

Best Wine Cellars

How much you enjoy your wine depends on how well you store it. Here are the latest and greatest wine storage units for kitchens—and budgets—big and small. For our top picks, see our [Best Wine Storage Slideshow](#).

By [Heather John](#)

Illustration by [Chris Dent](#)

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Last year, my husband and I renovated our kitchen, and one of our major considerations was how much space to devote to wine. Let's just say that the double oven lost out in the calculations. In researching various options, we found that there are a number of wine storage solutions, ranging from eight-bottle units to floor-to-ceiling wine fridges and everything in between. To find the best option for our budget, first we determined how much space we could devote to wine storage. Then we considered where the unit would be placed. For instance, would it live in a high-traffic area? Some units score low in the beauty department but high in functionality, while others might sacrifice storage capacity in favor of aesthetics. But regardless of its size, the unit's ability to maintain a consistent temperature was—and should be—the single most important consideration when making a selection.

In looking at the various choices, I found that great options come in all shapes and sizes. For those with kitchens the size of a postage stamp, small, freestanding cellars are a space-saving solution. Cuisinart makes the best of the bunch in terms of looks and performance. The brand offers surprisingly quiet units that store 8, 16, or 32 bottles, with an electronic touch pad to set the temperature. My sister uses hers to age her favorite California Pinot Noirs at 55 degrees. White wine and Champagne go directly in the fridge, since those are typically consumed within weeks of purchase. The Haier 12-bottle wine tower is another popular choice. While it's not going to win any beauty pageants, it's compact, affordable, and functional.

If you are able to devote a little more space, but don't want to relinquish the standard 24 inches of undercounter real estate, consider a more svelte 15-inch-wide unit, like the Sub-Zero 315W. Available in either stainless steel or overlay, this handsome wine fridge stores 26 bottles.

Financial consultant Elizabeth Barr and her husband opted for the 315W after much research. "As we shopped around for smaller wine storage options, most looked quite flimsy," Barr says. "The Sub-Zero was reasonably priced, relative to the other options, and a lot more solid." She says most of what is stored in their 315W is consumed within three weeks and is in the \$12-to-\$24 range. The nicer bottles are aged in a freestanding unit in the couple's basement. Vinotemp produces a 15-inch-wide wine cooler that holds 32 bottles. But the racking, or distance between shelves, is narrower than in the Sub-Zero, which means the Vinotemp can store more bottles, provided they are

primarily the standard Bordeaux shape; it can't handle more than a few bulbous Champagne- or Burgundy-style bottles.

The next size up is the 24-inch-wide undercounter unit. Depending on the bottle shapes stored, it can hold anywhere from 43 to 57 bottles. Again, racking plays a crucial role. Traditional racking measures 3 3/8 inches, allowing for maximum storage capacity. One of the two wine fridges I own is a stainless steel GE Monogram with traditional racking. I initially purchased this unit three years ago for my last kitchen. While I love how quietly it runs and how sleek it looks, the narrow shelves don't accommodate larger-girth bottles, and since we drink a fair amount of Champagne, that's a problem. So in our current kitchen, the GE fridge has been relegated to holding rosés and white wines that we plan to drink now; I've cranked down the temperature to 48 degrees so that these bottles are fully chilled and ready to drink at a moment's notice. Theoretically, we could remove some shelves to accommodate larger bottles, but that would reduce the number of bottles we can store by about 20 percent, not to mention jack up our per-bottle cost.

Dan Burnham, a friend and California wine collector, also has a GE Monogram undercounter wine fridge, which he likes for its quietness, consistent temperature, and maximum storage space. He took into account that the unit would be in a high-traffic area, so aesthetics definitely played a role in his choice. In retrospect, however, he says he prefers his previous model—the U-Line Wine Captain—even though it housed fewer thick-glass bottles of cult Cabernets, thanks to wider racking. The U-Line isn't as sleek as the GE, but it is every bit as functional. Ultimately, the wine fridge you choose should fit your space, as well as your lifestyle and wine preferences. Marvel manufactures an undercounter wine fridge that is 30 inches wide and can store up to 68 bottles. But again, traditional racking is more conducive to standard Bordeaux-shape bottles. So, when comparing these three undercounter units on a per-bottle cost basis, the GE Monogram comes out on top (though, admittedly, it has just one temperature zone).

Do you really need two (or more) temperature zones? The 80-inch-tall integrated Sub-Zero 427 that we purchased for our new kitchen last year has dual temperature settings. This feature is a luxury, to be sure; it enables us to store our best bottles of Champagne and white Burgundy up top, at 48 degrees, and our red Burgundies, Barolos, and California Cabernets down below, at 55 degrees. The 132-bottle unit also features humidity control, roller-glide shelves, and 3 1/2-inch-wide racking that can even accommodate magnums. I love this fridge. This Sub-Zero scores an A for both form and function, but rates just as high on price. However, if you consider the \$43-per-bottle cost basis, it's certainly not at the top of the price spectrum. Then there is the very attractive Liebherr, which features not two but three temperature zones, and storage for up to 143 Bordeaux bottles. (But here again, capacity is inversely proportional to bottle size.)

Of course, while multi-temperature options are nice, what really matters is temperature consistency, particularly for aging wine. Most experts agree that for long-term storage, both reds and whites should be kept at 55 degrees. Bordeaux aficionado Steve Vielhaber, whose collection occupies three separate units, says, "Keeping a constant temperature is important. All of the units [my wife and I] have score low in the beauty department but are very functional, relatively inexpensive, and very cost effective on a per-bottle basis." Vielhaber currently uses Vintage Keeper and Vinotemp models. You're probably not going to want an 82-inch-tall Vinotemp anywhere in sight, but at a \$6.05 per-bottle cost, you might be able to turn a blind eye.

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