



Build a Home for Your Wine

This Unique Spiral Cellar Offers Ample Underground Storage in a Small Space

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILLIAM WRIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY

There's only one problem with enjoying and collecting fine wine. It has to do with cellaring the bottles I won't drink now. Years ago, when I considered a dozen bottles in one of those expandable wooden racks on my kitchen counter to be a large collection with appropriate storage, it wasn't an issue.

Thankfully, both my reserve and my knowledge have dramatically increased in the past two decades, so kitchen storage is no longer an option—and the flimsy wooden rack was long ago sold for a quarter at a yard sale. Today, I yearn for a cellar but settle for sturdier metal racks in a cool, dark, undisturbed corner of my basement.

Alas, there is no budget—or space—for a bona fide cellar.

Or so I thought, until I learned about a unique underground storage concept designed in France by Monsieur George Harnois in 1978, when he realized that many modern homes had no proper cellar. Since then, well over 12,500 underground cellars have been built in France and the United Kingdom. Today, a clever group in the UK under the name of Spiral Cellars Ltd. markets Harnois' invention and is the sole provider of prefabricated concrete wine cellars worldwide.

So, what is a "spiral cellar" anyway? The short answer is: "It's the quickest, cheapest, and easiest way of building a wine cellar for your house," says Nigel Hall, a partner in the company he owns with Adrian and Lucy Hargreaves in Pulborough, West Sussex.

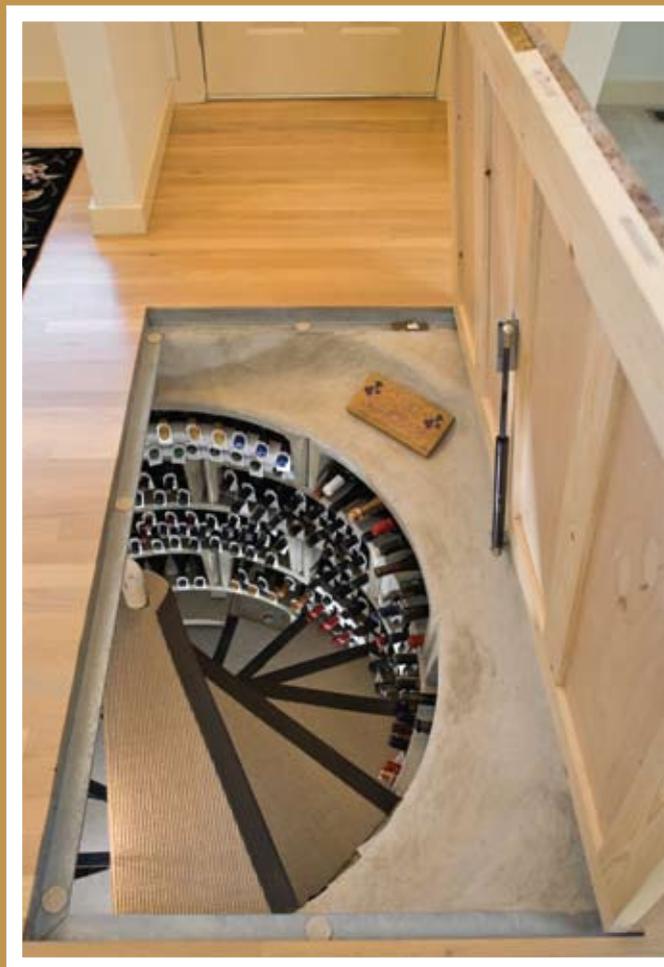
The cellar kits, which range in price from \$30,000 to \$50,000, require cutting a hole in the floor and sinking a watertight, precast cylindrical concrete unit into the ground. Like a traditional cellar, the spiral cellar relies on the surrounding earth for insulation. No power is required to keep its temperature stable, which is maintained at an ideal level by two pipes that feed to the nearest external wall and facilitate a passive ventilation system, drawing out warm air and allowing fresh air to circulate the space. So once it's built, there are no further expenses—except, of course, acquiring the wine to fill it.

The storage capacity of the largest cellar is 1,900 bottles, which rest comfortably on their side in vibration-free conditions with perfect humidity, within half-round hollow concrete masonry units. But the real bonus is that the cellar can be located anywhere on the ground floor—or above an open area like a crawl space—from kitchen to conservatory, workshop to study, front entry hall to garage. You don't need a lot of room, since the depth is nine feet and the interior dimension is six feet from side to side.

Rob Dent and his wife, Naomi Ruiz, of Seattle were among the first in the United States to install a Spiral Cellar in 2007, and they're delighted with the result. "It's perfect—exactly what we were looking for," says Dent, who utilized a tall crawl space under his entry hall for the installation. The cellar is just feet from the kitchen and dining room, simply accessed by a trap door that is nearly hidden in the hardwood floor and held open by a hydraulic arm when the cellar is in use.

Dent began to look for a cost-effective storage alternative when the couple's wine collection exceeded 100 bottles, which

were kept at unstable temperatures on wooden racks under a staircase. "Pretty soon, there were bottles all over the floor and in every closet, so we needed more capacity and a quieter, darker space," he says. "We thought about building out a basement area but couldn't afford a full-blown cellar from either a cost or a space standpoint. This seemed to be the best of all worlds, since we made use of essentially dead space."



Since Dent was the company's second U.S. client, the entire team came from the UK to install his cellar. It was not without challenges, since most European houses are built directly on a concrete slab and the installation can be totally underground, instead of in a crawl space as Dent and his wife chose. But within ten days, the hole was dug, the unit was installed and insulated with concrete, and the couple was reorganizing their collection. Within each ring of storage, a masonry unit creates a step, and each step down is offset from the one above it in a circular pattern. "It was a very clean, seamless installation," says Dent, "and a happy medium between a traditional cellar and storing wine under our bed!" ☺☺

*For more information, visit
www.spiralcellars.co.uk or call 0845 241 2768.*