

# company man

Matteo di Montezemolo is building a luxury-goods empire, one beautifully crafted object at a time.



#### MULTICOLOR PALETTE

Montezemolo is CEO of Charme Investments, a private equity group that owns such furniture brands as Poltrona Frau, Cappellini, and Cassina.

**O**n a cloudy afternoon in Milan, **Matteo di Montezemolo** bursts into the Ballantyne cashmere shop very, very late for our meeting and apologizes profusely many, many times. CEO of a multimillion-dollar furniture and fashion business, the 31-year-old entrepreneur has not fallen far from the family tree: His father, Luca Cordero di Montezemolo, is one of the most powerful businessmen in Italy. Chairman of Fiat, he resurrected the company's flailing Ferrari division in the 1990s and is stepping down as chief of the Confindustria, the country's leading association of industries.

Like his charismatic father, Montezemolo wears a white handkerchief peeking out of the pocket of a for-

mal dark suit, which only accentuates his youthful and enthusiastic demeanor. Although Montezemolo clearly has the confidence and charm of someone brought up in an elite Italian family, these are tempered by an American directness. "My mother is from New York," he explains, "and she passed on to me one of the most fantastic aspects of the American mentality—freedom."

Montezemolo also believes that life is better—and less boring—if you have to fight for what you want, so in 2002 he convinced his father to form the private equity company Charme Investments. Following a year at Goldman Sachs, Matteo wanted to start a family business—a very Italian tradition. "My father has been a fantastic manager for other families: Fiat is not ours, Ferrari is not ours. Charme is something I would like to pass to my son." (Married last September, he and his wife, Ludovica, just had a baby in February.)

Montezemolo wasted no time buying up companies representing the full spectrum of high-end furniture design, starting with Poltrona Frau, makers of luxurious

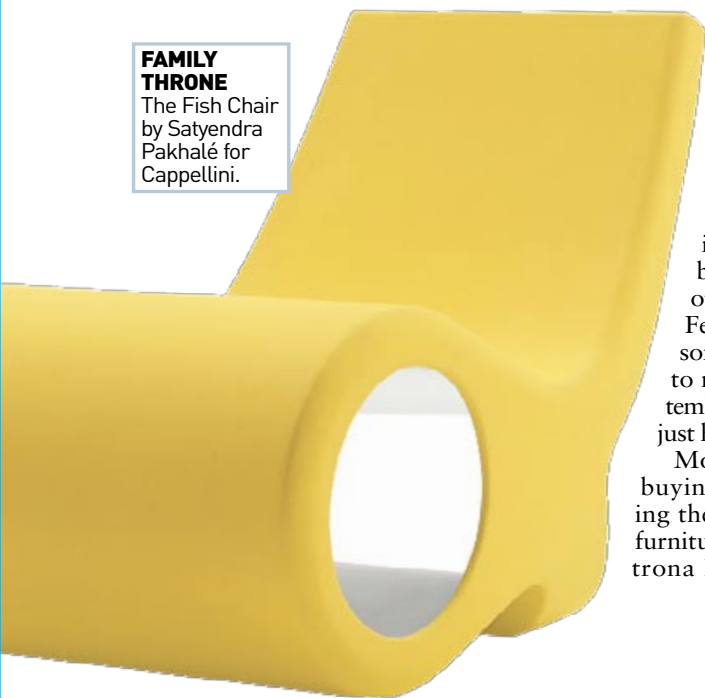
handcrafted pieces and owners of the Austrian company Gebrüder Thonet Vienna, the creator of classic bentwood furniture. Later came Cassina, which has produced many icons of 20th-century design, including the sleek leather 1976 Cab side chair, designed by architect Mario Bellini and part of MoMA's permanent design collection, and the more contemporary and trendy Cappellini, which has launched the careers of many young designers.

"I remember when I was young, looking at the Vanity Fair chair, by Poltrona Frau, in our house in Rome as if it was a sculpture, something fantastic. And today, after 75 years, it still seems incredibly modern," Montezemolo says. "Another incredible design I grew up with is the Ballantyne argyle: It was my first cashmere sweater when I was 10 or 12—like a boy's first tie." Expanding Charme's reach into fashion, he acquired the Scottish firm in 2004.

Montezemolo is one of a new breed of moguls who are marketing their own lifestyles—in essence, selling the things they want to buy. "These brands have been on the high end of the market for many years, and they need to stay up there," he explains. But that doesn't mean they can't be mixed together

#### FAMILY THRONE

The Fish Chair by Satyendra Pakhalé for Cappellini.





**SEATS OF POWER**  
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Mini Bottle table by BarberOsgerby; Baby Vanity Fair chair and the original, by Poltrona Frau; Mario Bellini chair for Cassina.

Courtesy of Cappellini; courtesy of Poltrona Frau; courtesy of Cassina; Sling Media, Inc.

with well-designed pieces at the other end of the scale. “In my house I have Poltrona Frau and Cassina, and I have Ikea—and they work perfectly in different rooms and situations. What I don’t like is in the middle, because you don’t understand what it is.”

This year Cassina will launch a new minimalist divan by Rodolfo Dordoni, which complements the Italian designer’s first collection for the company, introduced last year with the Pilotta chair and Boboli table. After two years in development, Cappellini will soon premiere a new chair by the young Indian designer Satyendra Pakhalé, whose whimsical plastic Fish Chair debuted in 2005.

But Montezemolo’s latest obsession is his newborn, Massimo. “Now I just want to make products for babies. We started the baby clothes for Balantyne, and I want to develop baby chairs by Poltrona Frau. When you become a father, you start realizing that life is also something else.” Of course, the good life is one of Italy’s greatest assets, another tradition that Montezemolo fervently supports. “It is very, very important to relax and take a break,” he says. “If you just work, work,

work, you do not have the energy, the kind of positive attitude, you need to work in the best way. The best way for me to keep my feet on the ground is doing the things I have done all my life, like playing soccer on Saturdays with my friends in Rome.”

Montezemolo has his feet firmly planted in two different cities: He works in Milan and lives in Rome, home to *la dolce vita*: “Why would I make my wife live in Milan? It is polluted and stressful, only for work, and Rome is one of the most beautiful cities in the world.” With that he rushes out the door to the car that is waiting to whisk him off to see his baby.

—CATHRYN DRAKE *a&d>76*

**Y**our overfed TiVo is bursting with *Mad Men*, *The Wire*, and that show where the mustachioed dudes blow stuff up in the name of science. But rather than basking in the warm glow of plasma, you’re stuck in a Helsinki hotel trying to wrap your tongue around the Finnish for “pay-per-view.” Enter the **Slingbox PRO**. The \$230 shoe-box-size gadget links your DVR, cable box, and DVD player to your Internet router, allowing you to tune in from any computer or video-ready cell phone the world over. Stuck in New Zealand during the NBA Finals? Watch it from your smartphone.

Against all odds, the installation is almost Apple-like in its simplicity—there’s not even a software CD. Once the Slingbox is hardwired to your router and TV, just download the user-friendly SlingPlayer onto your computers and phones. (Any snags will be the fault of an overprotective router, but Sling Media tech support will talk you through them.) Video quality, thanks to HD-compatibility, is far superior to YouTube, though subject to the occasional stutter, depending on your connection speed. Still, once you’re long-distance channel surfing, the drama you encounter will likely be personal, not technological:

## travel channels

An easy-to-use gadget lets you sling TV to your phone for away games.

Anyone watching TV at home will see, whether they like it or not, when you change the station from afar. Though your loved ones may grow a bit distant after witnessing your daily assignation with Oprah Winfrey, at least you’ve got a hand on a remote, no matter how remote your location.

—NICHOLAS MOSQUERA

### NETWORK NEWS

There are no monthly fees with the Slingbox PRO, \$230; slingmedia.com.

