

# AN AMERICAN FAMILY ALBUM

# TOWN & COUNTRY

NOVEMBER

## The LAURENS

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By Paul Goldberger

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# Cellar's MARKET

## CAN A WORLD CLASS WINE COLLECTION SELL A HOUSE?

By Candace Jackson

For his five-bedroom, 11,000-square-foot Malibu home (dubbed the New Castle, it had an asking price of \$85 million), developer Scott Gillen knew he had to do something special—specifically, with wine. That's because, although the house has water views, a cigar room, and a 70-foot infinity pool, the glass cube–like wine vault is the first thing you see when you walk in. “You say, ‘Wow, wine.’ It’s massive,” Gillen says. “And then you see the ocean in the background.”

In the competition for eight- and nine-figure-home buyers, houses at the top of the price range now come with everything from Warhols on the walls to gold Lamborghinis in the garage. Curiously, though, it's still BYO when it comes to wine collections. Not anymore.

While wine cellars are typically left empty or staged with inexpensive bottles to show off volume, luxury builders have started hiring experts to curate

these spaces to impress buyers who know enough about wine to recognize a good bottle but may not be bringing a collection of their own. Buyers can now move into homes that are not only fully furnished but fully stocked with notable wines—sometimes included in the asking price. The result is the rise of a new niche market: spec home wine staging.

Walker Strangis, the head of the L.A.-based Walker Wine Company, recently placed \$1.7 million worth of wine in a mansion in Bel Air that had an asking price over \$100 million. Strangis says the 2,000-bottle collection “covers a lot of ground,” including nearly every vintage of Château Lafite from 1844 to 2000. There are, of course, a number of California cult wines, but the most significant real estate is given to bottles from Burgundy, Bordeaux, and Champagne. “This is a collection that someone could pull anything from and wouldn't really go wrong,” he says.

Gillen, who doesn't drink, hired winemaker Ryan Waugh, of Napa's Waugh Family Wines, to install a California-centric collection on the teak shelves. Waugh staged it with

a mix of styles and vintages organized mostly by color to be pleasing to the eye. Gillen is including the collection, valued at about \$75,000, with the purchase of the home.

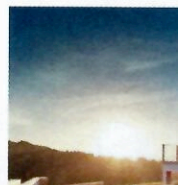
Appealing to a hypothetical wine lover is, however, different from building a collection for a specific client. In some ways it's like constructing a spec home. “It's an interesting situation, because you're thinking, Who is going to buy this house?” Waugh says. The general idea is to wow but not offend. Strangis says the Bel Air home includes some bottles that might take someone starting a collection a decade to find. And yet, he says, “I don't think a wine collector would walk in and be upset about anything.”

Waugh says he's working on other spec home cellars; he recently toured a property in the wealthy Silicon Valley enclave of Atherton, and he plans to hire a full-time staffer to handle such requests.

Strangis says he too is planning to expand the real estate wine staging part of his business—a growth area he didn't see coming. “I never even thought this was a thing,” he says. ◀

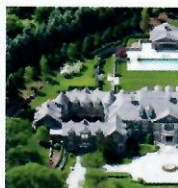
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