



GREAT SHAPE
Moorcroft vase
a real treasure
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BEYOND THE BRICKS LILLIANA DI FRANCO AND MARCELLO DECOTIIS



RICK EGLINTON/TORONTO STAR

Marcello DeCotiis and his sister, Lilliana Di Franco, are among five siblings managing Vancouver-based Amacon Developments.

Sibling rivalry

The family-run development firm that has made a name for itself in Vancouver aims to put its stamp on Toronto

HEATHER GREENWOOD DAVIS
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

When the DeCotiis family looks at the Vancouver skyline, they see more than beautiful architecture. They see their father.

For more than 40 years Amalio DeCotiis and his two brothers ran Amacon Developments, a company they founded together after emigrating from Italy in 1959. The company is responsible for more than 100 buildings that dot the eye-popping city (the 501, Brava, The Melville and Virtu among them) and their name has become synonymous with stylish west coast architectural design.

Despite arriving in his new home with only empty pockets and an

idea, DeCotiis went on to create an award-winning real estate development company that is respected and revered on the west coast.

Today the company, which is still in family hands, is trying to make a similar impact in Ontario.

DeCotiis, who died three years ago, only managed to see the beginning of his company's press eastward but his ideals are living on through his five children.

Daughter Lilliana Di Franco, 35, is vice president of marketing and sales for Amacon and son Marcello DeCotiis, 36, is company president. Together with their three siblings — all of whom are involved in some

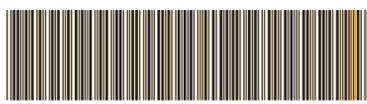
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Parkside Village in Mississauga is designed to be pedestrian friendly.

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ON

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2008 ★ TORONTO STAR ★ C05

COVER STORY < ANTIQUES < CONDOS

Family brings winning west coast ideals east

SIBLING from C01

facet of the company — they have watched the company grow exponentially from the three brothers who started it, to a staff of more than 40.

All of them are involved, Di Franco says, out of choice.

“Some of us have not always been involved, but I think we have always had an inkling to be,” she says. The youngest of the five siblings, she was the last to join the company 12 years ago after finishing a BA in history at Simon Fraser University.

“It was always around us. I guess some people would say it’s part of our soul.”

Today Amacon handles every step of the real estate process from land acquisitions to marketing and sales, development, construction and after service customer care for both residential and commercial clients.

The duo says they are intent on continuing to develop projects that impact not only the people who purchase them, but also the cities they are in.

Projects like The Beasley in Vancouver — a 33-storey condominium tower in Yaletown built as homage to Vancouver’s former director of land use planning, Larry Beasley, that includes a 60-foot dog run on the eighth floor garden terrace — and the 32-storey Eve glass tower in Mississauga — with its modern architectural design and mixed use spaces — are examples of the company’s forward-thinking approach. The newer buildings are a far cry, design-wise, from their dad’s first project.

“It was a three-storey, wood frame, square box 16-unit apartment building with tiny windows in North Vancouver,” DeCotiis says.

The building is still owned by the family: a testament to their personal pride and the connection they feel towards the work they do.

“I would say what really sets us apart would probably be our hands on approach,” Di Franco adds. “It’s something we probably learned



RICK EGLINTON/TORONTO STAR
Amacon's Marcello DeCotiis and his sister, Lilliana Di Franco, are building master-planned Parkside Village in downtown Mississauga.

from our father. We’re involved, I would say, almost in every step of the company. Each one of us is involved in every portfolio.”

And despite what most would assume when siblings come to work together, Di Franco and DeCotiis say there is little infighting. They say working with their siblings gives them a competitive edge because “decisions get made much quicker and we move forward fas-

ter.” But that is not to say that they aren’t competitive.

“Marcello was the fourth and I was the fifth child, so we’ve always been connected one way or another, but I can definitely say the competition between us is probably one of the highest,” Di Franco says. “I don’t think we try and outdo each other, but we definitely try and raise the bar with each other and

DETAILS

PARKSIDE VILLAGE

Builder: Amacon
Location: Burnhamthorpe Rd. and Confederation Pkwy.
Architect: E.I. Richmond Architects
Interior Design: Chapman Design Group
Occupancy: Spring 2012
Size: 45 storeys
Size range: 560 to 1020 square feet; penthouses 1,330 to 1,730 square feet
Price range: \$199,900 to \$390,000; penthouses \$400,000 to low \$700,000
Sales centre: 465 Burnhamthorpe Rd. W., Mississauga, Monday to Thursday, 1 p.m. to 7 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m., 905-273-9333, lifeatparkside.com

challenge each other at times.

“There’s also the other side to that which is we are there to help each other,” she continues. “It’s either a phone call away or a thought away, or a ‘what do you think of this?’ We’re just able to reach out to and kind of get each other, regardless if there are miles between us.”

DeCotiis agrees noting that his sister brings several strengths to the company table.

“She can play any position on the team. There’s a reliability, focus, and determination on her part that it’s going to get done,” DeCotiis says. “If there’s a wall, she’s going to knock down the wall, or she’ll go over it, through it, around it, make sure it’s not standing by the time she’s done with it.”

While Amacon’s home base of operations remains in Vancouver, eight years ago Di Franco moved east to Toronto to stake out new territory for the company. She’s found success in Mississauga.

And when the city opted to open up its land to more condominium development, Amacon stepped up

to the plate with Parkside Village: 12 hectares being developed as a master-planned community in the heart of the city with an estimated 6,000 units coming to market within the next 10 to 15 years. Di Franco is heading up the project.

“Our vision is to create a true urban village within the downtown core of Mississauga,” she says. “We all know that Mississauga is a ‘car is king’ kind of a city. We’re trying to change that mentality and ask people to look to alternatives, not only in modes of transportation, but just the way they live.”

The project brings in key mixed use planning trends like pedestrian friendly walkways, high density and commercial and residential spaces.

“Our vision and our sense of Parkside is really an animated, vibrant, and active street life,” Di Franco says.

DeCotiis adds that Amacon’s Toronto developments, that also include the trendy Elle and Eve condominiums, are as much a reflection of Amacon’s commitment to community as the projects in the west and new projects being developed south of the border.

“What we’re trying to do now is incorporate more of a mixed use in each project. I think the city is — not only in Vancouver and Toronto, but in Los Angeles too, for that matter — they’re asking for more than just a straight, standard residential project where the town is fully occupied by condos, and apartments, and townhouses,” he says. “They want to see that integration of amenities.”

While the company intends to continue to stake new ground at home and abroad, the siblings contend that Amacon will always be that family-centered company that focuses on creating communities and buildings they are proud of.

“Our tag line says it all, not just for us, but for everybody,” DeCotiis says. “The ‘live well’ tag line means live well in all aspects of life. We want to carry that through and it is the thing that we take pride in.”

SO, WHAT'S IT WORTH?

Claret jug worthy of any drink, from wine to water

JOHN SEWELL
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Q: My aunt brought this decanter over from Scotland in the 1920s. I’m quite sure it’s not valuable but I’ve always loved it. Including the lid, it’s about 30 centimetres (12 inches) tall and there are no markings. The metal hardware is not silver, but I don’t think it’s pewter either. In the 100th anniversary issue of *McCall’s* magazine, which I saw about 30 years ago, the food section featured a table setting for a Viennese dinner and an exact replica of this decanter was on the table.

Norma, Toronto

A: These are generally known as claret jugs and were originally used to decant and serve claret, which is a red French Bordeaux wine. Today, they’re used to serve any type of wine — or liquid, for that matter. This particular piece dates to about 1860 and is either British or European. The blown, moulded glass body is nicely decorated with ferns that have been engraved by copper wheels mounted on a lathe, a process known as wheel engraving. The hardware is white metal but it would have been silver-plated originally. Yours has apparently worn off. The acorn finial is a nice touch and the face on the spout, you’ll be pleased to know, is Bacchus, the god of wine. (Now, I’ll drink to that!) As for value, your jug is worth about \$250.

Q: This Moorcroft vase was handed down to us by an aunt. It’s 22 centimetres (8.5 inches) tall and in perfect condition. We’re very interested in knowing how much it’s worth.

Joyce, Oakville

A: There’s Moorcroft and then there’s Moorcroft. This is one of the best designs and it’s a star performer in the Moorcroft family. It’s known as Moonlit Blue and it was first introduced in 1922 in England, then shipped and sold worldwide. The design is typified by the tall, stylized trees, but the defining characteristic is the background blue



This rare Moonlit Blue Moorcroft vase was first introduced in 1922 in England.

coloration. William Moorcroft operated his pottery company in England from about 1913 to 1945, making all sorts of different pieces and designs, many of which are extremely valuable today. Generally speaking, the larger pieces bring more money but certain designs, like this one, command serious money, even when they’re not particularly large.

This vase, although a modest size, has beauty, rarity and the prestigious Moorcroft name going for it, all of which add up to a value of about \$2,750.

To submit an item to this column, go to the ‘Contact John’ page at www.johnsewellantiques.ca. Please measure your piece, say when and how you got it, what you paid and list any identifying marks. A high-resolution jpeg photo must also be included. (Only email submissions accepted.) Appraisal values are estimates only.

John Sewell is an antique and fine art appraiser and appears Saturdays in *Condos*.



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