

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

Wexner's ailing mother. Bella Wexner recovered and demanded to be reinstated. Epstein has said they settled by splitting the foundation in two.

Epstein does not care that he comes between family members. In fact, he sees it as his job. He tells people, "I am there to represent my client, and if my client needs protecting-sometimes even from his own family-then it's often better that people hate me, not the client."

"You've probably heard I'm vicious in my representation of my clients," he tells people proudly; Leah Kleman describes his haggling over art prices as something like a scene out of the movie Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome. Even a former mentor says he's seen "the dark side" of Epstein, and a Bear Stearns source recalls a meeting in which Epstein chewed out a team making a presentation for Wexner as being so brutal as to be "irresponsible."

One reporter, in fact, received three threats from Epstein while preparing a piece. They were delivered in a jocular tone, but the message was clear: There will be trouble for your family if I don't like the article.

On the other hand, Epstein is clearly very generous with friends. Joe Pagano, an Aspen-based venture capitalist, who has known Epstein since before his Bear Stearns days, can't say enough nice things: "I have a boy who's dyslexic, and Jeffrey's gotten close to him over the years... Jeffrey got him into music. He bought him his first piano. And then as he got to school he had difficulty ... in studying ... so Jeffrey got him interested in taking flying lessons."

Rosa Monckton recalls Epstein telling her that her daughter, Domenica, who suffers from Down syndrome, needed the sun, and that Rosa should feel free to bring her to his house in Palm Beach anytime.

Some friends remember that in the late 80s Epstein would offer to upgrade the airline tickets of good friends by affixing first-class stickers; the only problem was that the stickers turned out to be unofficial. Sometimes the technique worked, but other times it didn't, and the unwitting recipients found themselves exiled to coach. (Epstein has claimed that he paid for the upgrades, and had no knowledge of the stickers.) Many of those who benefited from Epstein's largesse claim that his generosity comes with no strings attached. "I never felt he wanted anything from me in return," says one old friend, who received a first-class upgrade.

Epstein is known about town as a man who loves women-lots of them, mostly young. Model types have been heard saying they are full of gratitude to Epstein for flying them around, and he is a familiar face to many of the Victoria's Secret girls. One young woman recalls being summoned by Ghislaine Maxwell to a concert at Epstein's town house, where the women seemed to outnumber the men by far. "These were not women you'd see at Upper East Side dinners," the woman recalls. "Many seemed foreign and dressed a little