



# A Metropolitan Wine Retreat in Austin

How One Collector Displays  
His Magnificent Collection  
in a Light-Filled Aerie

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One great challenge of condo living is finding enough storage space. And when a condominium owner is a wine connoisseur with a world-class collection he wants to display, it requires a very creative team to design a functional cellar that becomes the focal point of the entire residence.

Such is the story of a Texas entrepreneur who engaged the Austin-based architecture and construction firm Cottam Hargrave to integrate elegant wine storage into the entry of his urban loft in the heart of that city.

“In addition to usual constraints for cellars, this project brought a few more to the table,” comments Jen Weaver, an architect and lighting specialist with the company, which custom fabricates and installs every element of their designs.

“Because of its location on the twelfth floor of a residential tower, we had thermal and vapor barrier issues, limitations to scope of work in the space, and size limits to cabinetry pieces because we mobilized via elevator,” she continues. “There were extremely high expectations set by our client for fit and finish of the customized work. He desired a trophy room to showcase his collection and a space where he could create an event out of the ceremony of wine.”

Cottom Hargrave gave a great deal of consideration to these criteria, and then designed a unique racking



### How to Light Your Cellar

An important consideration in wine room architecture and design is lighting, which sets the stage for bottle display and conveys a theatrical mood within a cellar.

Jen Weaver, architect and lighting specialist at Cottam Hargrave, in Austin, Texas, favors compact, long-lasting, and transformer-driven light-emitting diodes (LEDs) and electroluminescent (EL) light sources, which protect the UV-sensitive nature of wine and don't convey heat because transformers can be stored remotely. There are many styles from which to choose, and she likes to use them in combination with one another.

If your cellar simply functions as storage space and no one sees it but you, this aspect may not be as critical. But if it plays a prominent role in your interior or you'll be hosting tastings and dinners, the subtleties of good lighting will only add to the warm and gracious tone you set for the enjoyment of fine wine.

*For more information on Cottam Hargrave, please visit [www.cottamhargrave.com](http://www.cottamhargrave.com) or call 512-225-2400.*

system composed of steel plates cut by computer numeric controlled (CNC) technology and locally sourced mesquite wood blocks and jambs, which were also machined by the CNC equipment to tolerances within a fraction of an inch.

The client engaged a structural engineer to confirm the load-bearing capacity of the compact space. Today, the Wine Grotto, as the room was named, elegantly catalogs a 1,500-bottle collection within a mere one hundred square feet. The main racks hold 1,225 bottles between 2½" and 3⅝" in diameter; the magnum racks can hold 138 bottles between 3½" and 4⅝" in diameter. "At one point," notes Weaver, "I took a tape measure to a few different wine merchants to verify that all bottles would fit into our system."

The cubbies were intended for ninety dessert wine bottles but can accommodate any size. The horizontal bottle display shelves are for the owner's nine most-prized wine bottles; the two front shelves accommodate the



larger show bottles. An unpacking area around the corner allows for the storage of up to six cases for incoming shipments and provides a mesquite countertop for uncorking. Just over the countertop, wineglasses hang from a custom mesquite glass rack.

"We think of it as a modern steel grotto," says Weaver. "Where traditional grottos are made of stone with sparse lighting reflecting off of irregular surfaces, we created an elegant space that sparkles with a variety of subtle light sources."

Weaver considers this among the biggest victories of the project. "We did not want it to feel like a dark storage closet," she says, noting, "We needed to find a light source that would fit behind the racks, but the racks could only come off of the wall one inch or the bottle prep area in the corner would be too tight." The designer adhered electroluminescent (EL) tape to the backs of the steel racks and used a variety of LED fixtures in combination. Temperature control was also problematic, but a heat pump that plugs directly into the building's chilled water loop effectively keeps the room just below sixty degrees.

The client is delighted with the outcome. "I couldn't find anything anywhere to provide the aesthetic I was desiring for the capacity of my collection," he says. "Cottam Hargrave discovered a functional and handsome solution." ☺☺