Storage Smart: Manor Estate’s Peter Cap Weighs in on Wine Storage

Once they see themselves as budding experts or just folks who appreciate good wine, the question of storage, and perhaps even the notion of starting a wine collection, occurs to a great many people. Peter Cap, the McLaren Vale vintner behind several award-winning wines under the Manor Estate (ME) brand, weighs in on wine storage do’s and don’ts and whether to mature it in a home wine cellar of your own.

Peter Cap on Ageing Wine at Home

“Many people think that ageing wine after buying it will improve it,” says Peter Cap, “but that’s based on the premise that wine will only improve with age. Most people will have seen the old movie storyline of a precious bottle of wine, maybe hundreds of years old, being opened, only for those who taste it to discover that it has turned to vinegar. While that’s an extreme example, understanding how the best wines are made, and why they are bottled and sold by a certain date will support the conclusion that it’s simply not worth trying to age wine at home.”

“At Manor Estate, we age our wine naturally. During that time, the vintner will test the wine at regular intervals to determine when it has reached its peak. When that day arrives, it’s time to bottle the wine and sell it. It’s possible to age a wine until its past its prime, and also possible to bottle it too young, when a few more weeks, months or even years of fermentation would have benefited it. It’s the winemaker’s task to use his or her skill and experience to choose the perfect timing.”

“As a result, a good wine is at its best when you buy it, and for some time following that provided it is in a sealed bottle - one of the reasons why porous corks are largely out of fashion these days and sealed, screw-cap closures are preferred.”

“Whatever the closure used, keeping a wine to age after it has reached its peak will generally not improve it. Even if the wine is young, emulating the conditions of a winery’s wine cellar would be expensive, and monitoring the wines inside the bottles is impossible. It’s better to buy a good wine, and drink it within 12 months than to try keeping it for years in the hope that it will improve. It probably won’t.”

Keeping Wine till One is Ready to Enjoy It

“Choose a cool place that is not exposed to direct sunlight. A cupboard is fine, but if you want to have your wine selection on display, keep it away from windows, harsh lighting, and any appliances that give off heat,” says Peter. “One of the advantages of screw-top wines is that the freshness is sealed in. When you open the bottle, the wine can be just as good as it was on the day that the vintner decided that the wine had reached perfection. You can also store the wine in an upright position which is a space-saver. Wines with corks, on the other hand, should be stored lying down, allowing the wine to keep the cork moistened. If corks dry out too much, they can crack, and the wine may become oxidised, or the cork snaps in half or crumbles during the opening process.”

Finally, Peter notes that additive-free wines are more delicate than those preserved with sulfites. “Unless they were made with great care and stored under controlled conditions, additive-free wines should be consumed relatively soon after their purchase,” advises Peter. “Three months would be a cautious guideline for wines such as this.”

Wine is an Investment in Enjoyment

“Wine is made to be enjoyed in the short term, not stored in the longer term,” Peter concludes. “The notion of storing wine for decades to boost its value still exists, but most vintners would agree that storing a bottled wine that long means it isn’t really for drinking. It may be of historical interest or have sentimental value, but opening it and tasting it will likely not be the pleasure most people seem to believe it will be. Invest in enjoyment. Buy wine with the intention of drinking it.”

Manor estate offers wine events, a romantic wedding venue and luxury accommodation in McLaren Vale. For more information, or join their wine club, visit the Manor Estate Wines website or call their team of experts on (08) 8383 7300.


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