

DOWNTIME



Carnival Cruise Lines CEO Bob Dickinson, seen above (on right) on an winery tour many years ago, now spends more time in his cellar tending to his collection rather than seeing how wine is made.

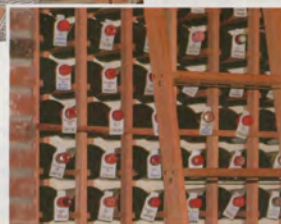
colossal outdoor generator, Dickinson's brick-walled, three-room, 1,200-square-foot wine cellar is replete with vintage wines — 20,000 bottles, at last count. "It has been as high as 24,000 and as low as 18,000," says the 62-year-old CEO of Miami-based Carnival Cruise Lines. "It ebbs and flows."

In the back room, where the temperature hovers at 51 degrees, racks are stacked with older bottles — ports,

hours in his cellar, labeling, organizing and assembling his wines. "I enjoy that aspect because it's physical," he says. "I'm working with my hands, deciding things and laying things out."

Dickinson spends at least one night a week enjoying wine with friends in what he likes to call "Boys Night Out." Those evenings have a theme, he says, such as a recent outing he dubbed "Great Drinking Reds from California or France in the 1970's" — each person selected a wine, decanted and transferred it to another bottle, hid the label and brought the cork along. The "boys" drank the wine blind then spent the evening trying to figure out which wine was which and which they liked. "It is enormous fun," Dickinson says.

Beyond that, the oenophile and his wife Jodi, a gourmet cook, entertain frequently. The couple donates lavish wine dinners at their home to benefit various local charities. For his part, Dickinson selects the wines. One of his great pleasures he says, is to



Liquid Assets

Bob Dickinson glances down at his watch before he enters the wine cellar of his Coral Gables home. It's precisely two hours before he is supposed to meet up with friends — time enough to retrieve and decant a bottle of 1974 Heitz Martha's Vineyard, arguably one of California's most revered vintages.

He cradles the bottle in his hands and carries it to his wet bar before laying it gently into a wire cradle. After wiping the neck of the bottle, he slowly uncorks it and carefully pours the chilled wine through a coffee filter and into a waiting decanter. When sediments approach the neck, Dickinson tips the bottle back slightly and slows the flow down to a trickle. Setting the decanter aside to aerate, he rinses the empty bottle, gazes lovingly at the juice and says, "An hour and a half from now, this is going to be an entirely different wine."

Accessed by security codes, accented with a stained glass door and powered by a

cabernets, Rhones, champagnes and Bordeaux. Stashed under a wooden ladder normally found towering over shelves of library books are two bottles dating back to 1870 — a magnum each of Château Latour and Château Lafite Rothschild, as well as a Madeira from 1795. Dickinson has his collection tagged, categorized by year and region and committed to memory. He easily points out favorites like the Penfold's Grange wines from Australia. "I have every vintage from 1953 to 1999," he says.

Dickinson first discovered his love for fine wine in 1973 when he wandered into a wine store, and, on a whim, picked up a couple of bottles of a 1966 Bordeaux. "Château Brane Cantenac. It was like a religious experience. Before that I was drinking Lancers and Mateus Rosé," he recalls. The following year he became serious about collecting.

Wrapped in layers, thick socks and a wool hat, Dickinson says he can spend

match the food and the wine. "It takes time to find them around the cellar and assemble them. If you get the right match, the food tastes better and the wine tastes better."

Dickinson, who has traveled extensively around the world, says he buys most of his wine at the source or through retailers in California, New York and Europe. Most of his leisure travel has wine at the center of it, but he says he no longer feels the need to see how wine is made. "If you've seen one winery you've seen them all," he says. "I'd rather drink it than look at it."

Just as interesting Dickinson says, is sharing his experience with others. "Getting people hooked on wine is gratifying. If they try it and like it they become passionate about it and then... we end up drinking their wine." — Barbara Perkins