

A Professional Touch

Aspenites Steve and Nancy Crown hired the Little Nell's wine team to update their cellar

BY BEN LASMAN

When Steve and Nancy Crown of Aspen, Colo., decided to expand their wine collection and update an outmoded home cellar, they didn't have to look far for help. As part of the Crown family, which owns the Aspen Skiing Company, they had a direct line to the master sommeliers behind one of the leading wine programs in America: Carlton McCoy and Csaba "Chubby" Oveges of the Little Nell, a winner of the *Wine Spectator* Grand Award.

To execute the new design, McCoy tapped local architecture firm Rowland + Broughton, whose previous work included remodeling the Little Nell's guest rooms and realizing the hotel's luxurious, wine-focused flagship restaurant, Element 47.

The resulting cellar revamp is a master class in modern collecting, transforming the original tasting room, with minimal storage and a chunky stone veneer, into an elegant, contemporary space that emphasizes efficiency and functionality and shows off a number of high-tech touches.

"[McCoy] understands the importance of function over form," Steve says. "It's extremely important to us as art collectors that we have a beautiful cellar, but it needs to be efficient and functional as well."

McCoy, tired of seeing cellars geared toward ostentatious decorative flourishes, echoes the sentiment. "If someone wants to put a cookie-cutter cellar with single-bottle storage in your home, fire them on the spot," he says.

The Crowns' interest in wine began "very organically," through travel and events. As their collection grew, so did their desire to modernize their existing cellar. "We needed more storage and proper temperature and humidity controls," says Steve. "We had a nice-sized collection but wanted to expand and needed a cellar that could protect this investment. We also wanted to create a beautiful showcase."

A modern complement to the classical style of the Crowns' home, the cellar features grids of white oak and blackened steel bins recessed into the walls, and a central tasting island of black slate with accommodation underneath for the Crowns' collection of wines in case. The overall effect is one of minimalism and refinement, presenting clean lines and a sense of spaciousness that belies the size of the collection—approximately 2,000 bottles, with room to spare. (The Crowns store an additional 1,000 bottles at their residence in Chicago.) The logical layout of the collection allows them to locate specific bottles with ease.

Under the hood, the cellar boasts a cutting-edge feature set. Consulting with a mechanical engineer, Rowland + Broughton replaced the humidity and temperature controls. (The cellar is kept at 50° F and 50 percent humidity.) A decanting light installed by the sink allows wine to be analyzed for color as it's poured. And access to the room is granted via a fingerprint scanner linked with the home's security system.

But alterations to the physical space weren't the only upgrade the Crowns commissioned. With holdings already strong in Bordeaux, Italy and domestic wine, they turned to McCoy to help them acquire Burgundy gems, including reds from Dujac and Armand Rousseau, and



The Crowns' home wine cellar in Aspen, Colo.



Nancy and Steve Crown

WHAT'S IN STEVEN AND NANCY CROWN'S CELLAR:

NOTABLE VERTICALS: *Dujac 1990–2010, Moët & Chandon Dom Pérignon 1988–2004, François Raveneau 1995–2010, Marc Colin 1995–2010, J.-F. Coche-Dury 1992–2011, Rousseau 1985–2013*

LARGE-FORMAT BOTTLES: *Pierre-Yves Colin-Morey Chevalier-Montrachet 2004 (3L), Comte Georges de Vogüé Bonnes Mares 2006 (1.5L), Domaine de Montille Les Malconsorts Cuvée Christian 2009 (3L), Comte Georges de Vogüé Musigny 2006 (1.5L), Dujac Clos de la Roche 2001 (1.5L)*

OLDEST BOTTLE: *D'Oliveira Malmsey Madeira 1835*

whites from Leflaive and François Raveneau. Verticals of Marc Colin run from 1995 to 2010, J.-F. Coche-Dury from 1992 to 2011.

"A lot of the buying process has to do with trust," says McCoy. "Steve knows his stuff. We wanted to have a dialogue about how to grow the collection. What's the goal from the clients' perspective? How do you get the most out of your tasting room?"

Bottles of *grand cru* Burgundy now take up an entire wall of the refurbished cellar, among them magnums of Dujac Clos de la Roche 2001 and jeroboams of Pierre-Yves Colin-Morey Chevalier-Montrachet 2004.

The majority of the bottles were purchased with some age already on them; the Crowns frequently host family, friends and colleagues and wanted wines ready to pour. "Our cellars are meant to store wine intended for drinking, not just investment," says Steve. When entertaining, "We normally start with a great vintage Champagne followed by a beautiful white Burgundy, then a red Burgundy followed by a great Bordeaux and occasionally a special old Madeira or Yquem."

The Crowns' cellar is meant to be not merely admired, but lived with and used. From its professional pedigree and technological sophistication to its personal focus on ready-to-drink wines and entertainment, the space brings a private collection up to the exacting standards of the Nell's influential sommeliers. □