



*In The Spotlight*

A Conversion With Class

# STORBOX Self Storage

BY POPPY  
BEHRENS

PASADENA, CALIFORNIA



Pasadena, Calif., most notably known for the annual Tournament of Roses Parade and Rose Bowl Game, is located at the base of the San Gabriel Mountains, just 15 minutes from downtown Los Angeles. It is a city of trendy shops and restaurants, tree-lined streets, distinctive neighborhoods, historic buildings, and a vibrant cultural scene. And it is here that Brett Barnard, owner of Barnard Investments, chose to build Storbox Self Storage, his one and only self-storage facility.

#### A Conversion Opportunity

Storbox Self Storage was converted from an existing single-story printing plant into a new two-story self-storage facility. Originally constructed in 1955, the building had a history of additions over a 30-year period that brought it to approximately 83,000 square feet in size. At the time the site was acquired by Barnard Investments, it was being leased by a credit tenant that had vacated the property. "We were able to negotiate a lease termination," says Barnard, "which reduced our cost basis on the property."

Initially, Barnard looked at several potential uses for the site including multi-tenant industrial, office space, and residential lofts. After running the numbers, he discovered that self-storage was the best use of the property, especially since all of the other uses had higher parking requirements. "If we converted it to storage, we were able to take the existing building and actually add an entire second floor throughout it," he explains, noting that this was a benefit of the industrial flooring in the original building.

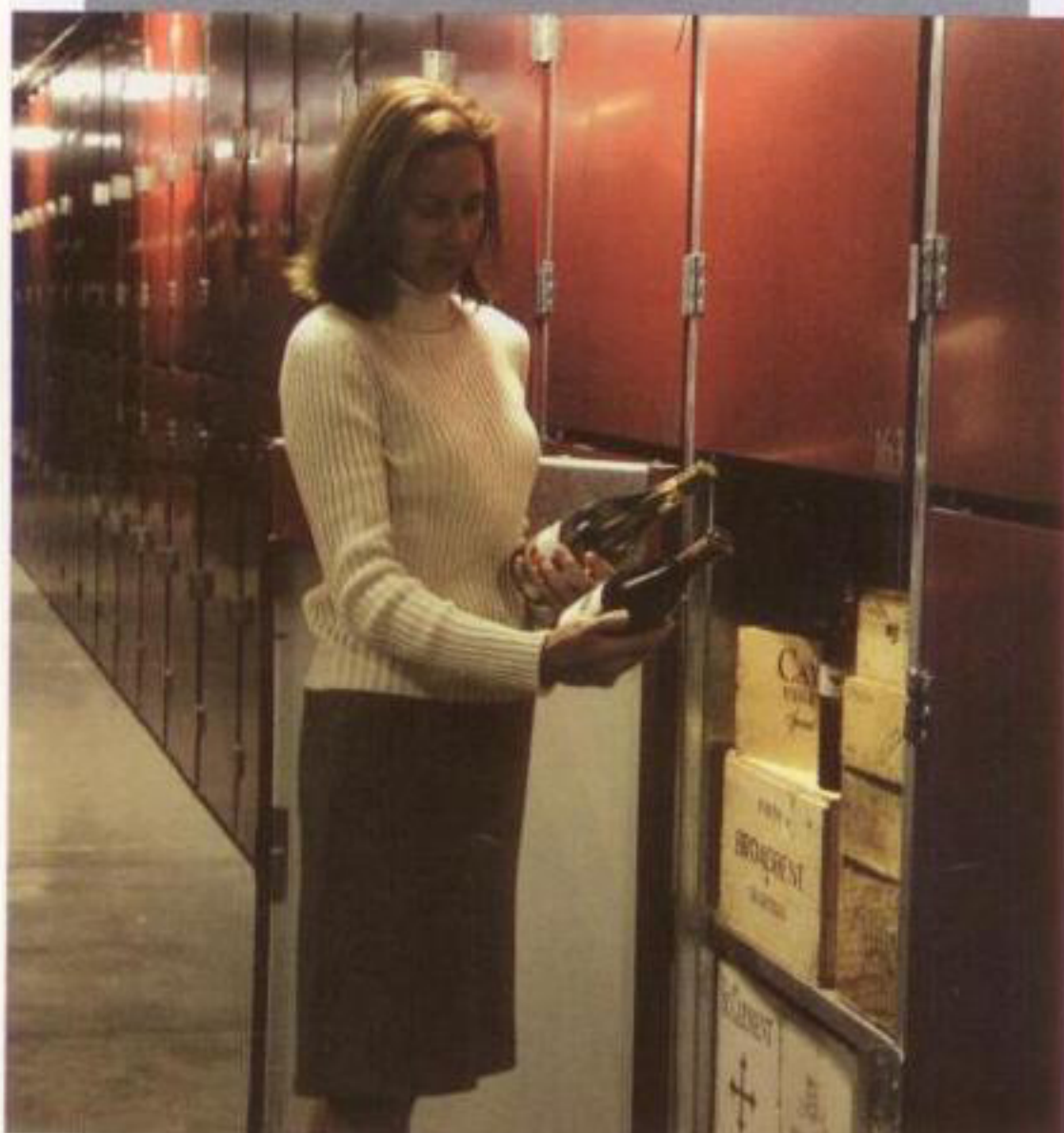
Pasadena is a city that is very much in tune to architectural design and landscape, especially given the number of

historical buildings located there.

Therefore, to accommodate the city's strict guidelines, Barnard decided to go with an art deco style. "Since the building had so many additions, we removed the oldest portion of it and added a new, single-story retail office," he explains, adding that it was designed with 100 feet of full-height windows facing the street. This makes the doors of the storage units located on the second floor above the office and retail area visible from the street. Designed with a high-tech industrial look, this area also features 14-foot high exposed ceilings that give it an open spacious feeling. Additionally, custom designed merchandising displays resembling trucks add to the uniqueness of the facility's retail showroom.

The facility also boasts three elevators, located around the outer core of the building, which allows for the average distance of travel to be less than 100 feet—a number that is significantly less than most self-storage facilities.

Additionally, should one elevator be inoperable, customers have the use of two others that are strategically located to minimize the distance to any unit.



*Wine storage is just one of the extras offered at Storbox Self Storage, located in Pasadena, California.*

*Photos courtesy of Barnard Investments.*



Another unique aspect of Storbox is that it has street frontage on three sides, with vehicle access from two of those streets. Barnard explains that there was

**Quick Facts**

Owner: Barnard Investments

Opened: August 2001

Facility Size: 97,818 square feet with 10,000 square feet of wine storage

Number Of Units: 1007 units + 800 wine lockers

Builder: HBI Construction

Architect: ARE Associates

44, and designated the rest of the area for RV, boat, and vehicle storage.

While most sites that utilize cargo containers for storage tend to be less than attractive, (even though some add roll-up doors to the containers,) Barnard chose to take a different approach at Storbox by lining the unbuildable area with 34 of the containers. The container doors were then cut off and replaced with traditional self-storage roll-up doors, each of which were hard-wired with door alarms. A secondary roof with 9-inch ridged insulation was also added, along with a façade that makes the units appear to be 10 feet high. These changes resulted in containerized storage areas that appear to be “real” storage units. Best of all, because they are portable, they are allowed by the city—more importantly, they are perceived as being comparable to a new building.

**Additional Touches**

Intrigued by the idea of wine storage, and familiar with a self-storage site in Glendale that had such an area, Barnard decided to incorporate The Wine Grotto into Storbox Self Storage, an attractive area

located just off the showroom floor. Admitting that wine storage is not for every-

one, he cautions that marketing for those units or lockers must be handled separately from that of the traditional self-storage business.

“Our success with wine storage has been due to marketing efforts that are completely autonomous from traditional self-storage,” Barnard says. “We advertise through wine retailers, separate mailers, and separate brochures. We’ve absorbed 2,500 gross square feet of space allocated for wine storage. If we had not created a specific advertising campaign for it, we’d probably have been lucky to have absorbed 400 square feet.”

With its customers in mind, Storbox also offers high-security units that are located near The Wine Grotto. Barnard says that having a premium area like that gives customers the perception that this is a higher end facility, that it’s nicer, and that they can justify a premium price to store their goods there.

“It’s like taking your car to the dealership to have work done on it,” Barnard says. “You know it is going to cost a little more, but you know that they are going to do it just right. It’s that peace of mind knowing that it’s the best you can get.”

Poppy Behrens is the executive editor of the *Mini-Storage Messenger*.



Top: Cargo containers (far left in photo) are made more attractive by adding roll-up doors and a façade that make them appear to be traditional self-storage units. Center and Bottom: Custom designed merchandising displays make the retail showroom at Storbox unique. Photos courtesy of Barnard Investments.

an existing wrought iron fence securing the property, however in order to satisfy the residential tenants on two of the facing streets, corrugated sheet metal panels were attached to the fencing. This shields all activity inside of the facility from the adjacent residents nearby.

“This way any cars or RVs or containers on site are blocked from view and don’t detract from the residential neighborhood,” says Barnard. He explains that they also upgraded the landscaping at

**Storbox is also unique in that it includes some containerized storage units.**

the facility to keep residents happy and instill a “good neighbor” feeling with them. “We had planned future phases on site, and we knew that we would have to go back to those same people to gain support for that, so we wanted them to be happy with the project and feel that they had a great neighborhood.”

**The Container Quotient**

Storbox is also unique in that it includes some containerized storage units. “When we initially looked at the parking area, we realized that it was in excess of what was required by the city,” says Barnard. Additionally, the northerly 60 feet of the site was restricted from having buildings constructed on it. “The question was how to maximize the value of that land. We realized that the highest return would come from putting containerized storage there.” Barnard had room for 92 containers, however he started out with