

# Cellar envy: 'It's like a secret wine cave'

## Fort Knox security for precious bottles

BY PATTI LANE

In the basement of a nondescript brick building at King and Spadina in downtown Toronto, an unmarked steel door opens to reveal a world of refined tastes and indulgence — a world where \$6,000 bottles of Pétrus Bordeaux nestle next to stacks of rare Montrachets and Domaine de la Romanée-Contis in the cool moist air of a massive wine cellar. From movie directors to bankers, retired Rosedale millionaires to young professionals, collectors bound by their love of wine store their precious bottles at the Fine Wine Reserve.

The wine-storage facility caters to aficionados whose space is shrinking while their collections are growing. Condo dwellers, collectors whose cellars are full, people working abroad or who need storage during a renovation can choose between a private locker for convenient access or bulk storage where wines are stored by the case.

David Jarvis, 48, got hooked about 12 years ago, buying

newly released Burgundies that needed years of ageing to reach perfection. It wasn't long before his collection grew to a couple thousand bottles. "Before you know it, you're on a one-way trip to hell. A good hell, though," says Mr. Jarvis, a hedge fund manager

When he moved from his house north of Toronto to an apartment downtown, he gave up his wine cellar but still needed to safely store his wine so it wouldn't "cork" or spoil. "If I'm going to start spending thousands of dollars on wine, I need to keep it in the proper place," he says.

At the Fine Wine Reserve, Mr. Jarvis stashes about 600 bottles in a private cabinet for which he holds the only key. "I just open my locker and go, 'What do I feel like today?'" He stores another 1,400 wines in long-term bulk storage.

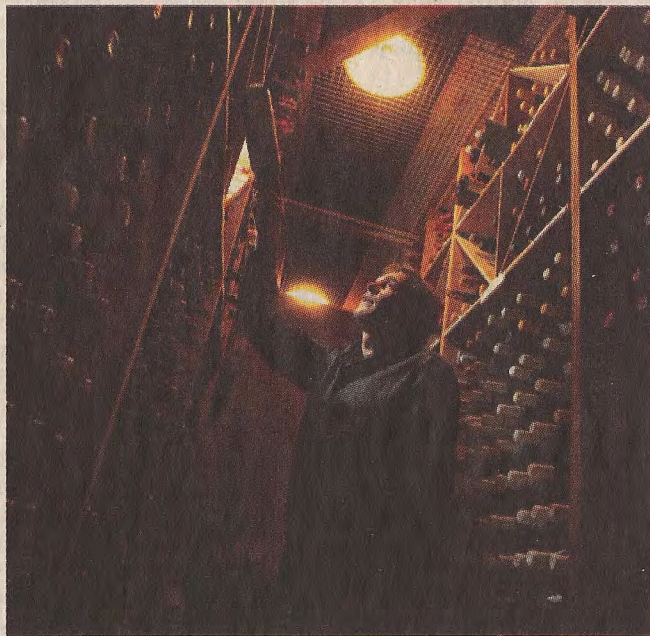
Marc Russell, founder and CEO of the upscale wine storage cellar, spent \$500,000 to transform the former industrial space into a modern 12,000-case wine cellar. Insulated two- to four-foot thick walls, high-tech climate controls and a fogging machine ensure the temperature stays a constant 13C and humidity between 65% to 75%. Since opening four years ago, Mr. Russell has steadily increased capacity

to meet demand. "I think we'll fill up in 18 months," he says.

Clients can access their wine 24 hours a day, seven days a week amid security worthy of Fort Knox. A biometric fingerprint scanner and pass card are needed to open four separate security doors before even reaching the cellar, while dozens of motion sensors and cameras track every movement within the vault.

Members can sample their wines in a luxurious tasting room, where rich burgundy walls, dark slate floor and a heavy wooden table evoke the feel of an old-world winery. Stainless steel appliances and Spiegel stemware are at the disposal of members who can invite friends, meet business clients, hold private parties and attend wine tastings.

Valentina Hedow, 35, had



NATHAN DENETTE / NATIONAL POST

**Marc Russell, owner of The Fine Wine Reserve, says his rental facility for storing fine wines should fill up in another 18 months.**

no room in her condo to properly store wine so it wasn't until she joined the Fine Wine Reserve two years ago that she could really begin to indulge her passion. Now, Ms. Hedow, a human resources manager, doesn't keep a single bottle at home.

Her office is a 10-minute walk away and she'll often stop by with friends after work to share a Pinot Noir from her 100-bottle locker before heading out to dinner in the Entertainment District. "It has an allure because it's almost like this secret wine cave."

Storage rates start at \$38 a month for the smallest eight-case locker, up to \$1,400 a month for the largest private walk-in cellar for 600 cases. A case contains 12 bottles.

IT consultant Jay D'Antonio, 29, started with a 16-case unit three years ago and moved up to a 48-case locker as his collection grew to about 700 bottles, mostly Italian wines he'll lay down for five to 20 years. "It guarantees that it's going to age properly and I don't have to worry about a wine fridge breaking down or something going wrong while I'm away," says Mr. D'Antonio.

Mr. Russell explains that fully half of the wine at the Fine Wine Reserve belongs to oenophiles who already have large collections at home with thousands of fine vintages. "Their wine cellars are full and they're still buying new releases. They're depositing

their most valuable product with me that's not ready to drink for five to 40 years."

These clients store their wine by the case in bulk storage and rarely withdraw it in the short term. Only Fine Wine Reserve employees can access these lockers. Monthly rates are about \$3 per case. Transportation and packing are also available.