



THE LUXE LIFE

SOUTHWESTERN CONNECTICUT

WHILE THE MASTER OF INTERIOR DESIGN, BILLY BALDWIN, MAY HAVE SUGGESTED STARTING ROOM DESIGN FROM THE RUG UP, in the case of this Connecticut Maine-style shingle house, designer Michael Whaley started from the ceiling down. The reversal started when his forty-something clients, who were in the process of building their waterfront house, asked him to examine its lower level and help them to decide how to organize the complex of game and socializing rooms they had in mind. When Whaley explored the raw space, he was struck by a section of the expanse with an extraordinarily high ceiling. Staring up, he envisioned dramatic, double-vaulted ceilings. His next vision? Wine bottles. That was it. He wanted to build an extraordinary wine cellar. Whaley got his way even though the couple were not serious wine drinkers. However, many of their friends liked wine, and some of them loved fine wine. The owners saw it not only as a way to cater to their friends when entertaining but also as an opportunity to learn more about wine while they started their own collection. They signed on for the idea with tremendous gusto.

Whaley then approached the house's architect, Scott Raissis, to fashion the arches, ones that were worthy of Renaissance Europe. Once installed, they created a magnificent frame for the wine cellar and set the mood. The resulting visual could easily be a hideaway for royalty. In fact, Bonnie Prince Charlie would not have felt out of place in such a setting.

Looking to the Old World for design seemed natural. The clients had lived in England, frequented France, and loved the French wines that, in anticipation of their new wine lifestyle, they had begun sourcing from the Westchester wine store Zachy's. To invoke a sense of ambience, Whaley created furniture riffing on a bygone era, such as the room's centerpiece, an eighteenth-century-style French-walnut tasting table. Its tabletop design features inlaid planks of contrasting holly wood in a parquetry pattern that echoes the design on the cellar floor. Limestone squares with cut corners and cocoa-colored cabochon accents add warmth and a subtle pattern, deepening the richness and beauty of the room. Whaley also purchased particular antiques to punctuate the mood, such as a nineteenth-century French iron-and-bronze chandelier



OVERLEAF: Whaley commissioned hand-painted, Georgian-style side chairs with scenes depicting four English castles.

ABOVE: The lounge area provides a transitional space, warmth, and a sense of contrast. • Diamond bins chosen for their shape line the room like paneling.

OPPOSITE: The room's centerpiece is the eighteenth-century-style French walnut tasting table. The inlaid planks of contrasting holly wood in a parquet pattern echo the cellar floor's design.



the designer found on a buying trip in Atlanta and had wired for electricity.

Further alluding to his clients' time spent in the English countryside, Whaley commissioned Georgian-style side chairs. These are hand-painted with scenes depicting four English castles that have particular meaning for the couple: Hever Castle, home to Anne Boleyn, and known for its beautiful gardens; Windsor Castle, one of the royal residences, which is located near where the clients had stayed in Surrey; the Tower of London, where the Crown Jewels are housed, and where kings stayed the night prior to their ordination; and Fountains Abbey, a ghostly ruin in the countryside that the clients found to be hauntingly romantic.

Whaley also handled the actual racking choices and wine-related elements. When the cellar reaches capacity, it will hold 2,100 bottles, stored mostly in diamond bins of French oak. The bins were chosen for their shape—the way they play off the room's geometry. Like paneling, they





line the room. The interior temperature, of course, is a chilly 56 degrees, so as much as the couple adores those chairs—their favorite element of the room—the time spent sitting on them is brief. Instead, they take a quick sip, make the wine decision, then move out to a warmer lounge area, which provides a terrific transitional space and contrast.

Outside the cellar, the vaulted ceilings descend to a more human height, which makes the space feel cozy and clubby and gives it a sense of elegant rusticity. The look is helped along by the choice of red Venetian plaster walls with flecks of gold leaf mixed into the paint. While the couple has a way to go before obsessively comparing tasting notes with fellow wine geeks, they now have an inspiring place to imbibe and share one of life's great pleasures with friends.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: The nineteenth-century French iron-and-bronze chandelier, found by the designer on a buying trip in Atlanta, further enhances the period feel. • When the cellar reaches capacity, it will hold 2,100 bottles, stored mostly in diamond bins of French oak. • A sink, Sub-Zero refrigerator, and Riedel glassware are placed elegantly in the lounge area.

OPPOSITE: Limestone squares with cut corners and cocoa-colored cabochon accents add warmth and a subtle pattern, deepening the richness of the room.

