

Collecting

Cellar Jazz

Musician and psychiatrist Denny Zeitlin is an upbeat collector BY RYAN ISAAC

Denny Zeitlin and his wife, Josephine, have decided to celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary with a trip to Oregon. As the centerpiece of the weekend, he's packing a selection of 1969 Burgundies, including G. Roumier Bonnes Mares and Domaine de la Romanée-Conti La Tâche.

"I hope the wines are up to snuff," Zeitlin says. "I've taken a lot of pains over the years to control temperature and humidity, and I've been lucky, with very few bottles slipping away from us."

Zeitlin's interest in wine is older than his marriage, dating to his medical studies at Johns Hopkins in the early 1960s. "I still remember getting '55 Pétus for \$5 a bottle, '52 Cheval-Blanc for \$4.25. But at that time I had neither the money, nor the vision, nor the space to put down any wines."

Most were drunk during late dinners with friends after their hospital rounds. "We didn't realize we were committing infanticide, but we were bowled over by these wines and it seemed like there was an infinite supply. You could go to the wine shop and pick up whatever you wanted."

But marriage, and moving to California, gave him a dif-



Denny Zeitlin began studying piano at age 7, while growing up in Highland Park, Ill., a suburb of Chicago. Columbia Records offered him his first record contract in the '60s, about the same time his passion for fine wine started to take shape.

ferent perspective. Since 1973, the couple has lived in Marin County where their proper cellar now holds 4,000 bottles. And Zeitlin, 66, has built a life based on both a profession and a passion.

A practicing psychiatrist, he sees patients about 30 hours each week. He teaches at the University of California, San Francisco, working

with psychiatrists in the residency program on various aspects of psychotherapy.

Zeitlin is also an accomplished jazz pianist. He has recorded more than 30 albums and has appeared on *The Tonight Show* and *CBS Sunday Morning*. His latest album, *Slickrock*, was released in May.

He and his wife typically drink wine every night, either

at home or at a restaurant. "Fortunately, in the Bay area, there's never been a problem with bringing your wine as long as you're willing to pay a corkage fee," he says.

Zeitlin proclaims that his wife is the best chef he's ever been around. "She cooks the way a great jazz musician would improvise," he says. "She has never written down a recipe; she has never followed a recipe from a book without changing it intuitively to make it better."

He remembers dinner parties that didn't conclude until 3 o'clock in the morning, opportunities for the Zeitlins to share many of their wines. "Drinking the older bottles and finding the marvelous antiques was a major thrill," he says.

Like many wine collectors, Zeitlin's tastes have changed over time. He

was introduced to wine with Bordeaux and has enjoyed many of the best, but hasn't bought it in great quantity since the 1982 vintage. "Psychologically, I've never been able to fully adjust to what's happened to the price of Bordeaux. I think that's the affliction of people who collected early."

Syrah is his latest kick.

Collecting



Every bottle in Zeitlin's cellar is fair game; his drinking options range from 80-year-old Burgundies to recent California releases.

"We're just in love with the expression of that grape, wherever it's grown." He particularly enjoys Sine Qua Non's Syrah-based bottlings, as well as Ojai and Torbreck RunRig Shiraz.

Fortunately, Zeitlin's cellar has protected those wines he bought long ago. For a while, the cellar was divided into two temperature-controlled areas: he stored older wines at 49° F and younger wines at 53° F.

"I think that was extraordinarily helpful over time. It wasn't immediately discernable, but over a period of 30 years it was. I would pull out a bottle of a similar wine to somebody who had stored it at 60 degrees, and there was a very palpable difference—much more intense, much stronger ... a big difference in

the sensory impression of the wine," he says.

He noticed the difference particularly in the Burgundies of Dr. Barolet, a physician and négociant who purchased and aged many of that region's best wines prior to his death in 1969. Between 1969 and 1970, Zeitlin acquired about 50 cases of Barolet & Fils wines, "the most exciting purchase we've ever made." Zeitlin has a couple cases remaining, and reports that the wines from 1925 are still drinking beautifully.

"I've lost any illusions of immortality I might have had when I was a teenager, so I'm not saving all my great bottles for 10 years from now," Zeitlin says. "We're drinking good wine every night, and that feels great." □