



Reds under the bed

By Simon Thomsen
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Wright began cellaring at 16 - and now drinks wines that "bring back memories".
Photo: *Chris Lane*

Revealed: the home cellars of our brightest wine minds.

Chris Morrison has one of the most lust-worthy cellars in Sydney. His 13 vintage champagnes include Dom Perignon '80 and Krug '90. Then there are the '63, '66 and '86 Granges; the grand cru burgundies, more than two dozen Bordeaux reds (plenty from the '80s) and, of course, the sauternes.

Unfortunately for Morrison, it belongs to his boss, chef Guillaume Brahimi of Guillaume at Bennelong. On the upside, anyone with a generous wallet - the '95 Domaine de la Romanee-Conti Richebourg is \$2100 - can raid his cellar.

Being surrounded by such opulence - and working most nights - helps explain why Morrison has just "half a dozen" bottles at home, but invites the question: what do sommeliers drink when they're spending their own money, rather than telling us how to spend ours?

To that end, Good Living canvassed sommeliers from hatted restaurants in Sydney and Canberra. Their tastes differ and, as their palates mature, a preference for Old World wines

emerges but their collective advice is simple: buy the wines you like, look out for bargains and do it for pleasure.

"The era of buying wine to make money is over," Morrison says.

All say they'd never sell their wines. Only est.'s Stuart Halliday has: once, to the restaurant he was working in to round out its list.

Morrison observes that baby boomers - having priced their kids out of the property market, as they did with wine during the '90s - are still useful for something. The bulk of the sommeliers' wines is stored at parents' houses, which at least preserves them from midnight raids. Even experienced sommeliers are prone to the familiar foible of "I'll just grab another one from the cellar".

Chris Morrison

Cellar philosophy If I get hit by a bus tomorrow, I don't want to be sitting on 2000 bottles.

"I hated my first glass of wine," Morrison, pictured left, recalls, wincing slightly at the memory of its dubious cask origins. For a kid who grew up in pubs, it wasn't an auspicious start. But once he was handed a wine he liked, Morrison was hooked and began teaching himself about wine, reading voraciously, before heading to London to work with second- and third-generation "old school" sommeliers.

He returned to work at bel mondo, then with John Clancy at Quay before moving to Guillaume three years ago.

Morrison started collecting wine about 10 years ago. Chardonnay is his favourite; he also has 120 bottles from his early days in a cellar at his father's Victorian home, mainly Yarra Valley pinot, Barossa shiraz and Coonawarra cabernet.

He hopes to have a great cellar one day. For now he'd "rather have two bottles of cracker wine to drink tonight than 1000 I can't touch for 10 years".

His interest is Italy, especially Piedmont, which has had "a string of awesome vintages".

He advises against buying Grange, which has become a "commodity". "It's a fantastic wine, but the price is ridiculous."

On the other hand, Hunter semillon is "the most under-rated wine we have and there are a lot of good vintages from the mid-1990s".

He also sounds a warning: "It's hard to know what to collect. There are guys making high-alcohol wines that register on the palate, but they're hollow and have no structure and integrity and they fall apart within a year. You have to be careful."

Now is a good time to seek older wines. "There are a lot of classic vintages coming into maturity - '91, '98 and '99. Bordeaux are super-expensive, but vintages like 2000 and 2003 were

very warm, and you can find the lower-grade wines develop some ripeness and they're actually very good value."

If he had \$1000 he would buy [a lot of Barossa Valley Torbreck](#); '03 chablis, "it was a warm year, so the wines were softer"; a bottle of '96 Grosset champagne, Coonawarra or Margaret River cabernet, Brokenwood semillon.

Everyday drinking [Torbreck Woodcutter's Shiraz is cheap as chips, and the '04 is stunning](#).

Wine to put away for 12 months Marlborough pinot noir and Tasmanian pinot gris.

Five years '02 Clare Valley reisling; '03 Beechworth pinot noir.

10 years '99 Barolo; '01 growth Bordeaux.

For a 21st ['01 Torbreck RunRig](#).

Jessica Wright

Cellar philosophy Collect the styles that you like. Don't buy a case, buy a couple of bottles of everything instead.

She may be 24, but Jessica Wright's cellar is already eight years old. It began with a bottle of '90 Stonier pinot noir, given to her by a family friend. She still has it.

It's no surprise that Wright enjoyed a childhood immersed in a strong food and wine culture - her mother is Fiona Wright, one-time owner of Canberra's legendary The Lobby, who now owns the 2005 Good Food Guide's best regional restaurant, Waters Edge.

Jessica became the restaurant's manager and sommelier in February. She started in the industry at 18 at the now defunct Canberra fine diner Atlantic, followed by a stint at Otto.

[She has about 100 bottles in a purpose-built basement cellar at her parents' house that contains Torbreck "until it became stupidly expensive"](#), Bass Phillip pinot, Moss Wood cabernet ("I think it's the best in Australia"), Clonakilla shiraz-viognier, Romanee-Conti, and vintage champers Billecart-Salmon Elizabeth rose and Grosset. Croser is another favourite.

Wright confesses to being "hopeless about laying things down ... We commit infanticide a lot of the time."

She also stocks the family cellar. Current favourites are Jasper Hill Georgia's Paddock shiraz and Emily's Paddock shiraz-cabernet franc, especially the "exceptional" '97 vintage.

Wright always has an eye out for champagne and pinot noir. The Yarra Valley is a favourite region, which she visits annually, especially Yarra Yering and Wantirna Estate - "they do some gorgeous pinot, chardonnay and cabernet".

"If you want to play it safe, go to a wine region, stop in and talk to them at the cellar door," she advises.

And rather than buying a case, take a few from each winery, in part for what it evokes.

"I drink wines we bought together because they bring back memories. If you've got 12, it dilutes the memory a bit."

If she had \$1000 she would buy One Krug 1990 (\$500) and a Mount Mary pinot noir 1996, with plenty of change left over for a weekend away to drink it.

Everyday wine Hurley Vineyard Mornington Peninsula pinot noir.

Wine to put away for 12 months Howard Park Scotsdale shiraz, "a great drop from an iconic winery. Excellent value and easy drinking."

Five years Bass Phillip Reserve pinot noir.

10 years Yering Station Reserve cabernet sauvignon.

For a 21st Stonier Reserve pinot single vineyard, "hopefully they can drink it when they're 16, like I did, and learn to love wine".

Nick Hildebrandt

Cellar philosophy Enjoy it and never feel guilty about spending money on something you love.

As with many of Sydney's sommeliers, Hildebrandt, pictured above right, has Tony Bilson's infectious enthusiasm for Bacchus to thank for his love of wine today. It began a decade ago when Bilson was at the Treasury.

"It had an unbelievable wine list and if you didn't really know about wine, you were outside, so you had to throw yourself into it," says Hildebrandt, now at Marque. In the early '90s, he began collecting benchmark Australian wines.

"Back then, Australian wine really was unbelievable value. Wineries such as Rockford and Mount Mary were undiscovered and you could afford to buy and drink them." The older wines in his 35-case cellar are Australian, but he no longer buys them, preferring French, Italian, Chilean and Austrian wines.

"I started off like a lot of people, liking the more obvious, bigger fruit styles. But I think as you get more experienced, you pick up on the subtle flavours," Hildebrandt says. "I'm more interested in new, undiscovered producers and always in bargain and good value wines."

The majority of his collection is stored in his parents' cellar after being vetted at his Newtown home - with mixed success. Only two of his six bottles of '96 Cristal made it to safety. There are some sublime wines: Chateau d'Yquem's dry white, Y; the '90 Guigal Cote Rotie La Landonne and, from a trip to Argentina, Cheval des Andes.

Hildebrandt tries to stay under \$40 a bottle when buying wines. He enjoys scoring the odd bottle at auction.

His marriage in September has curtailed things, but "I've snuck a few in, to my fiancée's horror". But the point is to drink the wines with friends and family. "It's a collection of memories - and you get to see how the wine has evolved."

If he had \$1000 he would buy '02 Burgundy reds; '03 German riesling; '96 champagne.

Everyday drinking Austrian riesling or a Cote du Rhone red.

Wine to put away for 12 months '03 Chateauneuf du Pape.

Five years '02 Vouvray, Loire.

10 years '02 Barossa shiraz, perhaps Hanisch.

For his 20th wedding anniversary "Anna loves Barolo, so maybe a Gaia; or a Bordeaux or Tuscan."

Stuart Halliday

Cellar philosophy Wine shouldn't be put on a pedestal and worshipped, it should be drunk with family and friends.

Halliday was up to his usual tricks with his boss, chef Peter Doyle of est., when Good Living visited. Like naughty boys, they order cases of wine together and split it, sharing their passion.

That's why a collection that began when he went to work at Rockpool, aged 18, now has about 450 bottles. About 20 dozen of "the really good stuff" is in his parents' sandstone cellar, the remainder in a built-in wardrobe at home. "The clothes have been evicted," he laughs.

The cellars boast the odd 100-pointer - the '82 Chateau Lafite Rothschild went recently for the third wedding anniversary, the '85 Domaine de la Romanee-Conti Richebourg awaits savouring on a similar occasion.

Halliday tends to buy around the \$15-\$20 mark. "There's some seriously good value stuff out there - it's just a matter of sifting through it," he says. Generally, he buys six. "As your palate matures, it likes a broader spectrum of flavours," he reasons. Mind you, it didn't stop him buying five dozen '91 Leo Buring Leonay riesling (at \$15 a pop) when he returned from Europe a decade ago. Only about six bottles have gone.

And, though he loves pinot noir, Halliday doesn't cellar it, preferring cabernet, "which is very underrated".

[He also collects cult wines for pleasure, such as the initial '99 vintage of Torbreck's RunRig \(bought at \\$35\). Five of the six survive.](#)

He doesn't buy much white, but believes riesling is the best value for money, and he has a soft spot for Hunter semillon, especially when it ages.

Halliday's wife, Ali, is accustomed to notes from the post office saying there's another package waiting to be collected. She knows the contents. When he felt guilty buying '98 Rockford shiraz at \$70, she condoned it as part of his job. No doubt the '96 Dom Perignon they drank to celebrate the recent birth of their first child, Oscar, was for a job well done.

If he had \$1000 he would buy Leo Buring Leonay riesling; '01 Tyrrell's Stevens Semillon; three bottles of Leeuwin Estate chardonnay - "I think everybody should try a great Australian white wine with a bit of age on it"; Chapoutier Cote du Rhone, "good value without being over-priced"; Croze Hermitage; three bottles of Yering Station Reserve shiraz-viognier, "a phenomenal wine"; [Torbreck The Struie](#); '02 Majella Coonawarra cabernet.

Everyday drinking 2000 Chateau du Sours rouge, a Bordeaux on sale at the Ultimo Wine Centre for \$14.95.

Wine to put away for 12 months Tyrrell's Vat 47 chardonnay.

Five years [Torbreck The Struie](#); '98 Rockford single vineyard shiraz.

10 years '02 Cullen Diana magnum.

For newborn son Oscar's 21st Barossa shiraz - Wendouree or the new Penfolds Bin 60A and Kalimna Block 42.