

The Talented Mr. Epstein; Lately, Jeffrey Epstein's high-ying style has been drawing oohs and aahs: the bachelor nancier lives in New York's largest private residence, claims to take only billionaires as clients, and ies celebrities including Bill Clinton and Kevin Spacey on his Boeing 727. But pierce his air of mystery and the picture changes. VICKY WARD explores Epstein's investment career, his ties to retail magnate Leslie Wexner, and his complicated past Vanity Fair March 2003

people freely. According to him, the flat fees he receives from his clients, combined with his skill at playing the currency markets "with very large sums of money," have afforded him the lifestyle he enjoys today.

Why do billionaires choose him as their trustee? Because the problems of the mega-rich, he tells people, are different from yours and mine, and his unique philosophy is central to understanding those problems: "Very few people need any more money when they have a billion dollars. The key is not to have it do harm more than anything else... You don't want to lose your money."

He has likened his job to that of an architect-more specifically, one who specializes in remodeling: "I always describe (a billionaire) as someone who started out in a small home and as he became wealthier had add-ons. He added on another addition, he built a room over the garage ... until you have a house that is usually a mess... It's a large house that has been put together over time where no one could foretell the financial future and their accompanying needs."

He makes it sound as though his job combines the roles of real-estate agent, accountant, lawyer, money manager, trustee, and confidant. But, as with Jay Gatsby, myths and rumor swirl around Epstein.

Here are some of the hard facts about Epstein-ones that he doesn't mind people knowing: He grew up middle-class in Brooklyn. His father worked for the city's parks department. His parents viewed education as "the way out" for him and his younger brother, Mark, now working in real estate. Jeffrey started to play the piano-for which he maintains a passion-at five, and he went to Brooklyn's Lafayette High School. He was good at mathematics, and in his early 20s he got a job teaching physics and math at Dalton, the elite Manhattan private school. While there he began tutoring the son of Bear Stearns chairman Ace Greenberg and was friendly with a daughter of Greenberg's. Soon he went to Bear Stearns, where, under the mentorship of both Greenberg and current Bear Stearns C.E.O. James Cayne, he did well enough to become a limited partner-a rung beneath full partner. He abruptly departed in 1981 because, he has said, he wanted to run his own business.

Thereafter the details recede into shadow. A few of the handful of current friends who have known him since the early 1980s recall that he used to tell them he was a "bounty hunter," recovering lost or **stolen** money for the government or for very rich people. He has a license to carry a firearm. For the last 15 years, he's been running his business, **J. Epstein & Co.**

Since Leslie Wexner appeared in his life-Epstein has said this was in 1986; others say it was in 1989, at the earliest-he has gradually, in a way that has not generally made headlines, come to be accepted by the Establishment. He's a member of various commissions and councils: he is on the Trilateral Commission, the Council on Foreign Relations, the New York Academy of Sciences, and the Institute of International Education.