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LOCAL POURS



Jill Lillaney, left, and her husband Sanjay Lillaney in the wine cellar that lies beneath the kitchen of their Reno home. Sanjay Lillaney, who has been collecting wine for more than 15 years, designed the cellar. RICHARD STOKES/RGJ

RENO COUPLE OFFERS A LOOK AT THEIR 2,700-BOTTLE CELLAR

By Laura Longero
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Sanjay Lillaney isn't a snob about wine, although he could be given his wine world. Lillaney, who started collecting wine in 1998, created the wine cellar in the home he shares with his wife, Jill, and their children. The couple has a modern home, but Lillaney said he wanted to give the cellar Old World charm.

A wine cellar is not as simple to build as one might think. It's not just a basement or a root cellar. When Sanjay Lillaney was designing his home, which was built in 2010, he designed around the wine cellar, which lies beneath the kitchen.

There are two entrances to the cellar: one from the ground floor that leads directly into the space for loading cases of wine, and one from the dining room. Open the door to the cellar, and you instantly feel the cooling system

used to keep the cellar at proper temperature. Stepping down a spiral staircase also brings you to the cellar, which is spacious enough to mingle and inspect bottles during a party without bumping into other guests, or worse, bottles of wine. There also is a computerized system for organizing the wine.

If you build it

Lillaney said the first consideration when building a wine cellar was to think about how much space you have and how many bottles you want to store. When he was designing the cellar, he said he wanted one that could hold 2,000 to 2,200 bottles but ended up with one that holds 2,700 bottles.

"It's not just a storage cellar," he said. "It has to be spacious."

The vapor barrier also was crucial from the beginning. It was placed all around the cellar — below tile in the floor, above the ceiling and inside the

walls — so the cooling doesn't dissipate and form condensation that could cause dry rot.

Lighting was the next consideration. Sunlight has UV rays that can damage wine. Low-voltage dim lights should be used in a wine cellar. The last of the initial considerations, Lillaney said, was choosing the cooling system. "Once those considerations are done, the rest is aesthetics."

Love of the vine

Lillaney acknowledged that not everyone needs a cellar, but said he and Jill Lillaney love wine. The couple currently has 1,600 bottles stored in the cellar. He said he doesn't have a prize bottle — he told me this as I spotted some large-format bottles of Mouton Rothschild and Insignia — and added that most of the bottles cost less than \$50.

Besides the Mouton and Insignia,



A spiral staircase leads down to the cellar. There is another entrance for loading cases of wine. RICHARD STOKES/RGJ

Lillaney's high-end reds include Robert Mondavi Estate and Chateau Montelena.

Lillaney said his favorite everyday wines were BV Rutherford cabernet sauvignon and buttery chardonnays like ZD and Chalk Hill. For bubbles, he reaches for Veuve Clicquot. Jill Lillaney said she liked Caymus Special Selection cabernet sauvignon.

"I like big red wines," Sanjay Lillaney said, a preference evidenced by many of the bottles surrounding us. "But I also like off-the-beaten-path wines like Peter Michael and Kistler. I like everything."

JANES ON WINE

A GUIDE TO ENJOYING WINE AND PAIRING ON VALENTINE'S DAY

Valentine's Day is just around the corner, and for many people, wine will be an integral part of this holiday. Whether it's wine at a restaurant as part of a meal, or wine on its own, how can you be one step ahead, wine-wise, this year?



MARK JANES

Let's start with wine at a restaurant. Remember that most restaurants allow you to bring your own wine. Be sure to call ahead and ask about the rules for bringing your own, what's called the corkage policy.

Bring only wine that isn't on the restaurant's list, something that is distinctive or special to you in some way.

Also, many restaurants will have their wine lists online, so take a few minutes to look over the list before you go. That way, you'll have a couple of smart questions at the ready and won't have to spend a lot of time fumbling through the list at the beginning of dinner.

But what if you know only a little about wine and want to order a bottle at a restaurant? What then?

The biggest pieces of advice I can give you is to ask what your date likes in wine, then ask the restaurant for help in selecting a bottle that fits tastes and budget.

In most restaurants, there will either be a sommelier, a person who focuses on wine in the restaurant, or your server will know the wines on the list.

If you are splurging, order an older wine and ask for it to be decanted. Having a wine decanted will only add to the whole wine experience.

'The Lovers'

If you are interested in wine on its own for Valentine's Day, what wines are most appropriate? I'd start with something pink and something sparkling — or kill both of these two birds with one stone by buying a sparkling rosé. Sparkling rosé wines are made all over the world, including Champagne and California.

A second idea is to think of a word or image that's important to you and search for a wine containing that theme as part of its label or name. Google terms like love, Valentine's, flower, flirt or whatever and see where that takes you.

One of my favorite vineyards in the world is Les Amoureuuses ("The Lovers"), a famous vineyard in the village of Vosne Romanée in Burgundy that grows pinot noir. Although pricey and not easy to find, I certainly wouldn't mind getting a bottle Les Amoureuuses for Valentine's Day (hint, hint for any prospective Valentines out there).

Pairs with chocolate

No respectable column about Valentine's Day and wine would be complete without mentioning wine and chocolate, though the duo is one of my least favorite wine and food pairings. Skip dry red table wines, skip port. For a twist that's a decent match, go with Madeira.

Madeira is a wine that is fortified (fermentation stopped with the addition of a spirit), oxidized (exposed to oxygen), and madeirized (exposed to heat). Because of this process, Madeira is the most reliable wine in the world to order by the glass; it's nearly



Madeira, a Portuguese wine whose fermentation is stopped using a spirit, pairs well with chocolate. Sip Madeira instead of red wine with your Valentine's Day chocolate dessert. GETTY IMAGES

impossible for it to spoil.

Madeira comes in varying levels of sweetness, but for a chocolate dish that is sweet, go with one of the sweeter Madeiras, a bual or a malmsey. Before you buy a Madeira, read about it online. Trying what is most likely a completely new wine is even better

when you know some of its geography and history.

Mark Janes, a Reno anesthesiologist, is a certified sommelier, certified wine educator and certified specialist of wine.

He is studying in the master of wine program administered by the Institute of Masters of Wine.