

The birthday bunker

By Sophie Hall

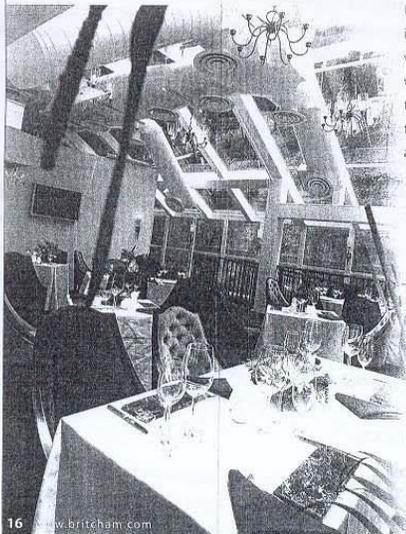
CHAMBER MEMBERS, I apologise. I organised a private birthday party at Crown Relocation's wonderful venue - Crown Wine Cellars in Shouson Hill this September. This underground bunker has been going strong for just over eighteen months and is a complete winner for private dinners and wine tasting occasions. Don't just run for it. Sprint to hold your next event here. It is awesome.

Crown Wine Cellars lives up to its name with a wine list so impressive it is hard to know where to begin. You are taken on an almost Phileas Fogg style journey across a vast amount of vineyards and their wines. Through South America, on to North America, then Europe, South Africa and finally finishing your experience in Australia and New Zealand. The paperwork alone is enough to exhaust you and a small Amazonian rain forest but it is well worth the effort. We chose two wines: a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc and a New Zealand Cabernet Merlot which complimented the food brilliantly and came as part of a four-hour drinking package along with soft drinks. It was, after all, a birthday celebration, and both the red and white wine served in handmade crystal glasses slipped down far too easily during the evening.

We meandered through to the Library, where giant lilies were placed as a table centrepiece by the cellar ideal for 20 guests. The Café Deco Group organised the catering and they do a superb job. Casting aside our diets for the evening, we dined on an absolute feast of grilled green asparagus salad with melted basil tomatoes, caper berries and baked aubergine-mozzarella wrap.

The guests were given a choice of two main courses: pan-fried New Zealand monkfish, butternut squash and mushroom risotto, sauce rouille and basil pesto or grilled Szechuan beef medallions with chillies, honey and five spice jasmine rice with Chinese

kimchi. Presented with an incredibly varied menu of various price ranges six weeks prior, it was difficult to select two main courses that would cater for all tastes.



Satisfyingly the venue, staff and caterers received nothing but praise all night and the birthday boy, who was still in shock, had a permanently ensconced smile which pretty much covered what we were all thinking. Crème Brûlée flambéed with dark rum and served with seasonal berries rounded off a delectable dinner and 'Consulate Clare' very kindly made a highly impressive birthday cake in the shape of a Scottish rugby ball.

Owing to their intended purpose, which was to store ammunition and weapons in preparation of World War II, the bunkers are located approximately 60 feet below ground with 3-foot thick concrete walls which is lucky after the third rendition of "Oh Flower of Scotland" was sung. To make the best use of such ideal cellar conditions, Crown Wine Cellars entrusted the conversion of the bunkers to an international cellar construction company which has more than 30 years experience in developing professional cellars for some of the most internationally respected wine cellars. A wonderful feature of the very private Library styled to an era long past, is the direct walk-through access to the Platinum and Gold Members' cellar. It is here that thankfully we were not allowed to tread but where the Crown Wine Cellar members can store their private collections in crafted wooden cabinets and which is stored under heavy CCTV surveillance.

In a city that is constantly striving for original and exciting dining venues, Crown Wine Cellars has excelled itself as a niche outfitter. Excellent value, wonderful staff, delicious food, a highly original venue and a plethora of wines would leave any connoisseur supping for more. Ironically, five weeks later, no one could remember why they had been to Crown Wine Cellars, but everyone remembered the bunker!

For further information on wine storage or event organising please contact Ingrid Chan on 2580 6287 or ichan@crowwinecellars.com