

Wine

The Cellar Standard

Five steps for receiving, storing and counting wine so each bottle reaches the table sound. Heat and light do their damage months before anyone tastes it.

Who

Head sommelier, with one named cellar person each week

When

On every delivery, every week, and a full count each month

You need

The cellar book or system, a thermometer, a hygrometer, bin labels

Measured by Cellar at 12–14 °C, logged every day · Every bin label matches the system · Monthly count within 1% of the system

1 Receive

Check every delivery against the order at the door: producer, vintage, quantity, condition. Refuse cases that are wet, leaking or warm to the touch, and move the rest into the cellar within 30 minutes.

"Delivery 14 Oct: 12 Barolo 2019 received. 1 case refused, wet label and seepage."

Common mistake Signing the delivery note without opening the cases. The wrong vintage turns up months later, at a table.

2 Store

Lay corked bottles on their side, labels up, in a dark room at 12–14 °C and about 70% humidity. Keep vibration and smells out: no cleaning products, no kitchen boxes, no motors on the racks.

"Cellar: 12–14 °C, 70% humidity. Lights off. Nothing stored here but wine."

Common mistake Using the cellar as overflow for boxes and cleaning stock. Cardboard brings damp, and the room starts to smell of the store.

3 Rotate

Put new stock behind the old in every bin, so the older bottles of a wine go out first. Each bin carries a label with wine, vintage and bin number that matches the system and the list.

"Bin 214: Chablis Premier Cru, 2021, 18 bottles."

Common mistake Stacking the new case at the front because it is quicker. The bottles at the back wait until they are past their time.

4 Log each bottle

Every bottle that leaves the cellar is logged at once: bin, wine, quantity, table or outlet, initials. Nothing goes out on a promise to write it up at the end of the night.

"21:10, bin 214, 1 bottle, table 7, LT."

Common mistake Taking two bottles for a busy table and logging one at close. The count is wrong by morning, and nobody knows why.

5 Count and review

Count the whole cellar once a month with two people, one reading, one writing. Look into any difference over 1% the same week, and list wines near the end of their drinking window for the floor briefing.

"Count 31 Oct: 2 bottles short in bin 108. Three wines to sell first this month."

Common mistake Counting alone, late at night, to get it done. The count matches the system because the counter wanted it to.

The Weekly Cellar Round

Thirteen points for the named cellar person to walk every Monday, before the first delivery. Anything that fails goes to the head sommelier the same day.

- ☐ Temperature 12–14 °C, logged every day
- ☐ Humidity about 70%, logged every day
- ☐ Lights off, no daylight on the racks
- ☐ No boxes, cleaning stock or food in the cellar
- ☐ Corked bottles lying on their side
- ☐ Every bin labelled: wine, vintage, bin number
- ☐ Bin labels match the system and the list
- ☐ New stock placed behind the old
- ☐ No leaking bottles or raised corks
- ☐ Stray bottles returned to their bin or logged
- ☐ Cellar book or system up to date to today
- ☐ Door locked, key holders named on the door
- ☐ Wines near the end of their window flagged

How to use this with your team

Name one cellar person a week on the rota. They walk this card every Monday and sign it; the head sommelier checks the signed card and three bins at random. Brief one point a day so the whole team knows the rules.

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