

The new hunter-gatherers

Suzy Zail speaks to three GPs who are as avid about their collections as their medicine.

DR JOSH Honig's consulting room in outer suburban Melbourne is plastered with football memorabilia. He makes no secret of his AFL allegiance, or his penchant for collecting.

Two framed St Kilda football jumpers and an autographed poster dominate the walls. A coaster and a clock emblazoned with the Saints logo compete for attention on his desk.

The GP was drawn to collecting as a young boy living in New York. Diagnosed at the age of four with kidney disease, he was enticed indoors with baseball cards and other collectibles bought from the local pharmacy.

"Collecting was a suitable pursuit for a frail boy," Dr Honig laughs. "My parents bought me my first packet of cards and that was it. I had to get the set."

When the Honigs migrated to Australia, the seven-year-old discovered stamps, which he catalogued and ordered according to country and denomination.

"Collecting is a great way to change focus after a hard day at work and step from one world into another." Dr David Bornstein

With American pennies, it was about filling the holes in his coin booklet. As a teenager, he skipped school to collect golfers' autographs at local tournaments, and spent weekends in movie memorabilia shops, scouting for photos for his Ingrid Bergman collection.

The 44-year-old doctor has all 41 of Hitchcock's talking movies on DVD and more than 100 books on mountaineering, but even those have been eclipsed by his most recent collection.

Outside, in the shed, in two humidity-controlled wine fridges, Dr Honig has more bottles of pinot and chardonnay than he could ever hope to drink.

Wine collecting's world of rankings and scores, its hierarchy, history, philosophy and art, appeal to his intellectual curiosity. The idea of hoarding something that improves and changes with time also appeals to him. He now has 50 books on wine. And more 600 bottles.

It's become an expensive hobby. His priciest bottle of wine, a 2005 Mugnier Musigny, is now worth \$2000, which he considers obscene. He wants to buy less and start enjoying what he has, but he acknowledges that drinking bottles he's nurtured for many years will be difficult.

"Drinking them will be both fantastic and sad – I like owning them," he says.

"There's a degree of compulsion and an obsessiveness that accompanies the collecting mentality," he admits. "I tend to become passionate about the things I enjoy – perhaps to excess – so I'm trying to channel that energy into collecting experiences and memories, rather than

material things."

What Dr Honig does consider positive about collecting is the way it impacts his work.

"If something gives you pleasure, whether it's a relationship, playing sport or collecting, if you're happy then you'll relate to your patients better, and treat them more effectively."

Dr Jim Glaspole agrees. The 44-year-old Melbourne GP and vinyl record collector often discusses music with his patients.

"As a GP, I have ongoing relationships with my patients that are not purely focused on medical problems," he says.

"You have to get to know your patients as people, and allow them to get to know you, too."

Many of his patients know he is the Dr Jim of Dr Jim's Records, an ex-record label boss as well as a GP, but few would know he owns more than 1500 pieces of vinyl.

Dr Glaspole began collecting vinyl

records as a medical student, spending more time at the university record shop than at the library.

"As a youth, I felt like an outsider. Music was my way of coping with the world and understanding people," he confides.

His first album was *Psychedelic Jungle* by the Cramps. It was loud, angry and discordant.

"I related to punk's personal politics, to its subversiveness," he says, adding that his subversive thinking assists him in altering his patients' perceptions of their illnesses.

"If patients are miserable, you have to subvert their thinking and help them look at their problems in a different way."

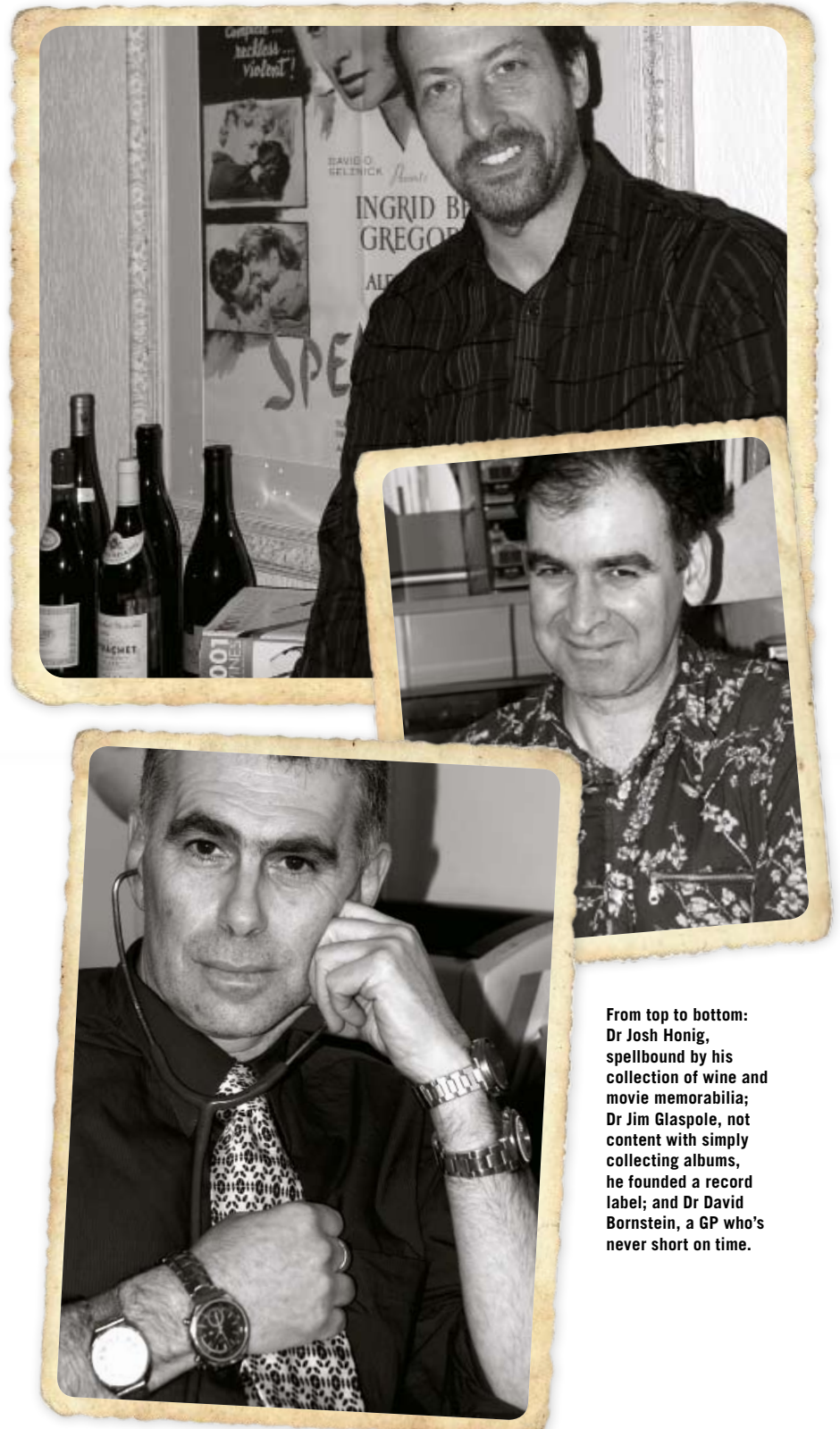
He started his record label to move from being a consumer to a player, but his increased exposure to musicians fuelled his addiction.

"After I graduated and had an income, I'd walk into a record shop after every paycheck. I've spent \$150 on a single; bought a dozen albums in one hit. It's a strange need, a bit like the search for the holy grail, for that ultimate new record."

If there was a limited-edition record, he wanted to own it. If a band he liked had its record recalled, or if the vinyl was coloured or had an extra track, it was even more alluring. He bought the first Nirvana single on vinyl for \$10. It's worth close to \$1000 now, but he wouldn't sell it.

"It would be like selling my personal history. Those records are precious artefacts of my early life."

He owns an iPod, but his love of vinyl has not waned. He still listens to his collection, whether it's punk, electronic or 16th-



From top to bottom: Dr Josh Honig, spellbound by his collection of wine and movie memorabilia; Dr Jim Glaspole, not content with simply collecting albums, he founded a record label; and Dr David Bornstein, a GP who's never short on time.

century Russian chants.

"Music serves different purposes," he says. "Sometimes it's to relax, at other times it's to fire you up. General practice can be all-consuming. You need diversions."

Dr David Bornstein keeps his diversion close at hand. Watches wrapped in tissue paper sit alongside his script pads. Ticking faces and worn leather bands spill from tin cans hidden in draws. He has more than 300 watches, and wears them all, alternating between them according to his mood.

"I always inspect a patient's watch before I take a history," he says, half joking. "Often we talk about the watch they are wearing. It can be an ice-breaker and most patients appreciate the opportunity to talk about their watch, especially if they have an interesting story."

The 55-year-old GP has been collecting wristwatches for 30 years. He always thought them beautiful – a fascinating

combination of jewellery, art, engineering and history. He has watches dating back to 1910; trench watches from the First World War; sleek styles from the 1960s; and colourful, clunky timepieces from the '70s.

"If I'd put as much time and money into property or shares, I'd be a lot richer," Dr Bornstein admits, "but there's something about being able to touch and feel something unique, and hold it in your hands."

Watches enthral the Melbourne doctor, but apart from a 1940 Tissot his father gave him on his 13th birthday, and a handful of watches he's received as gifts, he is not in thrall to them. He plans to sell most of his collection. In the meantime, he's still keeping tabs on eBay, visiting dealers and attending auctions.

"It's an indulgence," he admits, "a different world, an escape from whatever else is going on. Collecting is a great way to change focus after a hard day at work and step from one world into another." 