



Jewel In The Crown

Asia's first professional wine cellar facility and private clubhouse brings fine wines home to Hong Kong in a historic place where perfection is the ultimate goal.

There is a surging interest in fine wines in Hong Kong, and the wine market is booming. That means that the demand for buying and storing high-end collectible wines is also growing.

Gregory De'eb, a former South African diplomat and Head of Mission in Hong Kong, changed his career and country to become the head of a business to satisfy this burgeoning group of fine wine lovers. Crown Wine Cellars in Shouson Hill, a suburb on Hong Kong Island, is the first professional wine cellar facility and private clubhouse in Asia. The cellars keep hundreds of millions of dollars worth of the world's best wines sixty feet underground in an unused but historically significant military site that offers the perfect setting for keeping wine at its most perfect state.

The Crown Wine Cellars vision was initiated in 2001, when De'eb approached Jim Thompson, chairman of the Crown Worldwide Group, with the idea to convert bunkers into wine cellars. They soon realized that they shared a desire to establish a wine cellar facility on par with the best available anywhere else worldwide.

"The setting should embody all the core values of wine, including tradition, history, romanticism, and beauty while offering unparalleled levels of access and service. The piece de resistance would be the inclusion of an exclusive member's clubhouse and park-like surroundings," explains De'eb.

While searching for the ideal location, the pair came across what has become known as the Deep Water Bay Drive Bunkers.

Crown, being known for its innovative and industry-leading ideas, approached the Hong Kong government with a partnership concept to restore the site to historical accuracy, while transforming it into an interactive location that could be enjoyed by a broad section of the local community.

The site was a secret military facility officially known as the Central Ordinance (Munitions) Depot, while its code name was Little Hong Kong. Construction of the Bunkers was completed in 1937, at which time the entire site was comprised of twelve pairs of bunkers, a depot headquarters, a sentry box, and a guardhouse. Certain commentators have speculated that the guardhouse may have been constructed by the Japanese military during the occupation of Hong Kong.

De'eb says he got the notion after being invited to a government conference in 2000 that talked about Hong Kong and its ability to become the third wine-trading center of the world after London and New York, and the wine-trading center of Asia.

"Hong Kong currently owns around seventeen percent of the rare and fine wine stocks in the world," says De'eb, making it per capita, the wine-collecting capital of the world.

Previously, these Hong Kong-owned wines were held in storage in the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe, the United States, and Singapore, because Hong Kong's climate was thought unsuitable for storing and keeping fine wines. "We studied this and found the supposition incorrect. We decided we could create the perfect blend of conditions by correcting mistakes

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**— Gregory De'eb, Chairman,
Crown Worldwide Group**



made previously and by building on the strengths of Hong Kong."

And thus, the Crown Wine Cellars project was off and running. To make best use of the virtually ideal cellar conditions of the bunkers, Crown Wine Cellars signed on a world-class cellar construction company to assist in the conversion.

The results are textbook perfect. The cellar has computer-controlled humidity and temperature checks and balances. The consistency is ensured by multizone sensors. Zero vibration is ensured with reinforced concrete construction with walls more than a yard thick. There is zero tolerance for natural light presentation, and a multizone lighting system guarantees that total illumination never occurs at one time.

It boasts six underground cellars and a private-members clubhouse comprised of two underground bunkers as well as a newly constructed conservatory.

What is held in the underground cellars are prized wines that are about eighty percent owned by private individuals, with the remaining twenty percent the property of four of the top five wine-auctioning companies in the world.

To say the club has taken off would be an understatement; it currently has a two-year waiting list for certain categories. "We have to turn people away. We want to have an interesting club, however, and not just one full of the self-important and wealthy," says De'eb.

He expects the phenomenal growth in Hong Kong's fine wine market to continue, and believes that CWC is at the forefront of the trend. To back up his assertion, CWC has opened three new facilities in the past eighteen months to cater to rising demand.

While there are many wines of exceptional note stored in the cellars, there is one that raises De'eb's voice to a pitch of excitement. It's a case of six bottles, specially numbered, and purchased at auction about a year ago. The DRC (Domaine de la Romanee Conti) Burgundy was bottled within the last thirty years, and was purchased for about HK\$1.8 million.

De'eb believes it shouldn't be cellared anywhere but at CWC.

"We have created a perfect replica of the cellar in which wine is matured for the first critical years after bottling. Nothing more and nothing less," he proclaims. ■

Guests in residence at InterContinental Hong Kong can contact the concierge for exclusive "In the Know" access to Crown Wine Cellars.

Crown Wine Cellars is located at 18 Deep Water Bay Drive, Shouson Hills, Hong Kong Island, Hong Kong. For information, call +852.2580.6287.

