



'I can be ruthless. . . And I've been known to cheat.'

Joe and Deena Turner — with 9-month-old Jacob — enjoy the fruits of their labors at their fledgling Cana Cellars micro-winery. On weekends, the basement of the Turners' house/vineyard is a tasting room for customers. off Fitzhugh Road, which runs off 290 West.



The mellowing of 'Mad Dog' Joe Turner



Photos by Ralph Barrera/AA-S

When Willie Nelson was arrested on marijuana charges near Waco and local lawyers advised him to plea bargain, he turned to Joe Turner who punched

a hole in the cops' case. Before he was married, and before the marijuana case, Turner dated Nelson's daughter Lana.

Once known for wild living, Austin's on-the-edge defense lawyer has settled down with wife, baby and vineyard, but in court he still sinks his teeth into the prosecution

By **DON McLEESE**
American-Statesman Staff

Joe Turner takes it all personally. So he showed recently when he posed for a front-page photo with client Paul Sastrup, whose shooting of a would-be truck burglar on a downtown street is the latest in Turner's series of high-profile criminal cases, cases that he has done his best to turn into tests of character.

"Most trials are about who the

defendant is," said the intensely animated, 43-year-old dynamo of a defense lawyer, arms flailing as he makes his point, while his ruddy complexion grows even more heated. "If I like him, the jurors are going to like him, because I'm going to sell him. And if they like him, then he has a pretty good chance of winning — regardless of what the facts are, regardless of what the law is. It all comes down to character, and I think that jurors are pretty good judges of character."

Turner himself is something of a character. He took it personally in 1975, when the University of Texas law school declined to admit him, until Turner persuaded a federal judge to intervene.

He took it personally during his five years as a prosecutor, from the late '70s through the early '80s, when his aggressiveness earned him the nickname "Mad Dog." He grew increasingly frustrated with government work when he saw others rewarded on the basis of senior-

ity, while he was running rabid rings around them in terms of trials and convictions.

He takes his birthdays very personally. For his 30th, he flew the blues legend Big Joe Turner into town and threw a party at Antone's, where the two Joe Turners shouted "Shake, Rattle and Roll" onstage. For his 40th, he hired another Joe — Ely — to play a bash at Turner's Oak Hill ranch, where the

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Turner defended former UT baseball coach Cliff Gustafson when the university found financial irregularities in the operation of his summer camp.



In the wake of the siege of the Branch Davidian headquarters, survivor Ruth Riddle turned to Joe Turner. She received the lightest sentence for a weapons conviction of the group that went to trial.