



Clubs Shine a Light on Redesigned Wine Rooms

By Pamela Brill | August 27, 2019



The Patriot Golf Club

Members and guests are raising a glass to how clubs are showcasing upgraded wine rooms and wine cellars as spirited new gathering spaces.

Cheers to the wine room. Clubs across the country are breathing new life into these spaces, which are now being utilized not only as expanded storage facilities that reflect consumers' ever-growing thirst for fine vintages (see chart, pg. 26), but also as unique and exciting new gathering places for drinks, dinner, socializing and special events.

As more facilities begin to recognize the untapped potential of this aspect of their food-and-beverage programs, they are incorporating more functionality and purpose into wine room and wine cellar designs.



indulging in tastings, Fiddler's Elbow Country Club in Bedminster, N.J., was in need of dedicated socializing space. "As our wine club has grown, we added wine lockers, and the demand for a casual space to hang out and sample wines became evident," says General Manager Tom Hurley.

This past spring, the club added a wine cellar and lounge that has helped to boost wine and pre-dinner cocktail sales. Located between the club's Elbow Bar and Elbow Restaurant/dining room, the lounge is easily accessible to the kitchen, which is used exclusively for *a la carte* service. (A larger and newly renovated kitchen is reserved for weddings and large-scale member events.)



Fiddler's Elbow Country Club in Bedminster, N.J.

Designed in a rectangular style with brick walls and stone flooring, the cellar is described as "rustic and industrial at the same time," says Assistant General Manager Michael Nyerges. Small, round tables and bucket seats can hold up to 28 people for an intimate dinner or a speakeasy. For the latter event, couches are added, to foster a more casual vibe.

Track lighting in the cellar spotlights select tables or bottles on display, while wine lockers provide their own illumination "that gives off blue light and sets the mood," adds Nyerges. Sixty-four wine lockers, housing up to fifteen bottles each, are temperature-controlled and accessible only by the club's three food-and-beverage managers. Currently sold out with a waiting list, the lockers are a testament to the popularity of Fiddler's Elbow's wine club.



clubs' interest in redesigning and expanding their space for both storing wine and featuring it through special events in special places.

WINE SALES IN THE U.S.

(Wine shipments in millions of 9-liter cases from California, other states and foreign producers entering U.S. distribution)

Year	Table Wine ¹	Dessert Wine ²	Sparkling Wine/ Champagne	Total Wine	Total Retail Value ³
2018	338.7	40.4	27.4	406.5	\$68.1 billion
2017	336.1	40.8	26.4	403.3	\$65.3 billion
2016	332.0	41.2	24.4	397.6	\$63.3 billion
2015	324.7	40.2	21.7	386.6	\$60.5 billion
2014	323.4	34.6	19.8	377.8	\$56.8 billion
2013	326.2	31.6	18.4	376.2	\$53.4 billion
2012	319.1	30.3	17.5	366.9	\$51.7 billion
2011	307.6	31.4	17.2	356.2	\$50.3 billion
2010	291.4	28.9	15.3	335.6	\$47.7 billion
2009	287.7	27.2	13.9	328.8	\$45.6 billion
2008	273.1	27.7	13.5	314.3	\$44.7 billion
2007	273.3	26.7	13.8	313.8	\$43.7 billion
2006	259.4	24.3	13.6	297.3	\$42.2 billion
2005	253.5	22.5	13.1	289.1	\$39.5 billion
2004	245.3	20.3	13.2	278.8	\$36.2 billion
2003	237.0	17.6	12.0	266.6	\$34.0 billion
2002	222.6	15.9	11.5	250.0	\$33.0 billion

Sources: Wine Institute, Department of Commerce, Estimates by BW166/Gomberg, Fredrikson & Associates.

Creating a flexible design that can accommodate changing logistics for dinners, receptions and speakeasies in the cellar posed some challenges for the Fiddler's Elbow team, but Nyerges is pleased with management's decision to maintain complete control over the operation. "We decided to design in-house without engaging designers, so it took longer, but we are most familiar with our needs," he says.

Member comments have confirmed that these decisions were on target. Feedback regarding the wine cellar "has been nothing short of tremendous," Executive Chef Michael Weisshaupt reports. "Members are now filling an empty space," Weisshaupt says. "They meet here before dinner and many choose to [stay for] dinner. It is often active with wine club members stopping in to sample their wines."

To further cement its commitment to wine programming, Fiddler's Elbow is now hosting monthly wine club socials, in addition to monthly wine dinners. "Our traditional wine dinners always sell out, and these socials now offer a less expensive, more informal option," says Weisshaupt. Fiddler's Elbow members not only have the opportunity to sample boutique wines, but they can purchase them, too, which has helped to boost overall wine sales significantly.

From Boardroom to Wine Room



432-sq. ft. space was completed in December 2017, to better appeal to this expanding program.



Bay Colony Golf Club in Naples, Fla. "We had an approximate 20 percent increase in reservations for private events in the wine room over the previous year, when it was a conference room."
— Tammy Mercer, Director of Marketing and Membership Sales

Located just off the main dining room with easy access to the kitchen, the wine room makes a grand statement, with its mahogany wood doors offset by transitional décor. Upholstered chairs flank a long, conference room-style table that can seat up to fourteen guests. The overall design is complemented by patterned cream-colored carpeting, along with dimmable lighting can be adjusted for both business and social meetings.

Running the length of the back wall are built-in wine coolers offset in smoked glass. Showcasing up to 400 bottles, the fully stocked, temperature-controlled facility has different settings for wines from all over the world, notes Mercer.

While the wine room can be reserved for private dinners, wine events and meetings, its functionality will be enhanced by the addition of forthcoming wine lockers. "We also do at least one wine trip to Europe each year," Mercer notes, pointing to the Bay Colony

membership's increased interest in wine-related programming.

Thanks to the repurposed space, Bay Colony is reaping the rewards of its meeting room turned wine room. "We had an approximate 20 percent increase in reservations for private events in the wine room over the previous year, when it was a conference room," says Mercer.

Under Wraps

Giving new life to a former underground bomb shelter by converting it into a thriving wine facility has proved to be a major asset for The Clubs at Houston Oaks in Hockley, Texas. Largely driven by the club owners, the space previously in usage during the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis was repurposed into a Napa Valley-inspired wine-tasting lounge, private dining room and refrigerated storage cave last spring.

"[Our owners] wanted to enhance the notion of a wine club with a world-class facility for our wine enthusiasts to use and enjoy," says CEO/General Manager Bob Gusella.

Spanning approximately 13,000 sq. ft., half of Bunker 55 is dedicated to social elements (a tasting bar, lounge area, private dining room, restrooms and kitchen facilities), while the remaining real estate is



The Clubs at Houston Oaks in Hockley, Texas
"[Our owners] wanted to enhance the notion of a wine club with a world-class facility for our wine enthusiasts to use and enjoy." —Bob Gusella, CEO/General Manager



The main entry is just off the hotel parking lot, with a street-level door that leads to the bunker below. Special access is available for authorized personnel and members who have rented a storage bunk in the wine cave. This temperature-controlled portion of the bunker is set at 55 degrees (hence the name).



A street-level door now leads to “Bunker 55” (named for the controlled temperature in its wine-storage area), which The Clubs at Houston Oaks repurposed from an on-site underground shelter that was originally built during the Cold War.

Converting the outdated space required a full-fledged remodel and build-out of the former bunker, including custom stone and brick work, antique barnwood beams and other customized wood elements, and the construction of a tasting bar and lounge areas. Such a comprehensive operation was challenged by the fact that this space lacked an elevator.

“Everything that went into the bunker during construction—lumber, power tools, equipment, stone, brick, personnel—had to be taken down and removed later via manpower,” explains Gusella, who describes the 16-month-long endeavor as a “timeless, old-world project.”

To update the space for its new purposes, concrete flooring has been acid-washed and polished and is now outfitted with antique area rugs. Furnishings were hand-picked by Marci Alvis, one of the club owners who manages the interior design for much of the facility. Lighting incorporates a range of decorative options, including

recessed cans, directional spots, wall sconces, table lamps and custom chandeliers.

With all the comforts of home, plus the addition of modern-day amenities, Bunker 55 has become a prime attraction, one that Gusella describes as “awe-inspiring.”

“I can honestly say, as a club manager with nearly 30 years of experience, that I have never seen another facility like it—not even in Napa or France,” Gusella says.

Member usage covers a variety of uses, from bridal parties and rehearsal dinners to VIP receptions and milestone birthdays. One member used the facility to host a 50th birthday party for his wife and transformed into a fashion show. “It was quite an event, just like Fashion Week in New York City,” Gusella says.

Further proof of members’ enthusiasm is in the club’s books; Houston Oaks wine sales have increased by 175 percent this year versus the first six months of 2018.

Rolling Out the Barrel

When The Patriot Golf Club in Owasso, Okla., mapped out plans for a new clubhouse, management decided to replicate its wine club, along with an added bonus. “In our new building, we decided to have a dedicated space that could be home to



Building upon the original Cellar Room that had housed 48 lockers in a conference room, the renamed Barrel Room opened its doors in May 2018.

Situated just off the entry to the club's family dining room, the 13' x 28' Barrel Room offers direct access to the kitchen for staff and members alike. The ceiling is outfitted with an oak tongue-and-groove style, with perpendicular iron straps across the oak planks evoking a wine barrel. This look is also carried across the flooring and wine lockers that are enhanced by dry-stacked stone columns separating individual locker bays.



THE Patriot Golf Club in Owasso, Okla.. "In our new building, we decided to have a dedicated space that could be home to an expanded Cellar Club and offer members an enhanced private dining and event space." — Ali Sezgin, General Manager

Running the length of the rectangular-shaped room is a 14-foot harvest table, bolstered by velvet upholstered chairs that serve as the focal point of the space. Overhead lighting is provided by a linear chandelier finished in burnished brass, rounded out by four matching sconces in the corner of the room.

For wine storage, the west and east walls contain 120 temperature-controlled lockers for members' private stock and ten oversized lockers for the club's library collection of wines. Total capacity is up to 2,000 bottles, and ported ventilation for each locker bay is directed into the attic above. An art-frame television on the southern wall provides an additional amenity for member viewing, and an underneath wine credenza is used for house wine storage.

Because the club's original wine cellar served as a model for the new design, the team did not have to face any layout concerns. "The needs for this space were apparent from our previous wine room, and it helped to influence every decision we made," notes Sezgin.

With an established group of Cellar Club members in place, The Patriot GC is now able to offer six to eight free tastings each year, providing more purchase opportunities for lockers. To further boost business, the club recently began hosting wine-education classes and dinners that have been well-attended. "Our focus is now to educate staff and members, so we can increase our wine sales," Sezgin adds.

Summing It Up

- > Expanded wine programming calls for more room to accommodate greater event attendance.
- > Easy access to club kitchens ensures smoother, more efficient food-and-beverage operations.
- > Repurposing underutilized space, such as a conference room, creates a new option for hosting intimate dinners and private meetings.

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