

# Connoisseurs put good taste on display with fine wines

Story and Photo  
by Rona Distenfeld

**W**hen Larry Peel met his wife, he had cases of wine piled by his waterbed. "I thought that would impress her," laughs Peel. "It didn't." Twenty-five years later, Peel is still collecting, only now he stores his 5,000 to 6,000 bottles in a cellar that would impress anyone. Peel's fascination with wine comes through as he talks about the different wineries and vintages he collects.

While his first love is California wines, he doesn't limit himself. Like most wine collectors, he buys what he likes, although he has collected some notable trophy wines over the years. "Part of the wine mystique is to collect rare, unusual and unique wines," says Peel. He also likes to share his passion, and his cellar is frequently used for charity dinners.

## A Passion Shared

"That's the perfect way to do it," says Susan Thomas. "The best part of wine is sharing it with other people who



Larry Peel's wine cellar includes a tasting room as well as thousands of bottles of fine wine.


appreciate it."

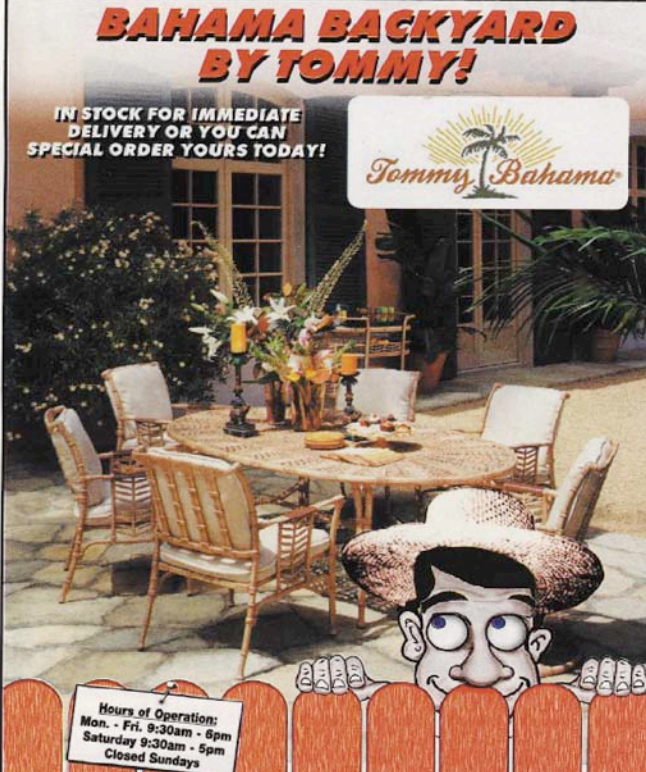
Thomas' collection isn't as extensive as Peel's, but its diversity reflects her love of wine. "I really like to taste different things, and I like to enjoy wine with friends," she says. "I also like to have the wine my guests ask for," she says with a laugh.

Like Peel, she discovers new wines through tastings, wine dinners, restaurants and trusted advisors. "The social aspect of wine is really wonderful," says Thomas. "You meet all kinds of people."

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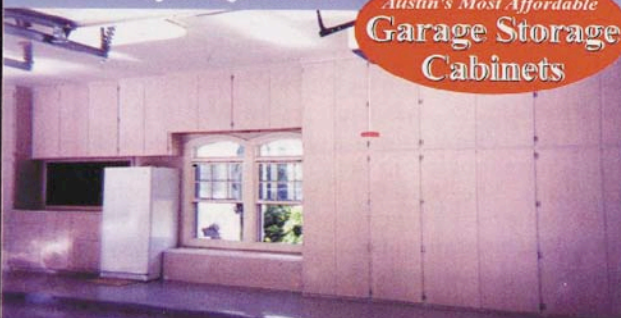
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## Wine collectors find their hobby ages well

That sentiment is echoed by Diane Dixon. "Wine has opened the door for me and my husband to meet so many nice people," says Dixon. "It's something we can share with each other, and with friends."

Her need to be knowledgeable about wines while entertaining clients inspired her interest in wine, but it became a passion when she discovered Bordeaux wines. When they married, her husband was happy to share her interest with her.

Now, enjoying good wine is an important part of their lifestyle. "We love to watch the sunsets with a glass of wine from the different levels of our house, so we have several cellars in different places," she explains.

For Charles Richter and his wife Dion Messer, their mutual love for vintage ruby port wines was one of the things that brought them together. Since port wines are better when they've been allowed to age, "laying down bottles for the long-term really made it feel like we were planning for a future together, even before we were married," says Messer.

Richter and Messer also buy wines they can drink now. "Aside from the port, our tastes are very different," says Richter. "But over the years we've learned to blend our tastes more by finding the right wines."

### Family Affair

Collector Jim Moritz loves to share his passion with his wife and kids. "We'll take a house in France or Italy for a month and do some private winery tours," says Moritz.

Moritz built his 20,000-bottle cellar

along with two friends. Each has his own section, and they share the elegant tasting room. Like Peel, all three host wine dinners for charitable causes.

Moritz has also invested in wine for his three children. "I've laid down 50 cases for each of my kids from the vintage year that matches their birth year," he says. "They'll have it to drink at their weddings."

Weddings and wine also go together for Susan Thomas. "If I decide to remarry, it will happen with the right guy over the right bottle of wine," she laughs. What better way to lay the groundwork for a lifelong passion?

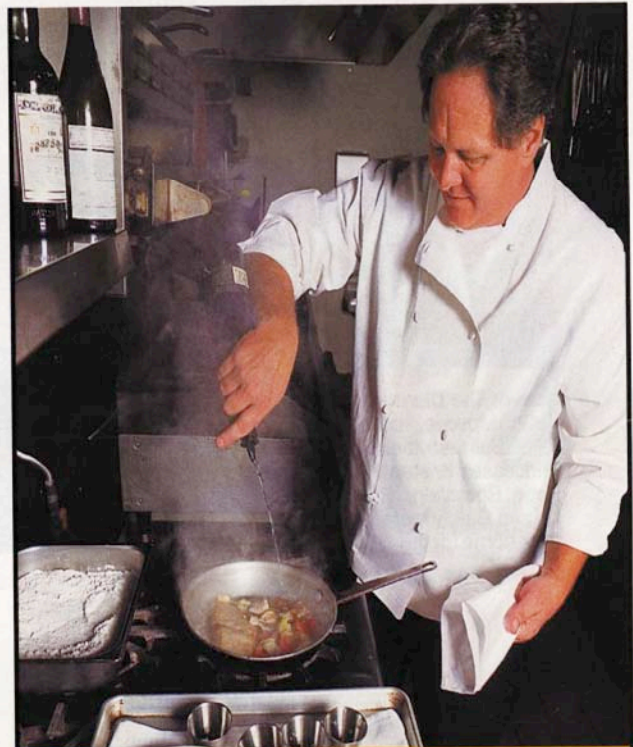
**"The best part of wine is sharing it with other people who appreciate it."**

**— Susan Thomas**

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