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# Heated Floors and More

*Some New Homes Also  
Have Wine Cellars,  
Saunas, and Safe Rooms*

By SAMAN WESTBERG

**L**AFITE OR PETRUS: IS THERE enough of either in the cellar for tomorrow's dinner party? More Washingtonians are asking such questions as wine cellars become a fixture in new luxury homes.

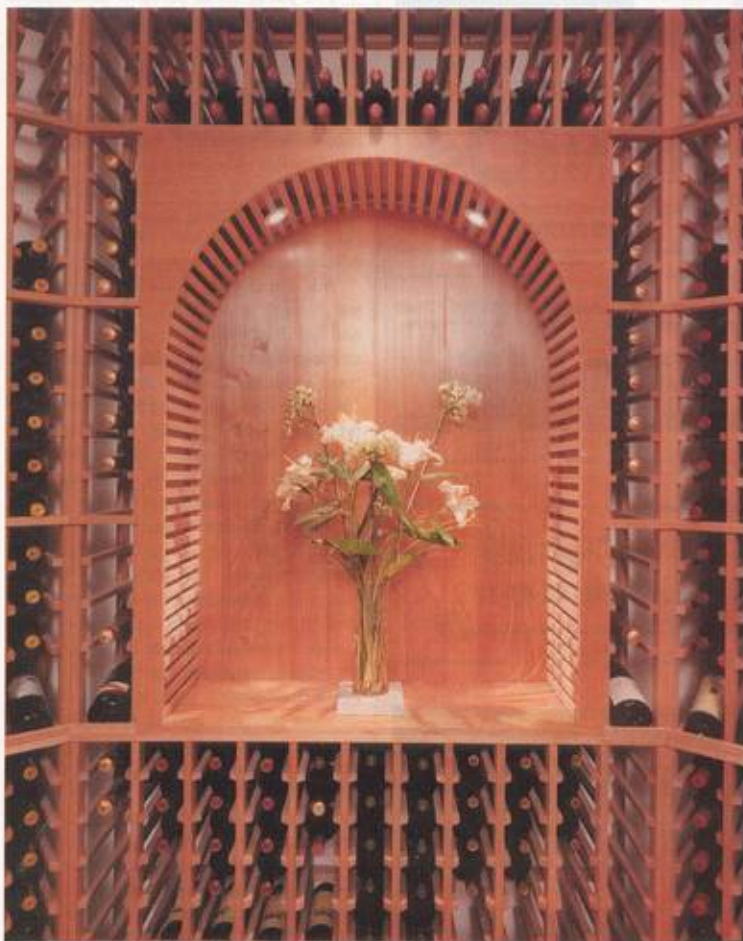
Enjoying wine is not a new hobby, but according to real-estate agents and builders, full-service wine cellars have come out of the closet. Buyers' desire for them is one of several trends—along with outbuildings and "safe rooms"—in new luxury homes.

Tom and Heather Stroup are up-to-date wine enthusiasts. Though the Stroups had a wine cellar in their previous home in Great Falls, they paid far more attention to the design of the cellar in their 10,000-square-foot new place nearby, which houses a collection of some 3,000 bottles. Measuring 15 by 18 feet, this cellar includes a refrigeration and humidification system to maintain an ideal temperature of 55 to 60 degrees.

The couple also installed a structured wiring link to the house computer that allows them to use a bar-code scanner to set up and use a wine database. A glance at the database lets them know how many bottles of a Lafite and a Petrus remain so they don't need to go down to the cellar to count.

Decorating of the Stroups' cellar was left chiefly to Heather. Vine-motif tile inlay, glass paneling, a chandelier, and dimable accent lighting add to the room. The area includes a tabletop area for wine-tasting where Tom sometimes tests out wines before serving them.

In another Great Falls home, one enthusiast asked a contractor to create a wine cellar as an octagonal room in the finished basement of the house. The center was designed so guests could taste wines and munch on snacks; wine racks are displayed all around the octagon behind glass



The owners of this 5,000-bottle wine cellar in Great Falls enhanced it with Botticino tile, recessed lighting, insulated glass windows and French door, and a separate cooling system.

paneling. This design and use of paneling allows for entertaining in the cellar without the off-putting 55-degree temperature.

Typically, the cost of finishing a wine cellar starts at around \$25,000 and can go to around \$60,000.

Wine-cellar options are available in developments as well as in custom-built homes. Keswick Homes' Cedar Chase and Copper Ridge in Fairfax County, Brookfield Homes' Pleasant View Estates in Centre-

ville, and JDA Custom Homes' Waples Crest in Oakton have wine cellars in their model homes and offer them as options. Penny Yerks, a Weichert real-estate agent, notes that even if a home doesn't have a wine cellar, upper-end clients want to make sure they have the right space to create one.

**A**NOTHER TREND FOR THOSE WITH THE space and the means is the building of pool houses—also called out-

buildings—close to the main house. When Sally Brown's father underwent cardiac surgery last year, the pool house of her Potomac home doubled as living quarters for her parents when they came to Washington for the operation. Her parents, who normally live in Philadelphia, retained their own space with the added comfort and security of being 20 feet from the main house—and from a cardiac surgeon (which Brown's husband, Frank Midgley, happens to be).

"I've put in six or seven of these spaces within the past year," says Larry Weinberg of Bowa Builders in McLean, designer of Brown and Midgley's guest house, "and I'm working on a couple now." Weinberg attributes the new popularity of outbuildings to their versatility. A pool house commonly holds changing rooms and showers, but the addition of a kitchen can facilitate outdoor entertaining in warmer weather. Add another room and you have the option of a home office or a playroom for the kids.

"We're using this space much more than we thought we would," Brown says. She and her husband of three years have six children between them; the building functions as living quarters for visiting older children and as refuge for studying teenagers seeking quiet away from the house. "And if it gets a little messy," she adds, "it's okay if it stays that way for a couple days because I don't have to see it."

Charlotte Becker's pool house was conceived as just that—a simple building with changing rooms and showers—"but has now evolved into much, much more." Situated 15 feet from her home, the pool house stands three stories: a below-grade level for storing swimming-pool equipment; a main floor with a bath, kitchen, and all-weather sunroom; and an upper floor that can be used as a home office, gym, or party/playroom for her four children who range in age from seven months to five years. Work on the structure began in November and should end early this month.

Building a pool house or similar structure from scratch generally runs \$100,000 to \$500,000, and can be more. Modifying a preexisting one can cost as little as \$25,000. Separate suites are also being placed atop garages. Some are custom-built; some developers offer the options in certain communities as well. Kentlands, a neotraditional community in Gaithersburg; Keswick Homes' Cedar Chase in Great Falls; and Brookefield's Cavanaugh Crossing in Lorton are just a few.

**A**LSO GROWING IN POPULARITY IS THE "safe room." Mike Garcia of Mike Garcia Homes has gotten a dozen requests in just the past three years.

Garcia, based in Manassas, describes a

safe room as a sunken concrete box with walls and ceiling ten inches thick, usually situated under a garage or porch and fitted with a "Fort Knox-strength" vault door and its own temperature-controlled air supply. The point is to protect family members in an emergency. The heavy doors, accessible from the basement, prevent fire from reaching valuables and intruders from reaching family members. "You could let a bomb off outside," he says, "and nothing's getting in."

Garcia, who has fitted such a room under his own home, stores irreplaceable mementos such as photo albums and home videos of his children. Clients of his have used these safe rooms as gun vaults, customizing the walls with pegboards and shelves for ammunition. To help ensure safety, homeowners or builders can add a separate phone line to call police or an alarm company. Prices start at around \$3,500 for a basic room, he says, and can go to around \$8,500 with full custom shelving and cabinets.

**I**N BOTH CUSTOM-BUILT LUXURY HOMES and developments, technology-inspired amenities like media centers, "smart alarms," cameras, and touch-of-a-button mood lighting are often must-haves.

Popular now are amenities that homeowners can access throughout a "smart house"—even from the bathroom. Options like preset timers can tell pipes under a cold bathroom floor to start heating up at 5:30 in the morning. You can also check the morning news through a mini-television placed behind specially reflective mirrors; while shaving or applying makeup, you can keep an eye on that little screen in one corner.

Before rinsing off in the steam shower, you may wander into your custom-made sauna. Finlandia Sauna Products and other manufacturers are happy to ship fully finished sections ready to assemble. They'll also supply appropriate wood, usually red cedar. Prices for preconstructed saunas run \$3,000 to \$5,000, depending on size; extras can include etched-glass doors, aromatherapy scents, and dippers and buckets handcrafted from Nordic pine.

On a more whimsical note, other fun extras are specially floored and padded rooms for in-line skating, saltwater aquariums, or choo-chooing model trains that chug through half the house.

All these options are available at many new luxury developments, including Potomac's Merry-Go-Round Farm and, in McLean, the Estates at Woodlea and the Reserve. Choosing among them can be hard for upscale buyers. So if the wine cellar makes the cut, sit back and relax with a glass of Petrus or Lafite—your supplies permitting. □