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Collectors at Home

WINE CELLARS ACROSS AMERICA, MODEST TO GRAND

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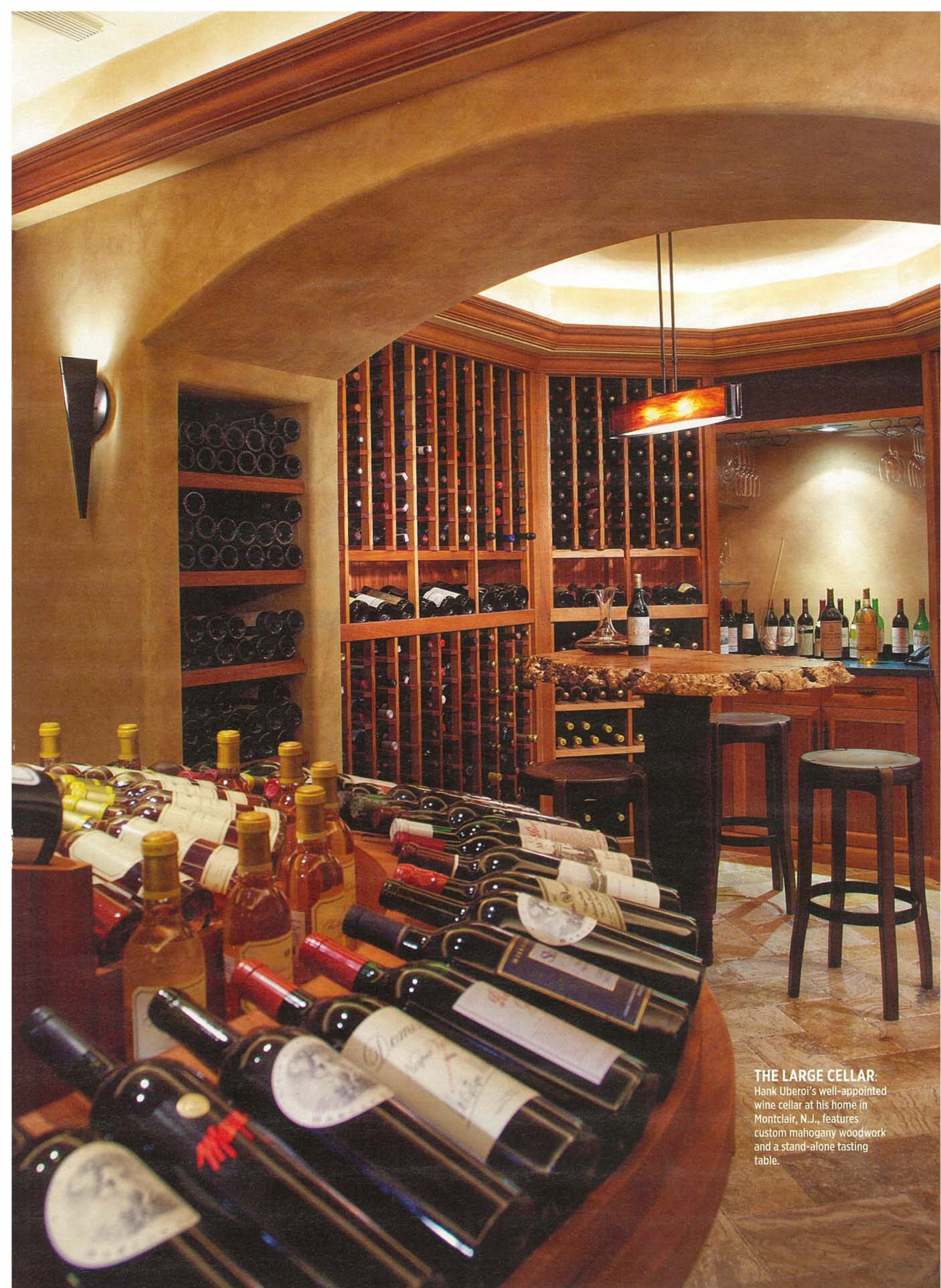
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THE LARGE CELLAR.
Hank Uberoi's well-appointed wine cellar at his home in Montclair, N.J., features custom mahogany woodwork and a stand-alone tasting table.

BIGGER IS BETTER

Serious collectors spare no expense, and even long to expand

By Peter D. Meltzer

When a cellar hits the 3,000-bottle mark, it enters a league of its own. In sheer volume, a cellar this size could easily provide a decade's worth of drinking pleasure. Intellectually, it affords tremendous luxury of choice by offering breadth and depth of selection, and alleviates the need to restock frequently. But perhaps most important to a serious collector, a cellar on a grand scale presents the opportunity to personally oversee a wine's maturation process over the years or decades, based on the multiple bottles involved.

There is little doubt that large cellars represent much more to their owners than mere

Hank Uberoi

MONTCLAIR, N.J.

Cellar capacity: 5,000

Number of bottles: 16,500

Designer: Design Build; completed in 2009

Large-format bottles: 15L Château Lynch-Bages 2000; 6L Château d'Yquem 2001; 6L Château Lafite 2000; 6L Château Haut-Brion

Oldest bottle: 1863 Madeira

repositories for bottles; for these most energetic of collectors, they are reflections of personal ambitions of the highest order. For Montclair, N.J.-based investor Hank Uberoi, who has been a collector of fine wine since 1996, his cellar is a work of art, featuring a custom Honduran mahogany racking system, a broad-leaf maple burl table, a natural stone floor with limestone veins, recessed lighting, and oval islands for displaying bottles. A true museum of wine, the cost of which topped \$350,000 (or more than \$70 per bottle just for storage), his 450-square-foot cellar, with a focus on Bordeaux and a growing presence of Burgundy, is at capacity, at 5,000 bottles.

Yet that is just the tip of the iceberg. "The larger the better—you fill it up anyway," says Uberoi. He has another 11,500 bottles in long-term storage and says he could use a lot more individual bottle racks so that wines that are ready to drink are more accessible. "I learned a lesson because I kept running out of room for my collection. Now I'd build a 7,500-bottle-capacity cellar. As an aside, install oversize racks that can accommodate both Pinot Noir and Cabernet bottles, which are shaped differently."

Uberoi and the three other collectors profiled here—all successful entrepreneurs in their 40s and 50s—came to wine collecting via entirely different routes, yet they apply the same energy to their avocation as they do their vocations. Although the composition of their cellars varies, they all share Uberoi's conviction that bigger is better—and many still aspire to even larger repositories for their liquid treasures.

To ensure pristine storage conditions, all enlisted professionals to

build their cellars rather than attempting the task themselves. Both Michael Thiemann and John Gerardy chose Vintage Cellars of San Marcos, Calif., which specializes in custom wine facilities. Hank Uberoi selected Design Build, a Greenwich, Conn.-based company owned by architect Evan Goldenberg. Kevin Buckler designed his own cellar with the assistance of master carpenter Marcel Dube.

These spaces also serve as focal points for entertaining and sharing, reflecting lifestyles that center on the enjoyment of wine and fine dining. Uberoi says his cellar is a great place to start and end gatherings with friends. "We usually serve Champagne and appetizers down there and later, dessert wine."

Few cellars—even large ones—remain static, as they are constantly being depleted and augmented. What's more, collectors' tastes often evolve over time, bringing a new dimension to a collection. For example, Uberoi shifted his focus from Bordeaux to Burgundy after being introduced to top-flight 2005s at Daniel Johnnes' La Paulée dinner in 2007 in New York.

Gerardy, of Escondido, Calif., says he typically replaces the wines he consumes with better wines or vintages. Thiemann, of San Diego, says he regrets the Bordeaux and California Cabernets he purchased in the mid-'90s. Now he buys exclusively Burgundy and Northern Rhône wines through brokers who have well-stored older bottles. Since founding California's Adobe Road Winery, Buckler has been sourcing small up-and-coming producers based in Paso Robles and Central Coast that are about the same size as Adobe Road, in order to keep current with California wine country trends.

As a high school student in 1979, Buckler visited South Africa's Stellenbosch wine region and came away highly impressed. He started buying California wine seriously in the mid-1980s and began scouring California vineyards. In the mid-1990s, he founded Adobe Road, a limited-production (6,000-case) winery in Sonoma County, while continuing to run his NASCAR racing business. When he moved to a new home in 1995, he converted half of a two-car garage into a wine-storage facility that accommodated 2,000 bottles. It was soon filled to capacity.

When he started building his 5,000-bottle, 450-square-foot cellar, which was completed in 2008 (and was quickly filled), Buckler had to dig out his backyard below the water table, which became "an engineering miracle and nightmare," he says. Buckler designed the project with the help of a master carpenter; the result is a subterranean cellar as secure as a vault. It also boasts a generator backup cooling system, in the event the primary system fails.

Buckler wanted his cellar to evoke the feel of a Tuscan villa. "To that end, we installed a slate floor, lots of redwood, reflective light. We then put in a crusty old 'dungeon door' and a wood-lined tunnel entrance. It was all about having fun!" He declines to put a dollar figure on the construction cost, instead stating that it was a "labor of love." Despite the cellar's capaciousness, Buckler says that if he were to do it again, he would shoot for a 7,500-bottle capacity. "It's wise to have a lot of empty racks."

And there is plenty to choose from, at least when it comes to California. Buckler has verticals of Harlan, Bryant Family, Colgin, Screaming Eagle, Araujo, Dalla Valle and Sine Qua Non. The cellar has more than 100

Michael Thiemann

SAN DIEGO

Cellar capacity: 4,000

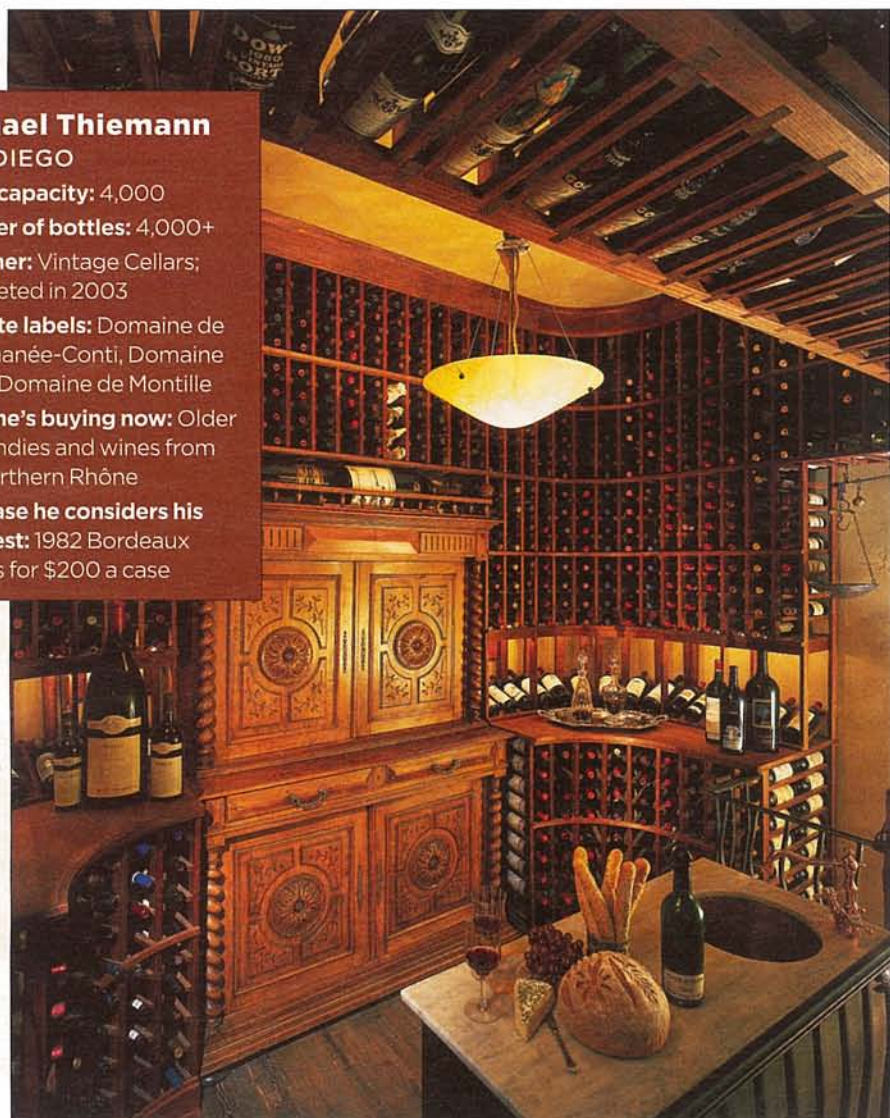
Number of bottles: 4,000+

Designer: Vintage Cellars; completed in 2003

Favorite labels: Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, Domaine Leroy, Domaine de Montille

What he's buying now: Older Burgundies and wines from the Northern Rhône

Purchase he considers his smartest: 1982 Bordeaux futures for \$200 a case



magnums, and bottlings from Spain and Italy. To enjoy it all, there are two tasting areas. Buckler observes that the joy of having a large cellar includes sharing the bounty. "When guests come to dinner, I ask what their favorite wine is. If I've got it, it will be opened over dinner."

Gerardy, who owns a nationwide photography business, built his 4,000-bottle capacity cellar to accommodate entertaining. It boasts special lighting, a sound system, and loads of display area for collections of wine labels and the artist series bottles he has gathered with his wife, Shirley. "We also created a 160-square-foot lounge area outside the temperature-controlled space where we've hosted parties of 20 guests or more. We installed a wet bar and a dishwasher just for glassware."

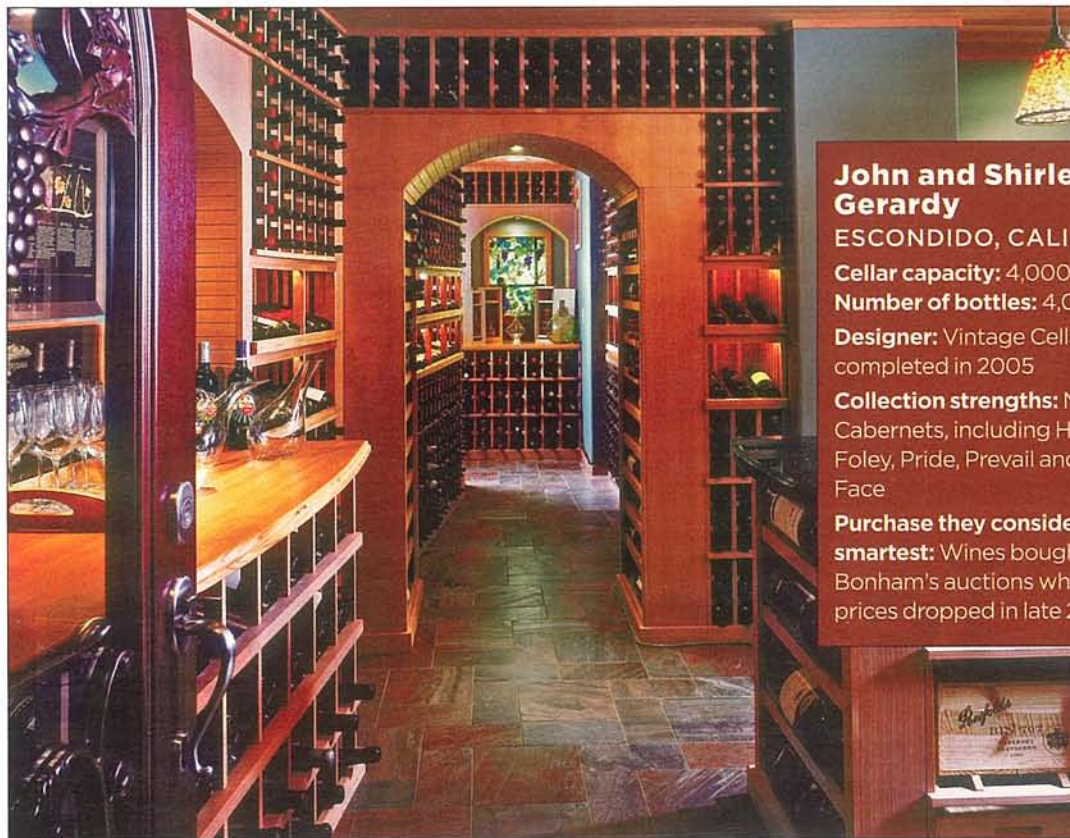
To build his cellar, Gerardy excavated beneath his home; splitting and removing the large granite boulders amounted to almost half of the final construction cost of \$200,000. Completed in 2005, the 360-square-foot cellar features all the trimmings, including granite countertops, redwood racking, honed copper slate, leaded glass, and sculpted iron railings. Its racks are filled with top California and Washington Cabernet Sauvignon, including many large-format bottles.

Gerardy's interest in wine came as a result of his vintage car collection. He had been invited by a fellow Shelby Cobra owner to join a rally from Santa Cruz to Napa and Sonoma. "We discovered wine on that trip and have since visited wineries throughout California and western Washington. We have also taken several wine classes at the CIA Rudd Center," he says.

Gerardy says he decided on a 4,000-bottle cellar because the size would enable him to age more wine instead of buying mature bottles, which tend to be more expensive. He recommends going overboard with a cellar's cooling unit: "It doesn't cost much more to install a more powerful one that doesn't have to work as hard to keep the cellar at optimum temperature." Ninety-five percent of his collection is housed in racks. "From a practical standpoint, that makes the wine more accessible."

Michael Thiemann was the wine-cellar manager at the co-op house he lived in while in college. His serious introduction to collectible wine came through Beltramo's Wines & Spirits in Menlo Park, Calif. "I studied and sampled as many wines as I could afford, but the real breakthrough was teaching wine-tasting courses while enrolled at the Harvard Business School in the early '80s."

Thiemann, who today is the CEO of Global Analytics Holdings, a financial consulting firm for overseas investments, wanted to create an underground experience even though everything in his hometown of San Diego is built above-ground. So he constructed a



John and Shirley Gerardy

ESCONDIDO, CALIF.

Cellar capacity: 4,000;

Number of bottles: 4,000+

Designer: Vintage Cellars; completed in 2005

Collection strengths: Napa Cabernets, including Hobbs, Foley, Pride, Prevail and West Face

Purchase they consider

smartest: Wines bought at Bonham's auctions when prices dropped in late 2008

two-story tasting room to replicate the sensation for \$50,000.

The size of Thiemann's 250-square-foot cellar also determined the logistics of his collection. "Because I have been collecting for a long time, the cellar reflects a lot about how I drink wine," says Thiemann. "For example, I have a sizable bin area that is not inventoried—these are my everyday wines (still very good, but I probably won't keep them for 20 years). A cellar my size enables me to find the perfect bottle to suit the occasion. I particularly like matching a wine with the birth year of my friends' children. From a physical standpoint, our house and cellar are the diametric opposite. Our home is contemporary, whereas the cellar is full of antiques and aged lumber."

And he likes cellars with dining facilities. "If I were doing it again, I would include more seating as well as large-format storage bins." Thiemann says that every first-time visitor to his cellar gets to take a bottle home. "I have a special 'take one' area!"

Once a cellar exceeds 3,000 bottles, it's difficult to rely on memory alone to pinpoint a bottle's location. Each collector devised his own method. Uberoi uses the popular, off-the-shelf CellarTracker program, while Buckler developed his own personal system using Microsoft Excel. Gerardy opts for Cellar software and Thiemann uses Robert Parker's Wine Advisor & Cellar Manager by Wine Technologies, Inc., released in 2003.

While all of the collectors profiled here have donated wine to charity, few have ever sold their wines. Buckler, however, says that in the '90s, he would buy cult wines like Screaming Eagle at Butterfield's auction house, then sell them on eBay and invest the proceeds in his emerging cellar. He enjoys wearing two hats. In a recent e-mail, he wrote: "I am here at the Bristol Motor Speedway in Tennessee, sitting on the pitbox, calling strategy with my NASCAR Sprint Cup team. But I am thinking about WINE!!!"

For collectors on a grand scale, the passion for wine is seldom far from the surface, and their thirst for more is seldom slaked, even with thousands of bottles already at the fingertips.

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Looking for more cellar inspiration? The collectors featured in this story generously opened their doors, sharing spaces small and large. View more photos from their cellars at www.winespectator.com/113010.