

Contents

LIFE IN FULL: ALEX VIK 50

It's not every international businessman who makes computer-controlled light sculptures in his spare time, but then most probably don't own avant-garde art hotels—polo resorts, either. Or 11,000 acres of Chilean wine country. BY RICHARD NALLEY



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Life in Full

Alex Vik

A COSMOPOLITAN BUSINESSMAN
EXPLORES THE ART OF PLEASURE AND
THE PLEASURE OF ART. BY RICHARD NALLEY
PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTOPHER LANE

Life in Full • Alex Vik



Previous page: Alex Vik in his New York apartment; the painting is by Jonas Wickman and Stefan Söder. This page (clockwise from top): Vik with a painting by Norwegian artist Sverre Bjertnes; the Musso Suite at Estancia Vik in Uruguay; a bottle of Vik's still unreleased (but already sold out) Chilean wine; a polo player at Estancia Vik.

ALEX VIK, Norwegian by birth, cosmopolitan by temperament, operates businesses on three continents in fields ranging from web-enterprise software to luxury hotels, investments, real estate development, agriculture, and wine and spirits. To many who meet him socially, he is first and foremost a major patron of avant-garde art and design. Among his recent ventures is an investment in New York's Sebastian + Barquet gallery. *ForbesLife* caught up with him in his art-stuffed, high-floor pied-à-terre in Manhattan's Time Warner Center, where the horizon-to-horizon views vie for attention not only with his collections but also with the 56-year-old's own furniture designs, computer and light sculptures, and wildly pixilated, geometric floor painting, apparently of the cosmos disappearing down a black hole.

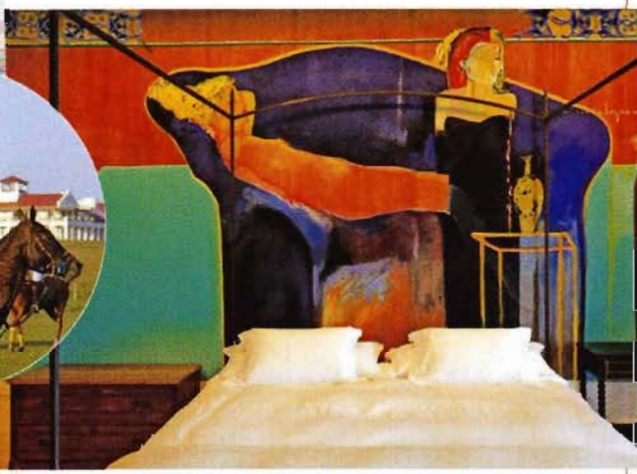
GETTING PHYSICAL

Vik came to the United States to study and play for the golf team at Harvard (the movie *Love Story* prompted the idea) and twice made all-American. A three handicap these days ("I don't keep up with it like I used to"), Vik is as likely to be found skiing, riding polo ponies, mountain biking, or playing adult-league hockey in Greenwich, Connecticut.

PAMPERED ON THE PAMPAS

Vik visited his mother's native Uruguay for the first time as an adult and was so deeply smitten with the landscape he bought a substantial chunk of it. But, he and his wife, Carrie, reasoned, "why

build a beautiful, amazing place and have it sit empty?" Instead, they opened two of the world's more unusual high-luxury hotels. There is an oceanfront domain, the cutting-edge Playa Vik, in the chic hamlet of José Ignacio, and the 4,000-acre Estancia Vik (see *ForbesLife*, December 2010) on a lagoon 5 miles inland, each of its 12 remarkable guest rooms decorated—if that's the word—with sometimes frenzied passion by Uruguayan artists. "Up on the Estancia, it's like Marlboro country," Vik says, with partial accuracy, "romantic and rustic, with gauchos. But on the beach, it's like Saint-Tropez in the summer, with parties and dancing and beautiful people."



CLEAR LIQUID

Vik's Christiania vodka is produced according to a 400-year-old recipe from the court of Norway's King Christian IV. One obvious Vik contribution: the New Classic Nude art contest. "The vodka is so incredibly smooth," he says, "that it's best to drink it 'naked,' without any mixers. So we had a competition, and we put the winner on a billboard in New York."

EL VINO

"We set up a two-year study to find the greatest *terroir* for wine growing in South America. We selected the Millahue Valley in Chile, about two hours south of Santiago—we bought nearly 11,000 acres of wilderness." Then followed a year of closer study and analysis of 4,000 soil wells that led to about 750 planted acres, managed "holistically." A competition yielded a stunning plan for an underground winery, now under construction. Vik and Carrie designed a 16-room luxury hotel on the premises. Viña Vik's first vintage, a 2009 Bordeaux-style blend, will be released next year at about \$100 a bottle—but has already sold out through preorders. ■

