

# WINE AND DINE

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## How To Start Your Own Wine Collection

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By **BILL GARLOUGH** for Sun Times Media



One of the joys in life is to experience “ah-ha” moments, when you realize something new. I had a food and wine “ah-ha” moment about thirty years ago, when I experienced a meal with a tremendous food and wine pairing. That dinner sparked a passion for wine that eventually led to owning a wine cellar. If you have the desire to begin cellaring wines, now is a perfect time to begin.

This subject will be discussed in two columns. This month’s column will review why it is a good time to collect wines, where to store your collection and some simple storage tips. Next month’s column will offer specific wine collection suggestions.

### Why Store Wines

Having a selection of properly stored wines on hand allows you to have a good glass of wine to pour when friends and family stop by for conversation or dinner. Stocking a cross section of whites, reds and sparklers allows you to broaden your offerings to your guests.

### Why Collect Now

There is a glut of wine in the market due to worldwide overproduction and a global recession. Quantity is up while demand is down, creating an overabundance of wine. Wineries have had to resort to slashing their prices to the traditional wine distributors and making excess inventory available at a reduced price to secondary outlets, like the discount internet sites. Because of these deep discounts and abundant supply, now is a great time to either add to an existing collection or begin collecting wine.

### Where to Store Your Collection

Wine is sensitive to temperature and light and ideally needs to be stored in a cool, dark area. Your basement may offer a suitable place to house your wine collection, if there is a section that stays moderately cool year ‘round. Wine bottle storage can range from expensive redwood or mahogany racking to cardboard boxes. For the least expensive storing option, simply gather some empty cardboard wine boxes from your local wine merchant and place the boxes on their sides on heavy duty plastic shelving. Instant wine cellar for less than \$100! Wire lattice racking is another affordable alternative that can hold approximately 100 bottles per rack for about \$100 plus shipping. More elaborate racking and refrigeration options are certainly available at a wide range of pricing.

For those of you without a basement, consider purchasing a refrigerated wine cooler. Main floor or bedroom closets may provide darkness but do not provide a low enough temperature for long term aging.

As a general rule, when stocking your “cellar,” place white wines on the top shelves and red wines on the bottom shelves. As cold air drops, the lower shelving is cooler, making it the better location to store your longer aging wines – which tend to be your red wines. White wines tend to be consumed at a younger age, so they may not need the best shelving location. Consult your wine merchant for advice on the long term cellar potential of the wine you are purchasing.

### **Simple Wine Storage Tips**

Wine is a natural, living beverage that is sensitive to storage conditions. Properly stored wine not only maintains the wine’s quality at purchase, but can allow the wine’s aromas and flavors to gracefully evolve into a more complex and enjoyable beverage as it matures. Here are the key storage issues:

- **Temperature:** Wine ages more slowly at lower temperatures and more rapidly at higher temperatures. While wine is stored from 45 - 64 degrees, I believe it is best to keep wine in the mid-fifties range. As a point of reference, wine cellars in France are approximately 55 degrees, and are ideal for long-term aging.
- **Humidity:** A moderately humid (versus dry) environment helps the top of the cork from drying out. Storing a wine bottle on its side allows the bottom of the cork (inside the bottle) to remain moist and maintain a good seal.
- **Light:** Ultraviolet light is wine’s enemy. Wine is intentionally bottled in colored glass and stored in dark places, to protect this living beverage from light’s harmful rays.
- **Vibration:** Wine is best left undisturbed. Shaking a bottle agitates the wine and can adversely affect the flavor. For best results, give wine a few days to settle after the ride home from the wine store.

### **What Wines To Collect**

People drink what they like and what they are familiar with, at price points with which they are comfortable. So, it would be only natural to keep on hand some of your favorites. Next month’s column will help you build your wine collection by providing suggestions of different varietals to stock, some affordable labels and general food pairings for these wines. See you next month.

**Bill Garlough is the founder and owner of My Chef Catering in Naperville, the winner of the 2007 U.S. Chamber's national Small Business of the Year. Bill is a level 1 master sommelier and pairs food and wine for My Chef's customers. He can be contacted at [www.mychef.com](http://www.mychef.com).**