

Wine Spectator

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62 at
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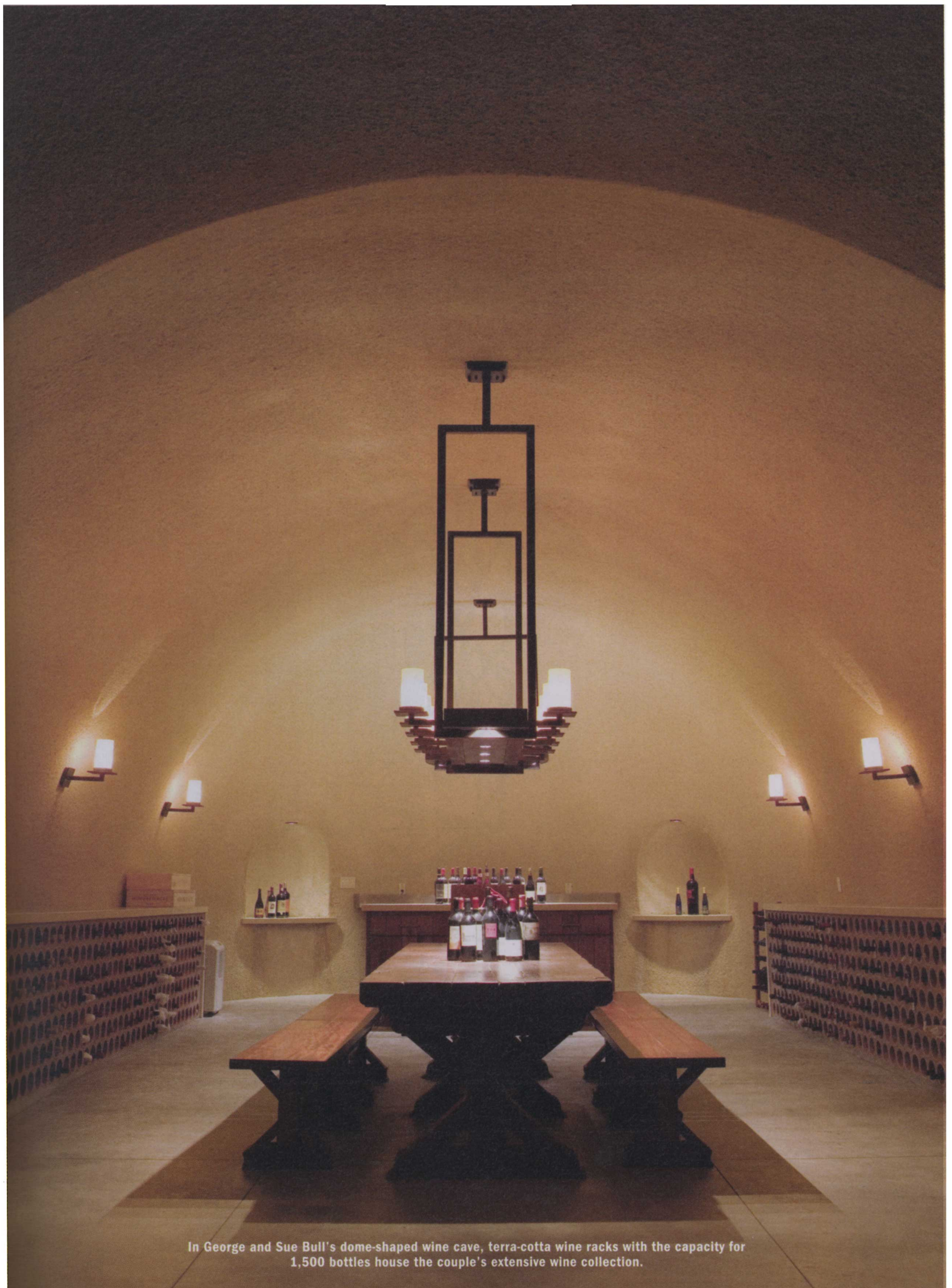
Holiday
Menu
With Matching
Wines

The Man Behind
Cheval-Blanc
& Yquem

NOV. 30, 2006

\$4.95 US \$5.95 CAN





In George and Sue Bull's dome-shaped wine cave, terra-cotta wine racks with the capacity for 1,500 bottles house the couple's extensive wine collection.

George Bull, who is CEO of Redwood Trust, views his cave as a destination, just steps across the limestone courtyard from the Santa Rosa, Calif., home that he shares with his wife, Sue. After cutting the house into the hillside, a wall was needed to retain the earth, which had been cut away and pushed back from the house and courtyard area. But as construction began on the retaining wall, Bull became concerned about its size. "With the future wall in direct view of my front door, I asked my builder, Michael Cello of Cello and Maudru Construction [in Napa], how big it was going to be. Mike said, 'Pretty big,'" Bull recounts. "I'd just returned from Bill Harlan's cave, so I asked Mike about the possibility of digging into the space to build a cave." After finding out that this was possible, Bull contracted Tom Taylor of Taylor Lombardo Architects in San Francisco to come up with a design.

But the equipment used in cave construction requires a lot of space, and the house was in the way. Don Magorian of Magorian Mine Services in Auburn, Calif., had to literally work around the house to tunnel through the hill. The hillside directly behind the portal was too flat to provide a sufficient amount of earth over the cave, so the entry was curved into a deeper part of the hill. "The area was a little tight, and we were working in rainy winter months to meet the Bulls' time frame," Magorian recalls.

With the cave still under construction, the Bulls moved into the house. "Looking out the window was like looking onto a battlefield," George says. By the summer, the muddy view had been replaced by a curved, asymmetrical portal cased in limestone. Only one year after that, the facade of Bull's cave looked like something from the Old World.

"Walking from the house across the limestone courtyard to the cave adds a heightened sense of arrival," Taylor says. Massive double doors of reclaimed teak with speakeasy windows open to a 500-square-foot domed cave, complete with refrigerator, dishwasher, telephone and stereo. Terra-cotta wine racks with the capacity for 1,500 bottles house mini-verticals such as Marcassin Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 1999 to 2002, Harlan Estate Napa Valley 1999 to 2001 and Rudd Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville 2001 and 2002.

The cave is the setting for many of the Bulls' parties and dinners, but ultimately it is "the man's cave." Here, Bull hangs out with his wine buddies, smoking Fuente Fuente OpusX cigars, playing cards and expressing themselves freely at the expense of polite conversation. "It



The wine cave of Larry and Jean Grunewald was inspired by the caves of Far Niente and Araujo in Napa Valley. Its cellaring chamber stores 2,400 bottles.

is a cave rule that if women enter, they can't complain about our behavior," Bull laughs.

Bull's cave also provides him with quiet solitude. "Some of my favorite moments are spent alone in the cave, just rearranging my wine," he says.

Caves are great for California hills, but what about city folk back East? New Jersey chiropractor John Bomhoff craved a cave, but lacked a hillside. Enter Michael Zuehl of Distinctive Environments in Lake Forest, Calif., who is willing to work anywhere in the country. Certain that an architectural



George Bull (center) uses his wine cave as the setting for parties, dinners and poker games with his wine buddies, but also as a retreat when he craves solitude.