

Dr. Herbert Zettl

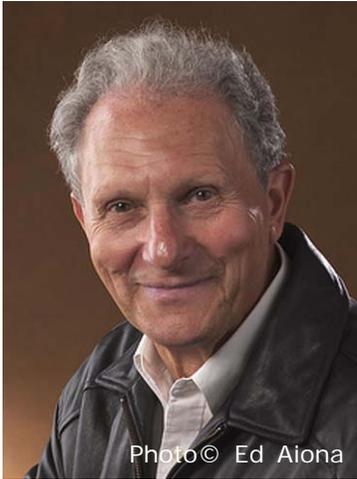


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Class of 1998

Silver Circle Profile
By: **Kevin Scott Wing**

Dr. Herbert Zettl (*Silver Circle class of 1998*)

almost made a decision not to teach television broadcasting at San Francisco State University. In hindsight, it could've been one of those career decisions he might've regretted down the road.

"By then, I was a young director on the go," says Zettl, who, in the 1950s, was directing programs and working as a floor manager at KPIX in San Francisco. Zettl had been asked by the chairman of San Francisco State's broadcasting and electronic communication arts department if he would consider moving from a television station into a classroom.

"I said to him, "are you crazy?" Zettl recalls.

The man who asked Zettl was **Dr. Stuart Hyde** (*Silver Circle class of 1996*), the longtime chair of the university's broadcasting department.

"I knew Stuart from Stanford (University), where we both attended," Zettl says. The year was 1958, and, by then, Zettl had already been at KPIX for several years, and he had some serious credentials: he had an associate's degree from Santa Rosa Junior College, and a bachelor's degree from Stanford, where he majored in speech and drama and minored in journalism. He later earned his Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley.

Zettl, who came to California after growing up in Austria and Switzerland, was enjoying his burgeoning, promising television career.

"I liked what I was doing," he says. While he was attending Stanford, Zettl began interning at KPIX, in 1953. The station and the university worked together to produce summer television workshops, and Zettl was the student producer. While still attending Stanford, Zettl advanced from a station intern to floor manager, and later, to directing many of the station's programs, including its newscasts and a dance-party program.

Zettl learned a lot from working on live remote broadcasts, as he did frequently for the likes of **Edward R. Murrow** and **Arthur Godfrey**, both of whom had popular programs on CBS like *Person to Person* for Murrow and a long-running variety show for Godfrey.



For a short stint in 1954 and 1955, Zettl left KPIX for a job at KQVR in Stockton, a new TV station which had many technological innovations. But, after 11 months, Zettl – who had a standing agreement with KPIX that he could return if he wanted to – left KQVR and exercised his option to rejoin KPIX.

As the 1950s drew to a close, and after San Francisco State had asked Zettl once before if he would consider joining the faculty to teach television broadcasting, Zettl wondered where his career might take him 10 years into the future.

"I knew that I didn't want to go to Los Angeles or New York," he says. "Who do I want to be who's already above me? Do I want to be a general manager someday? No."

Zettl called Hyde at San Francisco State, going there to visit the campus. But, when he arrived, he didn't understand how he could teach television production without a studio, or without equipment.

"Stuart told me that would be up to me to make all those things happen," he says.

So Zettl joined the faculty, started making things happen, and eventually managed to have a TV studio built on campus at a cost of \$4 million – a lot of money back in 1959. It would become the cornerstone of Zettl's next four decades at San Francisco State.

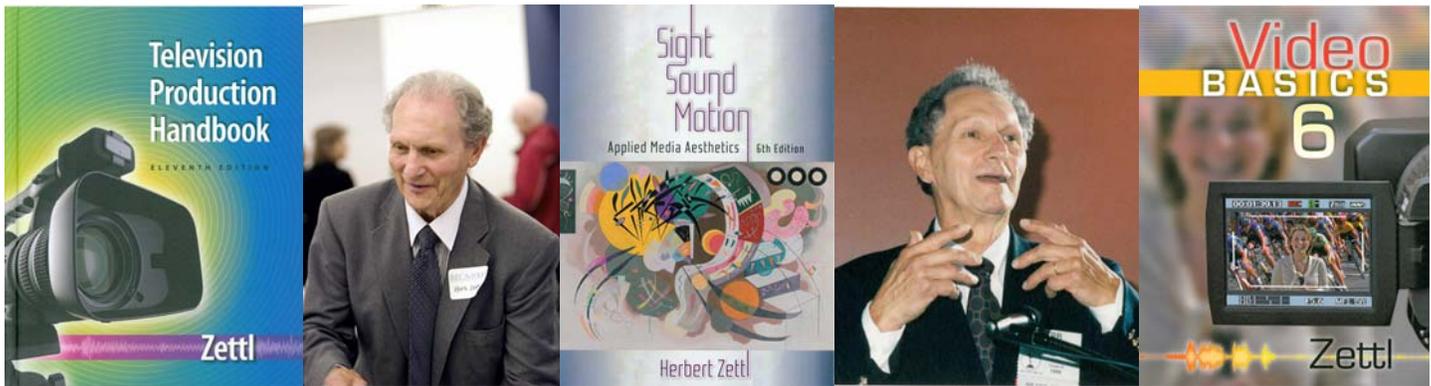
As Zettl settled in to his new job on campus, he hung on to his connection with KPIX until 1963, directing shows during the summer months when he didn't have any classes to teach at the university.

While there, Zettl headed the Institute of International Media Communication, which facilitated international visitors through the auspices of the State Department's International Information Programs.

Considered by former students, peers and colleagues as a "teacher-scholar," Zettl was a leader in the classroom in more ways than one. His influence in the professional world of television production persists to this day, 12 years after he formally retired from the university.

It's easy to see why. Zettl taught courses in media aesthetics, television production and seminars in experimental production.

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In his experimental production courses, Zettl spearheaded various experimental television projects such as dramas for simultaneous multi-screen and inductive narrative presentation techniques.

Through his methods, he explored the use of multi-screens in contrast to split-screens, quad-screens and other ways of dividing up a single frame. He once said that multi-screens “represent an extension of the space-time entity of the single screen.”

Much of Zettl’s research is defined by his theory of applied media aesthetics. It is a theoretical approach for understanding, and creating, mediated imagery. In fact, he wrote about his theories in *Sight Sound Motion: Applied Media Aesthetics*, one of the many books he has authored on television production. “That book is my pride and joy,” Zettl says. The book, first published in 1999, is now in its sixth edition.

Zettl has written his books with one goal in mind: so students can learn. His *Television Production Handbook*, the textbook mainstay of his teachings for four decades, will have a new edition – its 11th – due out in 2012. The book is also printed into several foreign languages, including Spanish, Greek, Chinese and Korean.

Today, all of Zettl’s books are used in key television production centers and universities around the world.

Now in his early 80s, Zettl is still devoted to his passion for television production. He’s currently finishing the seventh edition of another book, *Video Basics Workbook 7*.

“It keeps me going,” he says, laughing.

Through the years, many of Zettl’s former students have entered the broadcasting industry, from journalists and managers to production executives.

“Quite a number of people went into the broadcasting industry. It’s amazing how many people there are. There are a lot here in the Bay Area, and quite a few down in L.A.,” he says modestly.

After a 40-year career in the classroom, the number of people Zettl had an effect would extend into the tens of thousands.

One of Zettl’s former students is **Frank Somerville**, KTVU’s 5, 6 and 10 p.m. anchor.

“Frank was a serious student,” he says. “He was

very conscientious. He was very serious about everything. He was neat and clean, and he just wanted to write news stories. I was trying to teach him, and everyone else, how to compose pictures. He was a great student.”

Phil Arnone and **Ed Cosci** (*Silver Circle class of 1998*) were two of Zettl’s early students. They went on to become longtime production and engineering executives, respectively, at KTVU. **Darryl Compton** (*Silver Circle class of 1995*) was also an early student who spend twenty years as a technician at SF State with Zettl and eventually became associate news director at KRON 4. For the last 15 years, Darryl has served as executive director of our NATAS chapter.

Zettl’s influence has also extended to the world of entertainment.

Peter Casey was a former Zettl student, but he chose to go south. Casey established himself in Hollywood, and in the early 1990s, was one of the creators of the long-running NBC comedy, *Frasier*.

Outside of the classroom, Zettl shared his research and knowledge of innovative television production techniques on a global scale, but not just with his many books on the subject. For many years, Zettl would travel to other nations as a production consultant for the United States Information Agency, visiting places like Bangladesh, Iraq, Pakistan, Germany and China.

“I enjoyed international lecturing,” he says. “It was fun. I was so active.”

Zettl has received many honors through the years, including a California State Legislature Distinguished Teaching Award in 1966. In 2004, he received the Distinguished Education Service Award of the Broadcast Education Association.

These days, Zettl and **Erika**, his wife of 58 years, reside in the Marin County community of Forest Knolls. Married in 1953, Hyde – the man who hired Zettl at San Francisco State – served as Zettl’s best man, and Hyde’s wife served as maid of honor.

The Zettls have two children: daughter, **Renee**, who has five children; and a son, **Alex**, who teaches physics at UC Berkeley.

“I enjoyed every minute of my teaching at San Francisco State,” Zettl says. “Those were great years for me.”