

A Beastly Victorian

By Jerry Carroll

Like many another young couple, the Zacks of Steiner street just can't say when they'll be done redecorating their new home.

"Maybe never," David Zack said yesterday.

"Oh, sometime we'll be finished. Won't we?" Maija Zack inquired breathlessly, dancing down the stairs.

The problems of decor the Zacks have are not the sort facing your usual young marrieds.

The Zacks live in a 78-year-old Victorian at 908 Steiner. It's two stories tall and they don't know how many rooms it has.

The outside is painted in five different psychedelic hues and a silver aluminum wave is washing up a green whale's tail beneath the front window.

Inside, the walls swarm with countless hand-painted animals done by Mrs. Zack. She and her husband call them "beasts."

There are honest, unabashed beasts, beasts which cunningly depict Washington crossing the Delaware and beasts inside cartoon balloons spelling out the words "Woofers of the World, Unite!"

Zack, a bearded poet, regards you curiously through gold-rimmed spectacles when you ask why there are so many beasts in the house.

"They're nice," he said.

He and Maija, who is wearing a blouse and paint-



MAIJA ZACK'S CEILING TRIP
Not exactly the Sistine Chapel, but nice

flecked jeans, escort you proudly into a small room where a magnificent 80-year-old bed sits.

Zack points at something in the mottled grain of the rich cherrywood headboard. "See the beast in the middle" he asks.

Animal skins are thrown attractively over chairs and divans and a yellow ostrich foot with three toes serves as an ash tray.

In the study is a large painting of a dog—possibly a cocker spaniel—with a giraffe crushed between its jaws.

"That's wolf-wolf as a young dog," Mrs. Zack observes.

She stopped by a second-story window to point out the 10-foot papier mache and fiberglass crocodile crawling up the outside wall. An earlier, discarded reptile lies on the ledge below it and the wind makes it seem like it's breathing. Eerie.

The Zacks bought the house a year ago. Sometimes complete strangers have stopped by and helped with the painting. One fellow stayed for a month to paint.

"I never saw him before," Zack said.

If he and his wife ever resolve the question of whether the Steiner street pad can ever really be regarded as finished, Zack would like to move on.

"I have an idea to get some land in the country and build a house shaped like a beast," he said.

Jerry Carroll, "A Beastly Victorian." *The San Francisco Chronicle* (July 27, 1968).