

Bringing Home Bacon -- text only

BRINGING HOME BACON: INSIDE A RECLUSIVE BILLIONAIRE'S ISLAND PARADISE

By ALLEN SALKIN

Nobody has said of Louis Bacon what they whispered about the Great Gatsby: "One time he killed a man..." But they've said plenty of other intriguing and unsubstantiated things about the reclusive multi-millionaire who owns Robins Island, a tightly-guarded, teardrop-shaped paradise in Great Peconic Bay.

Bacon, 45, and his wife Cynthia have four children. That he regularly brings them to the 435-acre island near New Suffolk doesn't stop speculation. One North Fork businessman gossiped recently, "He had a bunch of models out there a few weekends ago." Another local said, "Prince Charles was out there hunting with him once."

Those who know the Wall Street financier say not to believe the rumormongers. He is a warm and thoughtful person, they say, a hard working family man with low-profile friends. They point to Bacon's astonishing generosity. He has permanently conserved nearly 1,000 acres of pristine East End land worth an estimated \$85 million, signing away development rights and granting stewardship to environmental groups. Thanks to him, some of the most valuable real estate in the world will remain home to ospreys, deer and mud turtles.

"Environmentalism, sometimes I wonder of that's taken over from his love of global trading," said Christopher Brady, a classmate of Bacon's at Middlebury College and Columbia Business School who heads the money management firm Chart Group.

Bacon does little to dispel the speculation. He has never given an interview. He requires employees to sign secrecy agreements. And he indulges in some colorful habits, like hosting traditional English "driven pheasant" hunts on his island where guests like Ted Turner's son Beauregard, environmentalist Robert Kennedy, Jr., and men of regal-bearing with unplaceable European accents don knee-high hunting tweeds to shoot fat birds from the sky. His brother has been dating Diandra Douglas, ex-wife of actor Michael Douglas. As a Wall Street trader, Bacon has been called "a predator," once scoring big by placing multi-million dollar bets against the U.S. dollar at the start of the Gulf War. That this fantastically rich and colorful man with homes in London, Manhattan, Colorado and The Bahamas is so secretive does not mean that he is evil, but secrecy does breed suspicion.

For evidence of that, return briefly to F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel about the mysterious Gatsby – himself the prince of a fantastic New York-area bayside estate: "He's a bootlegger" said the young ladies, moving somewhere between his cocktails and his flowers. "One time he killed a man who had found out that he was nephew to Von Hindenburg and second cousin to the devil."

With round-the-clock security men prowling the beach at Robins Island to keep away intruders, Bacon exudes a Gatsby-like aura of threat: those who try to pry loose his secrets do so at their own risk. After all, the fit, six-foot tall Bacon is an expert marksman with both a rifle and a crossbow.

Well, months of interviews and the examination of hundreds of pages of documents about him and his holdings, did not yield any information that Bacon is related to the devil. (Although he is related to a Virginia rogue named Nathaniel Bacon who in 1676 launched an unauthorized attack on Native Americans and briefly controlled the colony.) But the work did reveal a portrait of a rare character: a sort of feudal-lord-meets-techno-savvy-Wall Street-super-wizard, a man with one foot in the 17th

century and another in the 21st – and beyond. Indeed the legacy of his conservation gifts may last forever.

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When North Carolina-born Bacon bought Robins Island in December 1993 for \$11 million, locals feared he would turn it over to developers. The previous owner had proposed building 48 vacation mansions. Bacon had no such designs. With typical thoroughness, he hired 20 consultants to draw up a plan to restore the ecology of the long-neglected island and gave \$1.1 million to the Nature Conservancy to monitor rare species there. “They put transmitters on mud turtles’ backs to see their mating habits and make sure nothing interfered with them,” said Edmund Hollander, a landscape architect who worked on the restoration.

The consultants found an island overrun with 200 deer whose hunger for tree leaves and native ground plants allowed the proliferation of nasty, gnarled vines. Native oak trees had been cut down for lumber by early settlers. A pond was choked with thick non-native reeds. And structures dating back to the late 1800s when the island was a hunting preserve were decrepit. “Part of this was habitat restoration and part of it was developing a rustic country estate in the mode of Teddy Roosevelt – conservation, sport shooting -- that feel to it,” Hollander said. “Louis is in many ways of that time period, that turn of the century conservationist with a love for the land. The style of the architecture is very manly.”

In March, 1997, Bacon signed a conservation easement on the land with the Nature Conservancy. Under it, he retained the right to restore existing buildings and add a few amenities – a squash court, a heliport and a dog kennel among them – but ensured that no other development will occur no matter who owns the island after him. For this he received an \$8 million tax deduction – the difference between what the improved island might be worth if houses could be built there and what it is worth with development disallowed.

There were nearly 100 workers-a-day on Robin’s Island in the mid 1990s. A WWII-era military landing craft was bought in Norfolk, Virginia and sailed up the coast. The 100-foot long, gray vessel ferried huge oak trees, lumber and bulldozers from New Suffolk to the island. A power cable was laid along the floor of the bay to the mainland, tapping into the public grid and removing the island’s reliance on noisy generators. Hunters Against Hunger culled the deer herd down to 20 and donated venison to soup kitchens. Scrubby fields left behind by early settlers were plowed under and native grasses re-planted.

Things are pretty nice there nowadays. “When you get off the boat and get on the island, you feel like you’re going to Jurassic park,” Hollander gushed. “You expect to see dinosaurs. It’s you and ospreys and the wind and water. There are beautiful marshes and beaches.”

By 1997, Bacon was flying guests out to his island for hunting nearly every weekend. His seaplane was a regular sight to New Suffolk townies, touching down in the bay, motoring to the dock. These days he uses a helicopter. Bacon’s guests aren’t exactly regular folks. At one hunting weekend, Laura Hunt of the Texas oil Hunts met a dashing young man named Beau Turner, who manages his father Ted’s vast land holdings. Beau was an excellent shot. An impressed Laura drove with Beau back to Manhattan and introduced him to her daughter Gannon. The two were married in Dallas in December 1999 -- and filed for divorce a year later.

The pheasant hunts require “beaters,” men to drive the birds from the brush towards the tweed-clad hunters. The prey, trapped between two lines of humans, take flight and are shot in the air. Each hunter has an assistant who reloads one rifle while the hunter is shooting a second. Typically, there are two hunts a day. Meals are prepared by Bacon’s chef. Guests include fellow financiers and sharpshooting Scotsmen and Continentals whose accents local workers can not place. Bacon treats his employees well, regularly picking up the tab for their birthday and holiday parties at New

Suffolk's popular watering hole Legends. But he has one unusual requirement. "They make you sign this paper," a former beater said. "'No pictures.' You can't talk about what happens. What's done there is secret. Like that."

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Bacon's appetite for the outdoors started young, as did his uncommon personal discipline. "One bright sunny afternoon when everyone was out at play, I was going through the building and saw someone in the study area," remembered Lee Ainslie, former headmaster at Episcopal High School, the Alexandria-Virginia boarding-school Bacon attended for his junior and senior years. "And I saw Louis. He was just grinding away." Louis' grandfather was a historian and preservationist in North Carolina and Louis' father, Zack Bacon, Jr., was a real estate executive in Raleigh. His best friend is his brother Zack III, who works at Louis' company, Moore Capital Management -- Moore was the maiden name of Louis' mother who died in 1983. Between his sophomore and junior years in college, Louis worked on a charter fishing boat off Montauk. By the time he was in his 30s, Bacon was very rich and was showing an uncommon knack for making rich people richer.

Ainslie has made fundraising pilgrimages to Bacon's Sixth Avenue Midtown headquarters and recalls "Louis being surrounded by a variety of computer monitors and seemingly watching every market in the world simultaneously." There was also a basketball hoop near the elevators for traders who wanted to blow-off stress.

Big traders like Bacon often have peculiar habits. His longtime friend Paul Tudor Jones, who heads the Tudor Investment Corp., bought the sneakers Bruce Willis wore in "Die Hard" and dons them every time he makes a big trade, a friend of both Bacon and Jones said. (Jones was one of many Bacon associates who did not return calls requesting comment. Bacon also declined to comment, although he did authorize the head of his charitable foundation, Anne Colley, to speak.)

Whether the credit belongs to good luck charms or hard work, Bacon has done very well. He manages \$8 billion in investments and his flagship fund, Moore Global Investments, averaged 31 percent annual returns from 1990 through 1999. He hasn't done quite so well recently, showing only a 2 percent return in 2000. An investor in a Moore offshore fund says it was up less than one percent this May and is flat for the year. Exactly how rich Bacon is remains a mystery, but Institutional Investor magazine estimated that last year he may have had \$1 billion of his own money in his hedge funds. That figure may be high, but Financial World reported Bacon personally earned "at least" \$136 million cumulatively from 1992 through 1996. Good year or bad, Bacon enjoys his money. He and two employees invested \$30 million in New York-based GreeneStreet Films, which has produced the forthcoming "Just A Kiss" starring Marissa Tomei and Kyra Sedgwick. Through The Moore Charitable Foundation, Bacon gives to a remarkable array of charities, including North Sea Fire Department, Tanzania Wildlife Fund, and an ice-fishing tournament in Monument Lake Colorado. In 1999, the foundation gave away \$1.5 million.

At an April "Fisherman's Ball" honoring Bacon hosted by the environmental group Riverkeeper, the financier -- who has donated millions of dollars to Republican political campaigns -- made a rare public speaking appearance, delivering an impassioned speech to a well-to-do audience. He insisted they have a moral responsibility to take gains from President Bush's tax cut and invest it in the environment. "Immediately after he spoke, a man came up to us and wrote us out a personal check for \$110,000," Riverkeeper president Robert Kennedy Jr. marveled.

If it's true that Bacon is more concerned these days with environmental causes and less with big-time finance, it has been to Long Island's benefit. This past winter, the Peconic Land Trust announced it had received the largest gift in its history, a conservation easement on 540 acres of rolling meadows, woods and freshwater wetlands on Cow Neck peninsula in Southampton.

Bacon had purchased Cow Neck Farm in 1998 for \$25 million from the family of the late Peter Salm.

Hopeful developers had been salivating over the land-- Donald Trump proposed a golf course development. But true to form, Bacon signed away most building rights -- and again stands to pocket a hefty tax deduction. He kept the right to maintain 25 existing structures and a polo field and build four or five other houses. Just as on Robins Island, Bacon remains responsible for upkeep and retains ownership, but the land trust gains perpetual rights to monitor the property and block development.

When they surveyed the land whose stewardship they'd been given, officials from the Peconic Land Trust were stunned at the splendor. "I've never seen such healthy-looking deer," said Marsha Kenny, Director of Development at the non-profit. The deer are healthy because Bacon's workers have planted fields of alfalfa and clover for grazing. Kenny said no one from the land trust has ever met Bacon.

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Bacon's friends say his unwillingness to speak to the press does not mean he has anything to hide. "Because Louis is private, people speculate about him and if you can make it racy, it's more interesting to people," Anne Colley said. "But it's not that exciting. He's really a family man." Bacon is a top-notch squash player. His four children are aged five to fourteen. He has homes in London's exclusive Boltons and on Lyford Cay in the Bahamas (a home he bought from descendents of Costa Rica's first president). His hair is brown. He sometimes wears a beard but isn't doing so these days. These are facts that are known.

Gatsby, it turned out, was a man whose secrets were ugly. He coveted another man's wife and tried to win her by building an illicit fortune, only to find his fine parties and clothes won him no real friends, no real status. Bacon, on the other hand, has friends who speak of him with deep affection -- although it must be said that many of the friends are also business associates. His biggest secret might be that he is a man who wants no credit for doing truly good deeds. But mystery clings because he is a man with an island where no strangers may tread.

Did Prince Charles ever visit? Driven pheasant hunting has, after all, been called the "sport of kings." A Buckingham Palace spokeswoman said it was possible the prince had visited Robins Island during his last visit to New York in March, 1997 -- but if so it was not a public event. "If he did go there it must have been a private visit," the spokeswoman said. "And we can't confirm what he does in his private time."