

Cellaring: the art of knowing when to drink it now and when to save it

All lovers of fine wine like to cellar a few bottles and hope that they will mature over time and we can drink some old wines at a reasonable price.

Cellaring wines in Darwin for many years can be difficult unless you are lucky enough to have an air-conditioned cellar.

Wines in Darwin should be stored in an area that maintains a fairly constant temperature—remember that wines here will mature at about twice the rate of those in southern areas.

Having a cellar is a great asset only if it is used to store wines that will benefit from long-term bottle maturation.

Too often, wines that will not improve—or worse, wines that will deteriorate—are stored in cellars.

In broad terms wines can be divided into three categories:

- * Wines destined to be consumed when they are young.
- * Fortified wines matured in wood.
- * Wines that will develop further in the bottle.

The first wines usually fit into the lower priced wine segments.

They are designed to reach peak maturity in about two years, they are at their best when purchased and if cellared further are likely to be disappointing.

The second category of wood matured wines covers all fortified wines.

Tawny ports, muscats, sheries etc are all aged in oak casks for many years.

Although they are often pedigree and prestigious, cask-matured wines are best drunk when freshly bottled as no further maturation takes place.

The third category—wines which mature well in the bottle—includes all styles of table wines, vintage ports and sparkling burgundy.

Champagne will not improve significantly in the bottle and is best consumed soon after purchase.

Although the most popular cellaring wines are reds and vintage ports, white wines both dry and sweet can also be rewarding if cellared.

Certain white styles can live for 20 years. As a white wine matures, its colour changes from green/yellow to deep golden yellow, while red wines change from purple to deep red.

When cellaring, a poor cork can ruin



an excellent wine. Oxygen will penetrate, causing oxidation, or the wine may leak out of the bottle.

When you buy a wine that you intend to cellar for several years, one idea is to remove the capsules and check the top and sides of the corks for seepage.

Consume the wines in order of the distance that the wine has seeped along the cork, starting with the longest.

Another idea is to wax the top of the bottle to completely seal the cork.

Waxing bottles is a common practice used to protect wines that are intended for long-term maturation.

To do it, prepare a mixture of about 90 per cent candle wax and 10 per cent bees' wax.

Allow this to melt in a suitable container and simply dip the top and make sure that the wax completely covers the capsule to achieve an airtight seal.

After waxing, you can confidently mature the wine and expect every bottle in the carton to reach the same standard.

Our Law Society members' special this month is a new wine and wine style from Penfolds—the 1992 Penfolds Old Vine Barossa Valley Mourvedre-Grenache-Shiraz.

The winemaker said: "The expression

of these traditional Barossa varieties is generously featured in this distinctive red wine.

"Carefully selected fruit from very old, low yielding vines was blended to produce a rich earthy wine with a smoky tobacco-like oak integration.

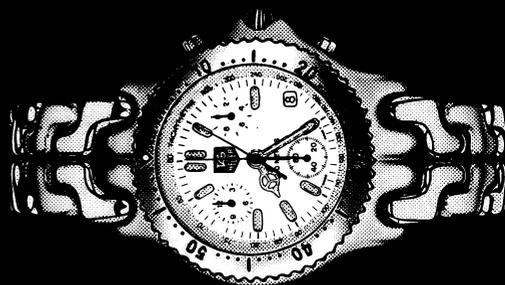
"The comparative scarcity of grapes suitable for this Rhine Valley influenced style will always mean that this wine is produced in limited quantities.

"It is unique and a true product of the Barossa."

Try this new wine at the Members' Price of \$15.50 per bottle.

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