of his 7,500 square foot home in Baton Rouge, La. About a year ago, the founder of Turner Industries Group, an industrial maintenance and contractor company, built a poolhouse in his backyard. Not happy with his wine storage system—his 700-bottle collection was scattered among three refrigerated units—he built a cellar with capacity for 3,000 bottles. But even after the construction he had a problem. He still had no idea what was in his collection.

“All my friends loved the wine I served, but I knew that what I was doing—pulling bottles of wine out by random—wasn’t a good system,” says Turner. “I knew they should be drunk based on age rather than going at it topsy-turvy.”

Turner needed a guru, someone who could sort and categorize his collection so he would imbibe no wine before its time. A friend directed him to Los Angeles-based Carte du Vin, a wine cellar management service founded by Jeff Smith. “Jeff came in and inventoried what I had. He gave me a printout that included every bottle, the age of everything I had on stock and how much it was worth,” says Turner. “Then he gave me advice on how I should proceed to drink it.”

Smith separated bottles based on wine type and region, and cross-referenced everything, including wine scores and ratings, retail values and suggestions of when each one should be uncorked. In Turner’s case, Smith posted the inventory on a password-protected web page and gave suggestions for filling the holes in his hoard. He also advised Turner to stick with half-case rather than full-case purchases. “It’s a smart strategy for my collection,” says Turner.

Carte du Vin’s Smith, who charges \$2.50 per bottle plus expenses for his services, says wine collectors shouldn’t equate their hobby with something more mundane, such as gardening or music appreciation. “Collecting wine isn’t like collecting CDs,” he says. “You don’t start with Abba and end with ZZ Top. As you’re building up a wine collection, you’re also tearing it down as you drink it. The key is knowing what you have at all times.”