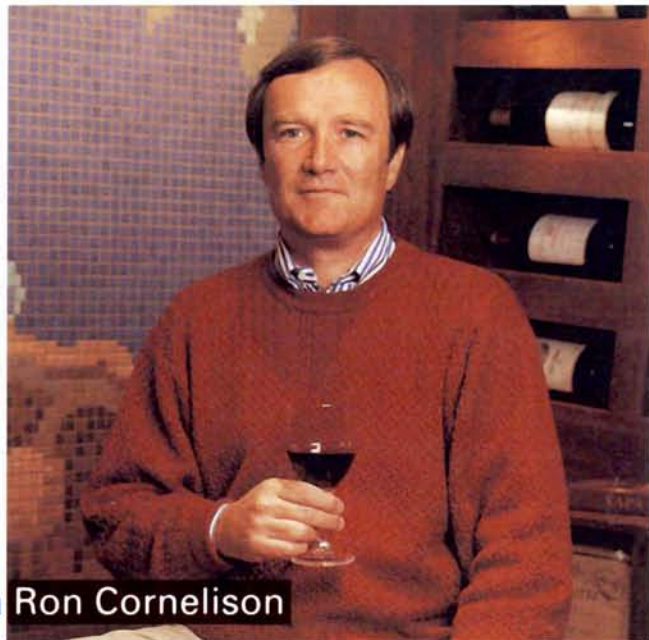


## Alexandria, Virginia Ron Cornelison



PHILIPPE NOBILE

**W**hen collector Ron Cornelison and cellar designer David Spon met at a wine tasting in Washington, D.C., in 1991, it was the beginning of a beautiful friendship for the two Virginians.

They ended up talking about Cornelison's need for a cellar in the new home—tucked away on a quiet street in Alexandria—he was building with his wife, Lillian, and their four children. After getting a personal recommendation about Spon, who had been plying his craft for three years, Cornelison was sold.

"What I liked was his vivid imagination for coming up with creative solutions," says the 47-year-old collector, who runs his own high-tech shipping business. "I knew I wanted some curvature in the racking, but other than that, I left it up to David."

Although Cornelison's previous cellar had just been featured in *Wine Spectator's* first Great American Cellars story, in 1988, Spon wasn't fazed. "I have a whole bunch of ideas in my mind and I just look for a cellar to do them in," says Spon, 34, who recently designed the cellar for Charlie Trotter's restaurant in Chicago. His firm, Wine Cellar Concepts, is based in McLean, Va.

One of those ideas was for a wall mosaic. "David said, 'I have this concept for a mosaic,' and I said, 'that sounds good,'" Cornelison explains. "I thought it was going to be small."

It turned out to be roughly 10 feet long and 8 feet high, a striking visual anchor to the relatively modest 280-square-foot cellar. To save money, the harvest scene was done digitally on a computer in 12,000 pieces. Once fabricated, it was assembled in 1-foot-by-1-foot blocks, much like bathroom tiles. (Spon went with the color blue for the floor because of Cornelison's Navy background.)

Overall, the cellar cost Cornelison \$50,000, but for him that was a small price to pay for an attractive room to house his growing collection of 1,400 bottles (it has a capacity of 5,200). The

redwood racks, which were stained dark, are from Wine Racks Unlimited in Cincinnati.

Spon used a "ducted system" to cool the cellar to a constant 57° F, which is the equivalent of central air conditioning versus a window air conditioner. There are multiple air supply vents for better air distribution, and humidity is kept between 60 and 75 percent. Cornelison says he prefers 57° F to the oft-cited 55° F because "if you keep it too cold, the wine takes forever to mature and you run the risk of condensation."

Cornelison's collection is strong in German ausleses and spätleses, particularly from the 1983 vintage, but the majority of the wine is California Cabernet—from top-quality wineries like Ravenswood and Groth—and Bordeaux, from eminent châteaux like Margaux and Cos-d'Estournel.

The big bottle department isn't too shabby, either. Cornelison boasts two double magnums of Château Lynch-Bages 1985, a jeroboam of Château Mouton-Rothschild 1982 and a double magnum of Diamond Creek Gravelly Meadow 1988.

Again, he has Spon to thank. "David said, 'How about some oversized bottles?'" says Cornelison. "And I said, 'I don't have any oversized



ANDREW D. LAUTMAN

AT FIRST, CORNELISON DIDN'T HAVE ANY OVERSIZED BOTTLES. BUT HIS CELLAR DESIGNER, DAVID SPON, SUGGESTED BUYING SOME AND THEN BUILT SPECIAL RACKS FOR THEM.



THE MOST STRIKING FEATURE OF CORNELISON'S RELATIVELY SMALL CELLAR IS THE 80-SQUARE-FOOT WALL MOSAIC. ALTHOUGH IT DEPICTS A TRADITIONAL HARVEST SCENE, SOME NEW TECHNOLOGY WAS EMPLOYED. THE IMAGE WAS DONE DIGITALLY ON COMPUTER IN 12,000 DIFFERENT PIECES. ONCE FABRICATED, IT WAS ASSEMBLED IN 1-FOOT-BY-1-FOOT BLOCKS, MUCH LIKE BATHROOM TILES.

bottles.' So I went out and bought all of them." Most of them now rest in a special rack on one wall, just beneath the stairs that come down from Cornelison's office.

He didn't have to twist Cornelison's arm too hard to lavish more attention on the room. "You don't want to have a \$3,000 bottle of wine in sitting in a \$10 cellar. But I'm not trying to impress anybody else. This is my part of the house," he says.

The entrance, in fact, is only accessible from his private study.

"Every time I walk into that room, someone asks me why there's five feet between the door and the place where the little stand is. I say, 'because that's how wide a mattress is,'" says Cornelison. "If I had to, I could put a mattress in. I love this place, I love to come down here."

—T. L.