

# VARIETY

## The Libation Librarian

He calls it "wine cellar management." Clients call it a godsend  
by [Scott Hettrick](#) - Thurs., Jan. 5, 2006

He only organizes wine cellars, but the world might be better if Jeff Smith ran it. He slays chaos and creates order, then hands you a database to keep it that way.

Book Soup owner Glenn Goldman has collected wine for more than 30 years, and yet: "Total disarray. I couldn't find a specific bottle to save my life." Thanks to Smith, he says, "I discovered stuff I'd long forgotten." As owner-operator of Carte du Vin, Smith provides wine cellar management. It's a rarefied corner of the service industry, but Smith's clients describe him not as a servant but as a Santa Claus.

"I'm like a little kid in anticipation of his arrival, and when he leaves, I'm a grown man crying," says Jim Caparro, president and CEO of Entertainment Distribution Co. in New York. "Wine collecting would not be the joy it is today if it were not for him."

Smith counts about 100 clients in 13 states, some who own 10,000 bottles or more. With that much wine, it's easy to under- or overestimate collections by as much as 20%. That can mean hundreds of thousands of dollars, a margin of error they would not accept in their businesses.

"It's like any other asset," says business manager Michael Karlin, a Smith client, "but people don't manage it properly."

Or, as Smith says, "They forget what they drink." Carte du Vin began about four years ago, by accident: Smith's father, music mogul Joe Smith, needed help moving his 4,000-bottle cellar into a new house. Then Jeff Smith's brother-in-law, the WB founder Jamie Kellner, asked for cellar assistance.

"Next thing I knew," he says, "I was in some of the biggest collections in town." Among those were Warners production chief Jeff Robinov, WB network chairman Garth Ancier, producer Jim Brooks, E! topper Ted Harbert, Endeavor's Adam Venit, producer-manager Freddie DeMann and Elliot Webb of Broder-Webb-Chervin-Silbermann.

Smith's experience includes stints at Ticketmaster, Warner Bros. Records and Warner Television. He wrote a singles column for the Jewish Journal and a book, "Life Sentence: The Guy's Survival Guide to Getting Engaged and Married."

It's not a background that suggests manhandling million-dollar wine collections. However, Wally's Wine partner Christian Navarro says Smith is uniquely qualified. "You need to have a true understanding of wine, software and people," he says. "He's one of the few people I've met who can do all three."

To those credentials, Smith would add a fourth: He's willing. "This is dirty, physical, cold work," he says. "It's unpleasant, and people don't want to do it." In the process, Smith finds things he didn't expect, like the false door that hid a cache of ammunition. (The cellar's owner liked to hunt, too.) Or burlap sacks that contained silver dollars. "There must have been hundreds of those bags," Smith says. "Stacks of bills, too."

Mostly, Smith finds a lot of wine in disarray. Prices start at \$2.50 per bottle for the initial organization of the cellar, which includes categorizing the wine by region and/or producer, labeling each bottle and providing a digitally indexed listing. He can also act as wine guru. Says Karlin: "He's helped me pare down the good wines and acquire the great ones."

Ancier, who brings his own wine to WB events, maintained his own cellar after Smith sorted out what was once "an incomprehensible mess." Although he gets the occasional tip from Smith, Ancier buys the wine himself. "That's half the fun," he says.

Other clients need more attention. "I needed someone to put together a wine closet, categorize it and tell me what to drink when," Webb says. "I had 150-200 bottles, and I didn't know one from the other."

Thanks to Smith, his collection has grown to about 700 bottles. But Webb says he still doesn't know much about wine. "What I enjoy," he says, "is drinking it."