

uncorked with Debra Meiburg meiburgde@aol.com

It's not easy to find storage space in Hong Kong. For most people, storing more than a few bottles of wine at home is out of the question, which is fine given that all but a handful of wines should be drunk soon after plucking them from the retail shelves. But if you have long-term plans for your prized Lafite, you need to take care of it.

When stored carefully, wines not only maintain their quality but some will improve in aroma, flavour and complexity. Consider the five "C" factors to keep your bottles in good condition: cool, calm, constant, concealed and clean.

Cool

Transport the bottle from shop to home as quickly as possible and avoid stowing it in a hot car en route. Wines kept at too high a temperature will age faster than those kept at a cool temperature so, once home, do not be tempted to store your wine in the kitchen – it is one of the least heat-stable environments. Placing a wine rack atop a refrigerator seems like a smart use of space but fridge tops are treacherous for wine as considerable heat is generated by the warm tubing at the back of the fridge and heat always rises.

Calm

Another reason to avoid storing bottles atop or even within

standard refrigerators is the pulsating vibration the appliances produce. This might be good for the Beach Boys, but when it comes to wine, there is no such thing as *Good Vibrations*. Wine needs to rest.

Movement agitates the molecules and oxygen trapped in the bottle, speeding the wine to an early demise. If you are the proud parent of teenagers, keep in mind that excessive sound can cause harmful vibrations too.

Constant

Though much has been written about correct storage temperature, the actual number isn't as crucial as maintaining a cool, constant environment. Fluctuation between warm and cool temperatures causes premature ageing and triggers reactions that diminish a wine's complexity and elegance.

Concealed

Exposing wine to light is like lying on the beach without wearing sunscreen; your wine will age prematurely. Champagne is particularly sensitive to light, which is why it is often sold sealed in individual boxes. Fluorescent lighting is notably unkind to wine so consider installing



gentle incandescent or sodium vapour lights, or use a black-out blanket to cover your bottles.

Clean

An odour-free environment is important because gases and smells can seep through the cork seal and contaminate the wine, which is yet another reason to avoid placing it in the refrigerator for long-term storage. Also, keep bottles clear of debris that could house insects, mould or larvae eager to infect the corks. Avoid storing near fruits, vegetables and cheeses or any other foods capable of fermenting.

So where should you store your wine? Other than a professional cellaring service, such as Crown Wine Cellars, or a specially designed home cellar (an unused maid's room can easily be converted), the best storage option is a chilling cabinet designed specifically for storing wines, such as EuroCave, Transtherm or Vintec. If a wine fridge is out of the question because you blew your annual bonus at the pub, store wine under your bed. Providing you don't have a, um, heated nightlife, the mattress provides insulation to keep your bottles calm, cool and collected. And that should help with your "Z" factors.