



The 5 Biggest Mistakes People Make When Building a Wine Cellar and How to Avoid Them

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Luckily, when most people call on Craig MacPhee to build their dream wine cellar, they do so at the right time – at the planning stage. Too often though, Craig is called in when it's too late. He has seen a lot of wine that has been ruined and a lot of money wasted.

We all know that wine needs to be cellared correctly so that it matures as the winemaker intended. The problem is that many cellars are built without the proper insulation, equipment or technical knowledge needed to do the job properly.

In his many years specialising in wine storage and wine cellars, Craig MacPhee, director of MacPhee's for the wine enthusiast, has seen a lot of mistakes people have made.

"Too many people have a go themselves and either end up spending more time and money to fix problems or will end up ruining a lot of good wine", says MacPhee.

So, what are the biggest mistakes people make when building a cellar?

Mistake number 1 - Assuming underground cellars will be cool all year round

The mere mention of an underground wine cellar conjures up images of the wine 'caves' of Europe. These traditional cellars are fully subterranean and are often meters under the earth. This is not the case with most underground cellars in Australia.

"People assume that underground cellars are naturally cool" says MacPhee. In reality, the opposite is often true. "In summer, and especially if they have a concrete ceiling, these spaces can become 'hot boxes' and the result is cooked wine. These cellars then become cooler in the winter months, and it is this *variation* in temperature that is detrimental to wine."

Mistake number 2 - Not using correct/any climate control equipment

Installing a conventional air conditioner in your cellar is a major mistake. "Air conditioners won't consistently keep the temperature low enough and they don't even address humidity issues", says MacPhee. Ideal cellaring temperature for all wine is 14 degrees, plus or minus one degree whilst humidity needs to be between 65% and 75%. "If air humidity is too low, this inevitably leads to corks drying out, letting in air and oxidising the wine. If air humidity is too high, you get label mould." Needless to say, storing wine in a cellar without *any* type of climate control equipment comes at a great risk.

The solution here is to install proper climate controlled equipment like a cellar conditioner that can maintain the low temperature and high humidity required to cellar wine correctly.

Mistake number 3 - Not insulating your cellar correctly

Too often, Craig has seen cellars that have been poorly insulated, if insulated at all. A cellar must be properly insulated with the right type of material. This allows the cellar conditioner to function efficiently, therefore reducing the amount of energy used.

“Insulating is easy and inexpensive if installed at the beginning of construction, but can be very costly if it has to be corrected or added later” says MacPhee.

Mistake number 4 – Poor choice of door

Another common mistake is when the cellar door is chosen simply for its aesthetic appeal. “The cellar door needs to be technically correct and made of the proper material to provide an air tight seal and good insulation; otherwise all the good work is lost. In saying this, the door also needs to be in keeping with the total look of the cellar and it is quite tricky to get all this right.”

Mistake number 5 – Poor Wine Racking

“I’ve seen a lot of people spend a lot of money on racking that might look great but it doesn’t function properly, isn’t user friendly and doesn’t take a wine collector’s changing needs into consideration. As a result, people become quite frustrated with their cellar” says MacPhee.

Wine racking needs to have the right mix of storage solutions that cater to different bottle and case sizes as well as current and future wine buying styles. There are a myriad of wine racks available at various price points but there is a lot more to it than initially meets the eye. “Getting the balance right between the appearance of the racking, convenience, space optimisation and budget is one of the key challenges when faced with selecting wine racking and you need to deal with someone who carries a broad range so that all these issues can be addressed” states MacPhee.

Other considerations

The above list is by no means exhaustive. It goes on to include issues such as wine friendly lighting, appropriate flooring, adequate airflow and ventilation, flood prevention and other technical aspects. The solution here is to get professional advice on your wine cellar. Craig MacPhee sums it up nicely “If you engage a professional early on in the project, you will overcome a lot of problems and you will have the dream cellar you’ve always wanted.”