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Uncorking 10 private wine collections



By [Peg San Felippo](#)
Special to The Post

Thursday, May 31, 2007

No wine snobs here: Enthusiasts – some with cellars, some with storage units – share their passion.

You can always tell when someone is passionate about wine. Their tone's upbeat, and they love sharing their opinions on the subject. They also are genuinely interested in other people's thoughts.

Here's a peek into the collections of enthusiasts who are into wine but aren't stuffy or snobby about their hobby.

DONALD YATES, PALM CITY

Age: 33

Occupation: Florida Power & Light energy consultant

Number of bottles in cellar: 130

Selection: 60 percent Red Australian and Spanish

Years interested in wine: Three

What made you get serious about it: Friends and more exposure to better wines.

Current favorite wine: 2003 Clio, a Spanish red that's about \$40, great quality for the price with big and fruity characters.

Favorite wine in the \$20 range: The '04 Termes from Spain or the Woodcutter Shiraz

Least favorite: New Zealand sauvignon blanc

Favorite wine and food pairing: Steak and a big red.

I buy most of my wine: From local stores.

My wine storage unit is: A Magic Chef 50 (which holds 50 bottles) that I received as a birthday gift, and a Danby Silhouette 70 (which holds 70 bottles). I got it because size-wise it was overly big.

Advice to new collectors: Don't focus so much on the scoring — look at the tasting notes and trust your own judgment.

Favorite wine vacation: Been thinking about going to California sometime in the near future.



Cydney Scott/The Post
[enlarge](#)

David Lambert's cellar in his Palm Beach home holds over one thousand bottles of wine. The cellar was part of the home's construction when it was built five years ago.



Vada Mossavat/The Post
[enlarge](#)

Doug Gonano with a bottle of 1991 Eisele Vineyard (Araujo Estate) Cabernet Sauvignon in the wine cellar of his home.



Cydney Scott/The Post
[enlarge](#)

Bob Allan of Jupiter uses a Eurocave unit that is custom fit for his kitchen. He buys most of his wines direct from the wineries.

BOB ALLAN, JUPITER

Age: 60

Occupation: Vice president for a market research company

Number of bottles in cellar: 250 to 300

Wines in collection: Big reds, mostly from California

Years interested in wine: 25

What made you get serious about it: Going back to California on a regular basis and drinking some great wines there.

Current favorite wine: Tara Bella, a red wine with very limited production. It's big and complex.



Taylor Jones/The Post
[enlarge](#)

Mike McNerney of Loxahatchee keeps his wines in a custom mahogany unit that matches his furniture. His wine parties include blind tastings, with the winning couple taking home a selection of wines.

Favorite wine, \$25 or less range: 2005 Montes Alpha, from Chile. It's \$9.95 and a great wine for the money, if you enjoy bigger reds.

Least favorite: Mass-produced wines

Favorite wine and food pairing: Pinot noir and rack of lamb

I buy most of my wine: Direct from the wineries.

I store my wine in: Two 140-bottle Eurocave units. We selected them because they were built to custom fit our kitchen cabinets. They are pretty much hassle free, except to change a sensor battery once a year.

Advice to new collectors: Try everything at least twice and make sure the glasses you are drinking out of are clean. If they aren't, or they're soapy it ruins the true taste of the wine.

Favorite wine vacation: A wine barge trip through Burgundy, France. Incredible.

DR. JOSEPH CHARLES, STUART

Age: 49

Occupation: Radiologist

Number of bottles in cellar: 1,700 to 1,800

Wine in collection: 95 percent red, half of which is Bordeaux, another quarter California, and the rest Italian and miscellaneous.

Years interested in wine: 10

What made you get serious about it: I wasn't a wine drinker, but heard about all the health benefits and that got me started learning about and appreciating wine.

Current favorite wine: 1982 and '86 Mouton Rothschild. Bordeauxs are great because they change as they age, but drink well from they time they are young. They are constantly different.

Favorite wine in the \$20 range: Mollydooker, The Boxer, a big wine for around \$19.

Least favorite: Pinot noir

Favorite wine and food pairing: An aged Bordeaux with lamb or veal

I buy most of my wine: From Roy's in Fort Pierce, and Zachy's in New York. Wines futures I buy from ABC. If I'm traveling and visit wineries, then I ship direct.

My wine storage unit is: A 3,000-bottle custom cellar that was designed when the house was purchased.

Advice to new collectors: Find out what you like. Try a lot of things, and if you have a wine budget, stick to it.

Favorite wine vacation: Italy. The people, scenery and wine and food are truly an experience.

HARPER CLARK, STUART

Age: 49

Occupation: Investment real estate

Number of bottles in cellar: 220

Selection: Red Bordeaux and Australian

Years interested in wine: Three

What made you get serious about it: I tasted a 1995 Cheval Blanc and then understood why there is such a passion about wine. From there I started buying wines that showed their quality. There are quality wines available at all price ranges.

Current favorite wine: 2005 Chateau Montelena Chardonnay. It's nice complex with a long and lingering finish.

Favorite wine in the \$20 range: Mollydooker Two Left Feet Shiraz, Australia. It has complex flavors with big fruit. Great wine for the price.

Least favorite: Mad Dog 20/20

Favorite wine and food pairing: California Chardonnay with grilled grouper and New York strip with a French Bordeaux.

I buy most of my wine: From the Internet and ABC Fine Wine and Spirits; once in while also from Total Wines. I also use the Internet as a resource and compare prices at sites such as winebid.com, then buy from the place that offers the best prices.

My wine storage unit is: A 40-bottle unit from Costco with a dual control for whites and reds. There is an alarm if there is a temperature issue. It also locks, which is a nice feature. The rest of our wine is stored in a locker at ABC.

Advice to new collectors: Follow your taste, get educated, and look for wines for \$25 or less. Look for wines with 90 point ratings or more; however, ratings aren't everything. Most of all, it should be fun.

Favorite wine vacation: Haven't had one yet but we are in the planning stages of doing a Napa Valley wine tour.



Libby Volgyes/The Post
[enlarge](#)

Marcy Hall and Patrick Laramie stand in front of their three wine lockers at Imperial Wine Storage Inc. in West Palm Beach.



Vada Mossavat
[enlarge](#)

Dr. Joseph Charles, in the wine room of his house, wasn't a wine drinker until he heard about the health benefits and started to learn more about wine. With 1,700 to 1,800 bottles and a 3,000-bottle custom cellar in his home, he has room to expand his collection.



Vada Mossavat/The Post
[enlarge](#)

Donald Yates, with a bottle of 2003 Clio from his collection, has been interested in wine for three years. His advice to newcomers? Study tasting notes and trust your judgment when choosing wines.



Vada Mossavat/The Post
[enlarge](#)

Harper Clark of Stuart got passionate about wine three years ago after tasting a 1995

Cheval Blanc. He's planning a Napa Valley trip.



Libby Volgyes/The Post [enlarge](#)

Ryan and Katherine Rothstein and their dog Bentley pose in front of their wine collection. Ryan's current favorite is any brunello from Italy.



Cydney Scott/The Post [enlarge](#)

Anna and Justin Talerico have all of the wines they store in their home inventoried and numbered so they can track their age.

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DOUG GONANO, JENSEN BEACH

Age: 53

Occupation: Attorney

Number of bottles in cellar: 1,650

Wine in collection: 55 percent American, 25 percent Spain, Italy and Portugal and 20 percent French.

Years interested in wine: 25

What made you get serious about it: Roy Anderson, of Roy's in Fort Pierce, was a client, and we then became friends. His son Keith introduced me to the fine wines that were available in the early '80s and it progressed from there.

Current favorite wine: 2001 Rieussec second-growth Sauterne and any vintage of Patz & Hall Pisoni Ranch Pinot Noir.

Favorite wine in the \$20 range: Zenato Ripasso, an Italian red. It's complex and unique. I like it because it's different.

Least favorite: High alcohol, unbalanced wines

Favorite wine and food pairing: A hearty risotto and an aged Barolo from Italy

I buy most of my wine: From Roy's, or directly shipped from wineries.

My wine storage unit is: A custom-built room that holds 2,000 bottles. It has a Breeze-aire cooling and humidity unit with custom redwood wine racking.

Advice to new collectors: Don't be afraid to try different varietals and don't be close-minded. Most of all, don't drink wines in a vacuum. Try different wines especially with food but make sure that you are drinking a wine that works with what you're eating, or you'll never find out how good a wine can be.

Favorite wine vacation: I have two. A California trip to Napa and Sonoma. But the most memorable was Northern Spain and France. Being able to taste terrific wines and then matching them up with regional foods was a terrific experience.

MARCY HALL, WEST PALM BEACH

Age: 37

Occupation: Insurance broker

Number of bottles in cellar: 500 bottles

Wines in collection: Mainly Washington state with some California and Italian

Years interested in wine: Eight

What made you get serious about it: We lived in Washington state and became involved in the wine culture there. We would take trips to California, and that got us even more interested in wine. We moved to West Palm a year ago.

Current favorite wine: Owen Roe, duBrul Vineyards Cabernet. Very small production but a wonderful, big, red wine.

Favorite wine in the \$20 range: Amavi Cabernet. This wine tastes much more expensive than \$18.

Least favorite: Yellow Tail Shiraz

Favorite wine and food pairing: Steak and cabernet

I buy most of my wine: Direct from wineries.

My wine storage unit is: A locker at Imperial Wine Storage. The locale is a great location and our wine is safe there, especially if there is a hurricane.

Advice to new collectors: Go and spend time at wineries. It really is the best way to learn about wine.

Favorite wine vacation: Italy — phenomenal! We had great wines for \$5 a bottle and the wine and cheese pairings were very good. They really showcased the wines.

DAVID LAMBERT, PALM BEACH

Age: 53

Occupation: Formerly worked on Wall Street

Number of bottles in cellar: Several thousand

Summary of selection: Broken down in thirds — California, French and Italian.

Years interested in wine: 20 What made you get serious about it: Visited California and had dinner at a winery in their cellar. The whole experience made me have a much deeper appreciation for wine.

Current favorite wine: White Burgundy

Favorite wine in the \$20 range: Spottswoode Sauvignon Blanc

Least favorite: Sweet wines, except sauternes

Favorite wine and food pairing: White with fish; cabernets or Bordeaux with main entrees.

I buy most of my wine: Directly or through wholesalers. I may go to Total Wine for a specific name wine if I know they carry it.

My wine storage unit is: A custom-built walk-in cellar in my home. I also store wine at Imperial Wine Storage.

Advice to new collectors: Drink what you like and experiment!

Favorite wine vacation: I have two. Biking through Burgundy and spending time in Napa and Sonoma.

MIKE McNERNEY, LOXAHATCHEE

Age: 41

Occupation: Realtor and former golf professional

Number of bottles in cellar: 1,000

Selection: 50 percent are Australian reds and remaining are California and French

Years interested in wine: 20-plus

What made you get serious about it: I'm from Chicago and was a beer drinker. Beer started getting boring and I heard a couple collectors talking about wine and it piqued my interest. Wine really is a lifestyle.

Current favorite wine: 1998 Wolf Blass Black Label. 100 percent cabernet. I enjoy it because it's full-bodied with a lot of fruit.

Favorite wine in the \$20 range: Bleasdale Reserve Shiraz. It's a great deal for under \$20.

Least favorite: Any chianti.

Favorite wine and food pairing: A beef filet and potato with a big red wine or spaghetti with a shiraz.

I buy most of my wine: From ABC or direct from wineries.

My wine storage unit is: An 8-foot-by-5.5-foot custom mahogany unit that holds 568 bottles. It's from California Wine Cabinets, which I chose because it best matched our furniture.

Advice to new collectors: Be sure to use the right glass. For instance, if you're drinking big reds, you want to use a big volume glass, so the wine can aerate and you can experience all the character of the wine.

Also, play games with wine — have it be the focus of parties you throw. A couple times a year we have six couples over and ask them to bring two bottles of wine — one in the \$60 price range and another in the \$25 price range. We do a blind tasting with the \$60 wines using a point system, and whoever accumulates the most points answering correctly about the wine gets to take home all six bottles of the \$25 wines.

Favorite wine vacation: Going to my relatives' houses and raiding their wine collections.

RYAN ROTHSTEIN, PALM BEACH GARDENS

Age: 32

Occupation: Sales manager for WPBF-Channel 25

Number of bottles in cellar: 70 to 80

Selection: Eclectic — mostly reds from Spain and Australia with just a little French thrown in.

Years interested in wine: Five years

What made you get serious about it: My family has always been interested in food. It was a logical progression for me to become involved in wine. I read everything I can about it.

Current favorite wine: Any brunello from Italy.

Favorite wine in the \$20 range: Kaesler Stonehorse GSM. It's a big red wine that's really well-balanced and still elegant.

Least favorite: Overpriced California wines.

Favorite wine and food pairing: Bordeaux or brunello with lamb.

I buy most of my wine: From local wine shops or directly from the wineries.

My wine storage unit is: A GE profile that holds 45 bottles. It came with the house, but I'm looking at other units.

Advice to new collectors: Don't make assumptions about what you might or might not like. What you like today may not even be on your radar screen tomorrow, so be open.

Favorite wine vacation: My honeymoon in Italy. We really enjoyed the Chianti, Banfi regions.

JUSTIN TALERICO, BOCA RATON

Age: 39

Occupation: CEO of an Internet company

Number of bottles in cellar: 600

Years interested in wine: 11

What made you get serious about it: I came from a foodie family and that really carried over into my adult life.

Current favorite wine: 1982 La Tache (French)

Favorite wine in the \$20 range: 2001 Three Legged Red; it's \$17 but drinks like \$50. It has some great minerality to it.

Least favorite: Fruity California chardonnays

Favorite wine and food pairing: E&E Black Pepper Shiraz with short ribs.

I buy most of my wine: From all over.

My wine storage unit is: A custom-built glass fronted cellar off the dining room with the temperature and humidity controlled by the Whisper Cool system. The wine is visible when guests are seated at the dining room table.

Advice to new collectors: Don't get sucked into "cult" wines and don't feel pressured to spend \$100 on a bottle. There are a lot of good wines out there for a lot less money.

Favorite wine vacation: Napa

Getting started

I've collected wine for 16 years. You can avoid costly errors by learning from my mistakes.

Start out small and don't be afraid to stay there.

Take your time. This isn't a race. I went from 24 bottles to 700 in less than a year — a huge mistake. Slow down and learn more about wine before buying.

Keep close track of your inventory. I have my collection recorded on a spread sheet that has the year, the wine, quantity, price I paid, tasting notes and an approximate year when it should be drunk.

No system will help you if you don't utilize it. I go through my inventory list every week or so to make sure it's current.

When you find a wine you like, don't go crazy buying it all. Your tastes will change. My collection has gone from mostly French to mostly California, and now is a pretty even split of California, French and Italian. New wines and vintages are released every day. I now never buy any more than six bottles of one wine unless it's a classic.

It's your palate and your money, and there are no wrong answers in wine. Don't be pressured to buy a wine. Everyone we interviewed agreed that you should drink what you like.

— Peg San Felippo

Peg San Felippo, a wine and food enthusiast, is a former chapter chairman of the American Institute of Wine and Food and has completed the first level of The Court of Master Sommeliers. E-mail her at psanfelippo@pbpost.com.



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