



# THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ERNESTO

*The head of the Bertarelli family says that the sea is a source of inspiration — and of concern, which is why he has made protecting the Earth's waters a focus of his philanthropy.*

*He talks to **Laetitia Cash** for her new rich-media platform, *Emerald Tablet*, dedicated to profiling those accomplishing the most in conservation, clean-tech and green business.*

*Photography by **Johnnie Shand Kydd***

Standing at the water's edge on the terrace of his hotel looking out over the Bosphorus and sprawling city of Istanbul, where he is attending the Extreme 40 yacht races with his Team Alinghi, Ernesto Bertarelli cuts a handsome and yet understated figure.

Tall and urbane, Bertarelli, 45, is in his prime. Wearing a crisp white shirt, monochromatic blazer with a small linen handkerchief, his casual yet subdued style is quintessentially Italian but also reminiscent of that iconic glamour epitomised by Cary Grant in the 1930s and 1940s. As someone once said, Bertarelli is more Italian count than Swiss businessman.

But while Grant had to reinvent himself from an uneducated working-class background to reach the top echelons

of society, Bertarelli was born and bred a quintessential member of the inheritocracy with all the wealth, privilege and lifestyle that entails. He may not boast a centuries-old lineage, but on the death of his father Fabio in 1998 he (along with his sister Dona, to whom he is very close) inherited ownership of the multi-billion-dollar pharmaceutical giant Serono.

Today he belongs to the club of the world's billionaires, but what really distinguishes him is the entrepreneurial spirit and sense of noblesse oblige that runs in his blood. From the conception of Serono, the Bertarelli family has been part of a long tradition of giving which is thoughtful and designed to make a genuine difference.

For Bertarelli himself, it is clear that, from an early age,

great things were expected. He remembers: 'When I was seven years old, I walked into my father's office and he told me: "Son, one day I'll be dead and you'll be sitting in that chair." It was a big chair at the time and I was quite overwhelmed! I think the lesson is that everyone is born with something: some people have liabilities, some have assets. But everyone has something that makes them unique and who they are. I think everyone has a responsibility to do something and to make a difference.'

Like other billionaires in the wave of new philanthrocapitalists (a term coined by Matthew Bishop and Michael Green in their book of the same name), Bertarelli views his philanthropy as the mechanism through which he can help bring about lasting solutions to the world's biggest problems. 'After my father died, my sister and I understood what a fortunate position we had inherited. We started the Bertarelli Foundation because we found ourselves wanting to give back, and we also felt we owed it to our father's legacy.

We shifted our focus on to the social side of reproductive health, like what people go through when they can't have a baby.'

Born in Rome, Bertarelli's father moved the family to Switzerland in the 1970s following a spate of kidnappings targeting Italy's wealthiest families. He was an Italian army captive and World War Two concentration camp survivor. Like Pope Leo X's patronage of Leonardo da Vinci's discoveries five centuries earlier, Bertarelli's grandfather Pietro, alongside Professor Serono, founded the pharmaceutical company that pioneered the first IVF baby.

Looking out over the Golden Horn, the stretch of sea that divides the banks of the old Ottoman Empire from the West (also where da Vinci, under the patronage of Cesare Borgia, designed his famous bridge and the double hull), Bertarelli explains his family's tradition of helping scientists push the boundaries of possibility. 'My grandfather was the entrepreneur while Professor Serono was the scientist. Improving lives and reproductive health was really what drove Serono. We were the first company to purify the hormones which trigger ovulation, and we were the first company to provide these hormones to physicians.'

As a young boy, whether out at sea or on the shores of Lake Geneva, Bertarelli developed a lifelong passion for sailing and being on the water. It is this constant exposure to the great outdoors that has inspired his passion for ocean conservation.

'In my youth I was always in nature. My father would take us to the mountains to ski in the winter and sailing to the sea in the summer. I was given a boat before I was given a moped, so my first experience of freedom away from my parents was not climbing on a moped but climbing on a boat and going around the corner of the beach. I have always liked the freedom the sea gives me. We were born on

the sea and my kids are born on the sea, and if I am away from water for more than a few weeks I don't feel right.

'At sea I gain an incredible perspective on what happens on land. The water gives me distance to better view what I have left behind and reminds me why I want to go back. I have also lived the last 30 years on Lake Geneva. When I started sailing on the lake it was a dump, but year after year, looking beneath the surface at the clean-up job being done, I have witnessed the progress that has been made. Personally, I find that extremely rewarding.

'In the same way we were born in a family that understands medical science — this is what I bring to the (conservation) table, this understanding, passion, and connection with these particular things. My emotional connection with the sea and being on the water makes me the person I am.'

Bertarelli has much in common with the thinking of the great industrialist of 19th-century America, philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. One of the traits Bertarelli shares with these modern mega-philanthropists is the remarkable way they give.

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On the philanthropic side, Bertarelli is keen to try something new and likes to bring different minds together to finding lasting solutions. Currently, the Bertarelli Foundation is now in partnership with activists and scientists who share his passion for the ocean and the collective goal to preserve it (the goal has initially been set at a 'realistic' 3 per cent of the ocean surface in key areas of outstanding natural beauty).

What qualifies Bertarelli as a member of the new movement of eco-philanthrocapitalists is not just the scale at which he is willing to operate (his Chagos Marine Reserve is larger than California) but also his unwaveringly eco-centric outlook and love of marine life and coral reefs. 'I am on the side of the fish. If I defend the fish and the ocean I'm also defending whoever wants to go there. Preserving the ocean is in the best interests of everyone.'

Along with the founders and CEOs of Google, WalMart, Coca-Cola and Virgin, Bertarelli has become convinced that climate change is one of the biggest threats facing the planet. But rather than seeking the solution to develop clean, carbon-free energy, he prefers to put his resources where his own passion lies — in ocean conservation. Currently, this has taken the form of partnership with the British government and the Blue Marine Foundation, to create the Chagos Marine Reserve in the Indian Ocean. The Blue Marine Foundation was co-founded last year by George Duffield and Chris Gorell Barnes, who were behind the film *The End of The Line*. After a successful fundraising dinner (CHF1.2 million) hosted by the Bertarelli Foundation in February in Gstaad, Blue Marine now has a sufficient stream of income to raise awareness of the biggest threats facing the ocean and its inhabitants.





In terms of conservation, Bertarelli has been especially influenced by environmental scientists such as Sylvia Earle and through his first-hand experience of climate change and man-made pollution in Switzerland and around the world, both as a skier and as a professional yachtsman. He explains: 'Living in Switzerland I just experience it — while the country is not perfect it does a lot to raise awareness. As an avid skier I have seen what is happening with our glaciers; if you compare a print of glaciers twenty years ago with one of glaciers today, there is no question the earth is warming up. More positively, over the years, I have seen how the solutions using conservation enforcement have brought Lake Geneva back to life.'

'When I am at sea and I see one place which is pristine and another with plastic bags, I ask myself why. The solution is not a question of money, but of educating people in appreciating and respecting the environment in which they live. I believe teaching people the value of integrity is key. I may have more money than most so I can do more, but that's only part of the equation. Integrity is about not disregarding that knowledge and taking on that duty and responsibility for our own environment. We all share the same planet and have a collective interest to take care of it — in other words, to adopt high ethical standards.'

In common with the new philanthropists, Bertarelli's approach is also knowledge-based. *Gospel of Wealth* author Carnegie believed imparting knowledge and giving generously to universities and scientists to be key elements in his philanthropic

activities to advance humanity. Similarly, Bertarelli and his sister have been strategic and targeted their resources on where they feel they will make the biggest difference. For instance, the Swiss Sailing Grants initiated in partnership with the Swiss Sailing Federation and the Henna Pre-School in South Africa, where a new facility was built thanks to the family's financial support.

Bertarelli is also keen on partnering opportunities such as the Neuroscience research and education programme at Harvard Medical School with the Centre for Neuroprosthetics research programme at the Polytechnique Lausanne (EPFL). He points out: 'Two schools which are situated miles apart actually found each other and discovered they needed each other to open new areas of research, new areas of collaboration.'

Describing himself as above all a European, Bertarelli explains: 'On the whole, Europe is a very sophisticated society with a tremendous wealth of knowledge. We may not have the oil, size, population or the natural resources that other regions have, but from an environmental standpoint our knowledge is our main resource. I believe it is extremely important to impart our knowledge to the newly industrialised world, where people are making the same mistakes we made 50-100 years ago. With the benefit of hindsight and

an understanding of our mistakes, we have a responsibility to tell the rest of the world. If we can stop people throwing plastic in Lake Geneva, we can stop people throwing plastic on the beaches of Oman. We need to educate the local people, both on an individual and at a community level, that clean sewage systems that work and clean beaches are in the interest of everyone.'

**W**ith a surge of environmental and social crises creeping up on humanity with alarming speed, with the urgent need for collective action and raising awareness, these new eco-philanthropists are beyond reproach. Giving has entirely changed since the ancient days when giving money bought you prayers to heaven. This secretive form of altruism has now been replaced by a new sense of accountability and transparency. As Carnegie said about his own philanthropic legacy, 'I do not wish to be remembered for what I have given, but for what I have persuaded others to give.'

Along with other eco-philanthropists now on the scene, Bertarelli is adopting a new language to describe his approach to philanthropy: collaboration, effectiveness, knowledge-based and high engagement. In addition to contributing money, he donates significant human capital to his philanthropy, in both time and ideas.

'A collaborative approach based on opportunity should be the modern way we approach philanthropy and charity. No particular person has the answer. You need to bring a number of people around a table

with different views and one collective goal. That's what I find fascinating and that is how I try to approach everything — in business, in sport or in philanthropy. That is what I love to do — that is where my inspiration comes from.'

In keeping with the contemporary 'do-good-do-well' philosophy, Bertarelli is an entrepreneur who sees his philanthropy as an opportunity to put his own superior business acumen to work for the good of the planet. Unlike many others, he is also in the unique position of being able to deploy resources quickly. As Bill Gates and Warren Buffett have sought to inspire with their Giving Pledge agenda, if they have what it takes to build a fortune successfully then they should apply the same talents to problem-solving for the planet.

Bertarelli draws on his privileged position and pioneering entrepreneurial spirit to make his philanthropy more effective. In addition to running three investment vehicles (Ares Life Sciences, Kedge Capital and Northill Capital), he was a graduate of top business schools — Babson College (where he read science) and Harvard Business School. Aged 22, Bertarelli became CEO of Serono, holding the role for a decade. He made the key decision to shift the company's focus from pharmaceuticals to biotechnology and increased



revenue from \$809 million to \$2.8 billion. With the launch of Rebif, used for multiple sclerosis therapy, which generates \$1.4 billion annually, Bertarelli proved he shares the same entrepreneurial prowess as his grandfather and father.

'One of the beauties of selling Serono is that I now have the freedom to work on a lot of different projects. I think I can reproduce the success I had with Serono. I continue to invest and be an entrepreneur in companies where I see potential and that need it the most. I took Serono from an adolescent company and I grew it to be an adult global corporation — I think this is my skill and my strength. In the field of sport, the Alinghi venture was really about putting a team together from scratch, picking the best possible people from different cultures and backgrounds and taking on the incredible challenge of winning the America's Cup. I think I can apply this approach to my philanthropy and seeing the opportunities like the Chagos project.'

In line with the Emerald Tablet principle, Bertarelli appears to strive for a balance and harmony in his work, family, philanthropy, and sporting life. He has been married for eleven years to Kirsty Roper, a British beauty, singer and fellow eco-devotee (she will perform live in front of Prince Albert of Monaco at the WWF's Panda Ball in Geneva in September), and they have three children. Like his father before him, Bertarelli 'believes' in the sea as the best place to spend time as a family.

**A**s if taking a leaf out of neuroscientist David Eagleman's book *Incognito*, Bertarelli is a believer that in order to be fully functional and true to oneself, the deliberate and rational side of the brain must be reconciled with the emotional. Having been asked if he would invest in any land conservation projects, he revealed: 'I don't think I

can contribute as much to a game reserve in Africa, because I don't have the genetic and emotional connection. I think the emotional element is extremely important in any decision one makes. Why is it if you stand in front of a painting you may feel an emotional connection and another person will not? Why is it that someone prefers to look at a sunset rather than looking at the moon? We are all drawn to different things.'

Enabling him to exercise his Darwinian side, Bertarelli's love of racing has provided him with the perfect vehicle to pursue new challenges and win. Since 1993 he has sailed on high-tech multi-hulls, including his two victorious America's Cup campaigns (in 2003 and 2007). He has won the Bol d'Or on his home ground of Lake Geneva six times, including this June, and has been a professional racing yachtsman for the past eighteen years.

He put his entrepreneurial and business acumen to the test with his vision to create a 'Manchester United' of sailing with his Team Alinghi. Following conflicting opinions between himself and other heavyweight sailing competitors (most notably Larry Ellison of Oracle fame) about the direction of the America's Cup, Bertarelli has turned to more low-key events and has recently been one of the creators of the Decision 35 design class, conceived in 2004 and due to sail for the first time this September across the Mediterranean.

Bertarelli has a relentless work ethic and, like all great entrepreneurs, is a hard task-master on whichever task is to hand — extreme sailing, business, philanthropy. When asked if he has any other conservation projects in the pipeline, he replies: 'First we want to focus on our existing partnerships and make them 100 per cent efficient.'

On the question of whether 100 eco-philanthropists can save the planet, Bertarelli says: 'I don't think one person can save the planet. I don't think 100 people or 1,000 people can save the planet. I do believe that people, by working together, can save the planet. It is groups of people coming about and joining their understandings, their competences and their networks.'

'Nobody has the truth, but if you put a number of people round the table who are trying to achieve the same thing but who have different views, if you are able to put these views together like a puzzle, then you get a vision — a clearer view of what needs to be done.'

Thinking beyond conventional wisdom and to future generations, Bertarelli shares in the Carnegie ideal of a world of shared responsibilities, opportunity and community. 'When I think of my kids, I try to help them understand how fortunate they are to be born in modern society with knowledge, schools, with freedom and resources. I think if they are given something, they have a responsibility to do something with it — that's really important.'

Bertarelli is adamant that he doesn't want to be the Joan of Arc, the William Tell or Robin Hood of some cause. 'I am just one person with a Foundation — one family being able to help at a given moment.' *J*