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BUSINESS JET TRAVELER

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA

on directing *The Godfather*,
how he chose his business jet
and the movie he still
hopes to make

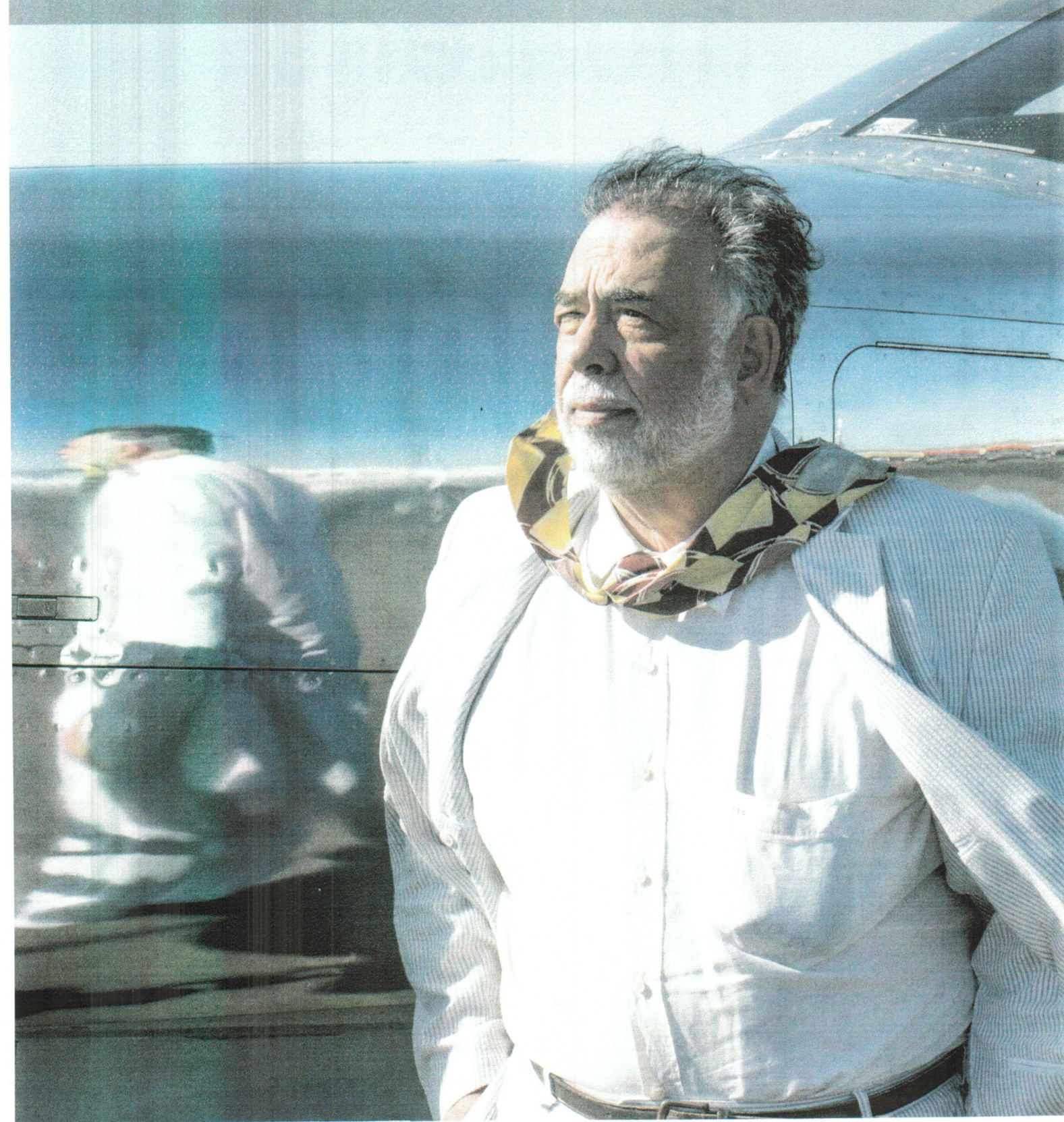
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FRANCIS FORD



COPPOLA



The acclaimed director talks about filmmaking and flying.

by Margie Goldsmith

Five-time Academy Award winner Francis Ford Coppola is one of the world's most innovative and influential filmmakers. *The Godfather*, which he made while in his early 30s, has been ranked second only to *Citizen Kane* on the American Film Institute's list of the greatest American movies. Also high on the list are his *Apocalypse Now* and *The Godfather Part II*. (See box on page 23.)

Born in 1939, Coppola spent his childhood in Queens, New York, where he was bedridden with polio. He used the time to create theatrical productions with puppets and, by age 15, to make 8mm home movies. After high school, he received a degree from Hofstra University and went to UCLA's School of Theater, Film

Coppola uses his Daher-Socata TBM 850 for flights within California.

and Television to make his first low-budget cult classic, *Dementia 13*. In 1969, along with George Lucas, Cop-

pola created a production company, American Zoetrope, which was an early adopter of digital filmmaking. The studio has garnered 68 Academy Award nominations and won 15 Oscars.

Coppola travels the world on his Dassault Falcon 7X business jet, and not only to make films: he owns luxury resorts in Belize, Guatemala, Argentina and southern Italy, where his grandfather was born. He also owns cafés and a literary magazine and, for 35 years, has produced wine at his Napa Valley estate, including his bestselling Inglenook Chablis. When asked why he has undertaken so many diverse projects, he replies, "It's all entertainment."

CHAD KERG

What did your father encourage you to do with your life?

My father wanted me to be an engineer because I always got an A in science even though I failed every [other] subject in school.

Who was your first mentor?

My brother, five years older, now passed, was a major influence. He gave me books to read and taught me things. If he was going to be a novelist, I thought I could become a playwright. Whatever he wanted to be, that's what I wanted to be, too. He was better at everything: extremely handsome, a super lady's man, popular, and good at school.

You attended 23 schools before graduating from high school. How did that happen and how did all the moving around affect you?

No one knows why my father kept moving. I later thought he was speculating on houses because he'd buy a home and then we'd sell it and move. I didn't have time to make friends at school so I was very involved with my older brother and younger sister. It made us a very tight little family unit.

Besides your brother, who encouraged you?

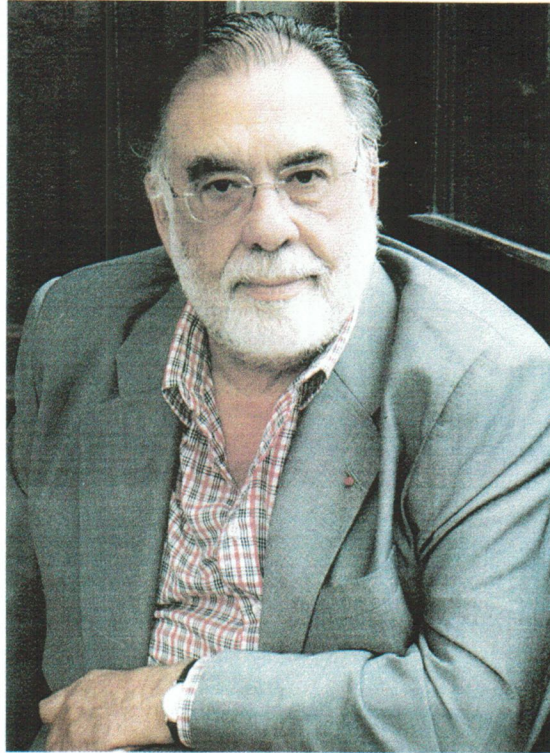
At UCLA, a wonderful directing teacher, Dorothy Arzner. Soon after, I became an assistant for producer Roger Corman. It was a fabulous opportunity to learn low-budget production.

What was the most important thing Corman taught you?

There can't be any waste in filmmaking. You have to sharpen your pencil to a fine point and learn how to always save money.

Corman let you direct your first feature in 1963, *Dementia 13*. How did that come about?

Whenever Roger made a film for a company, he'd also personally finance a smaller picture, taking advantage of the available equipment and crew. I gave him a couple of scenes to read in Europe, and on the strength of that he gave me \$20,000 and suggested I go to Ireland to find English-speaking actors. There, I met an English producer and sold him the English rights for another \$20,000, so I had \$40,000 to spend on my first movie.



SOFIA COPPOLA

In 1969 you decided that the studio system had stifled your vision. What were you hoping for when you created Zoetrope?

I wanted to make more personal art films like the French New Wave and the great Italian directors such as Fellini and Antonioni, movies with more personal artistic expression rather than Hollywood pictures. We founded Zoetrope to try to be more independent.

Robert Evans [head of production at Paramount Pictures at the time] said you didn't want to direct *The Godfather*.

I thought the novel was sort of sleazy and didn't want to direct it because while parts of [the book] had the story of the family and the Mafia, a big percentage was much more salacious material. A third of it is about a character, Lucy Mancini, who had to have an operation on her private anatomy. I got the job partly because movies about the Mafia had been unsuccessful and they liked the performances I'd gotten when I made *The Rain People*. They thought they had an Italian-American director who could get good performances and take heat from the Italian

"When I pass away I'll have nothing I wish I'd done. I did everything I wanted to do."

FASTFACTS

NAME: Francis Ford Coppola

BIRTHDATE: April 7, 1939 (age 75)

OCCUPATION: Filmmaker (see box on page 23). Also, wine producer and resort owner.

EDUCATION: B.A., Hofstra University, 1960, M.F.A., UCLA, 1967

PERSONAL: Lives in Rutherford, California. Married to Eleanor Coppola since 1963. Enjoys cooking, reading, travel. Three children: Gian-Carlo (born 1963, died 1986) Roman (born 1965), Sofia (born 1971), all film directors.

“Let’s face it: in aviation you can never have too much fuel, too much altitude or too many engines.”

community about a film emphasizing gangsters. Plus, I was young, so they figured they could boss me around.

How were you able to stand your ground when the studio fought you over so many of your decisions regarding *The Godfather*?

I’d been pretty clever at Hofstra about getting my own way. Negotiating and finding ways to do what you want when you have no power is a specialty of a penniless student.

What was it like to work with Brando?

He was extremely easy to work with. You just suggested what you were going for, and he was so creative. He hated to talk about acting but loved to have props such as little plates of Italian appetizers. In one scene I put a cat in his hand. He liked you to engage with him and provide stuff that he could take advantage of as an actor.

What do you think made Al Pacino so great for his role in *The Godfather*?

Al Pacino is an extremely intelligent, talented person. Some actors are intelligent but not talented and some are talented but not so intelligent. Al was both and could conceptualize the internal life of that character in a way that was so vivid.

What do you think is the most important thing the trilogy conveyed?

I think the metaphor of the American business system put into the metaphor of the Mafia, which is a kind of pragmatic [attitude]—anything you do to make a profit is OK.

What do you think of such latter-day Mafia works as *Goodfellas* and *The Sopranos*?

Goodfellas is a masterpiece about the working stiffs who are the so-called soldiers of the Mafia. I didn’t see *The Sopranos* [until] recently. I was touched with its greatness throughout.

What is the most rewarding aspect of being a director?

I love seeing something that was just a lot of ideas and thoughts on a piece of paper turned into a beautiful, living, emotional work of art.

Do you think you were born with a talent to write or is that something you can learn?

I struggle all the time, overcoming that lack of the gift of writing through hard work. Writing, like acting, is something you can get better at.

What actors haven’t you worked with but would like to?

Michael Fassbender is a wonderful actor [as is] James Franco. Philip Seymour Hoffman attended a reading of my new script just a few days before we lost him. That was heartbreaking.

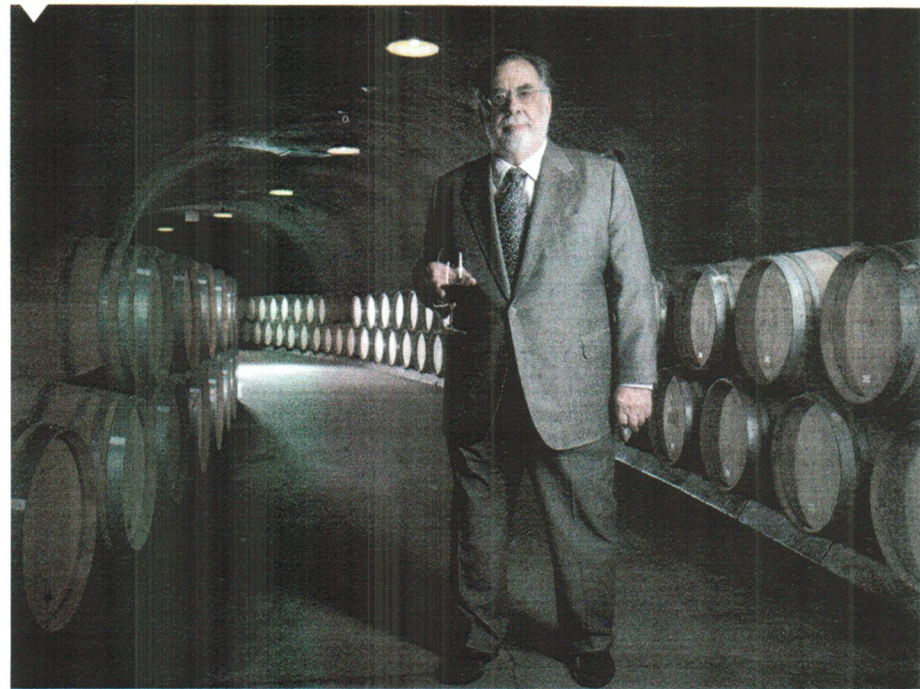
What is the new film you are working on?

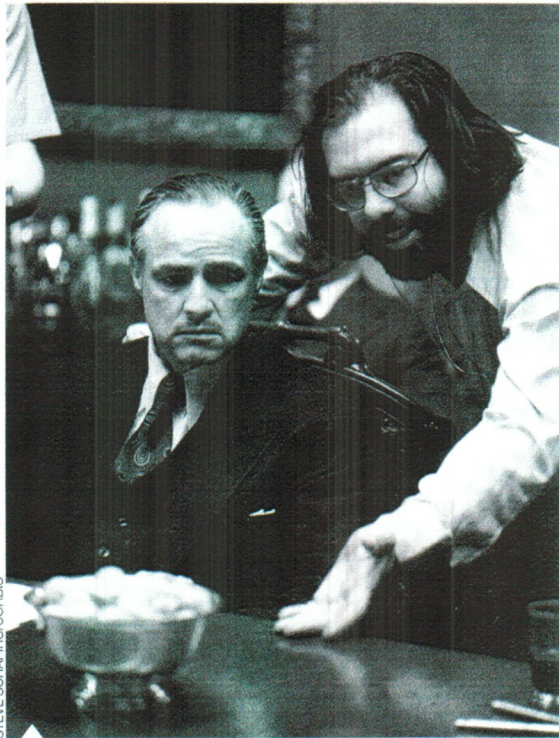
It’s a kind of epic that chronicles several generations of an Italian-American family. Right now, we’re finalizing the script and working on casting. It deals with three generations of a family who are making a migration from being the working poor into being a family of artists—not unlike my own family, although it is totally fiction.

You’ve always been a risk-taker. How did that ethic come about?

I thought the only way you could really fail in life is if you were some old guy dying and saying, “Oh! I wish I had done this and I wish I had done that.” When I pass away, I’ll basically have nothing I wish I’d done because I did everything I wanted to do and I continue to live that way.

Coppola has always associated wine with family and fun and has been making it at his Napa Valley estate for 35 years.





Directing Marlon Brando in *The Godfather* was extremely easy, Coppola says.

I understand your grandfather made wine when you were a boy. Did that give you the inspiration to buy a Napa Valley wine estate?

During Prohibition, the law permitted a family to drink wine as part of a meal and to make two barrels of their own wine. My grandfather had a fermenter in the basement and all my uncles talked about how much fun it was. Making wine and drinking it throughout the year was something I associated with my family and a lot of fun.

What are your favorite wines?

Inglénook is great, and it's also my favorite because my family was raised on that property. I love wine from the Rhône district, the fabulous Burgundies from Burgundy, southern Italian, Spanish wine. I love all wine, but I am not a wine expert. I just like to eat and have wine with my meals.

How did you happen to create the Coppola Resorts?

I bought my first place, a small house in a remote part of the jungle in Belize, to remind me of my two years in the Philippines making *Apocalypse Now*. We fixed it up and needed a staff to stay there and

look out for it and it ended up becoming a little inn. Then we built a second property because people wanted to go to the beach. When I made a film in Argentina, there was a lovely little hotel for sale; then we found another one in Guatemala; so little by little, it just happened.

Our latest resort, Palazzo Margherita, is a big palazzo in southern Italy where my grandfather was born. We'd heard about the area from my grandfather, and the kind of food that he liked to eat comes from there. It has wonderful wine and it's just an enchanting part of Italy not known well because it's in the south in a region called Lucania. I am convinced that successful businesses grow out of things you love to do.

When did you start flying privately?

I co-owned an MU-2, a turboprop that I used for a lot of the air-to-helicopter photography in *Apocalypse Now*. My kids used to call it "The Banana Plane" because it was yellow.

How do you fly now?

In California, for wine and film industry work, I use the Socata TBM 850, a small, very fast plane that can take only four people but is perfect for frequent business trips from Napa to Los Angeles. I also own the Falcon 7X, which I use for long trips, whether I'm going to Italy or dealing with hotels or films or handling wine sales in Asia.

How did you decide on the 7X?

It was intriguing because it was the first business jet to do fly-by-wire, and it has three engines. Let's face it: in aviation you can never have too much fuel, too much altitude or too many engines. The 7X can fly at 50,000 feet and is a much more economical plane per hour than some of its competitors. It is also comforting to know that if you ever lose an engine, you still have two.

And how do you travel on the ground?

I like to drive my Tesla between my wineries. I also have a 1939 Tucker, a 1936 Cord, a 1913 Model T Ford, an Isetta and a bunch of Citroëns.

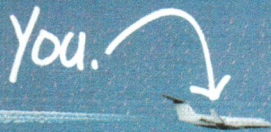
What is a typical day like for you?

Wake up very early and have coffee and a banana, hopefully with my wife. My favorite

COPPOLA'S GREATEST TRIUMPHS

Francis Ford Coppola has made more than two dozen films since 1962, and he shows no signs of slowing down, having released five movies in just the last five years. Many of the films he has made over the last three decades—including *The Cotton Club*, *Peggy Sue Got Married* and *The Godfather Part III*—have been box-office and/or critical successes. Still, there's no question that his greatest triumphs came during the 1970s, when he directed and co-wrote three movies that the American Film Institute (AFI) has ranked among the 100 best ever made in the U.S.:

- ***The Godfather* (1972).** Ranked #2 by AFI. Academy Award for best adapted screenplay; nominated for best director. Golden Globe Awards for best motion picture drama, best director, best screenplay.
- ***The Godfather Part II* (1974).** Ranked #32 by AFI. Academy Awards for best picture, best director, best screenplay. Nominated for Golden Globe Awards for best motion picture drama, best director, best screenplay.
- ***Apocalypse Now* (1979).** Ranked #30 by AFI. Golden Globe Award for best director; nominated for best motion picture. Nominated for Academy Awards for best picture, best director, best adapted screenplay.

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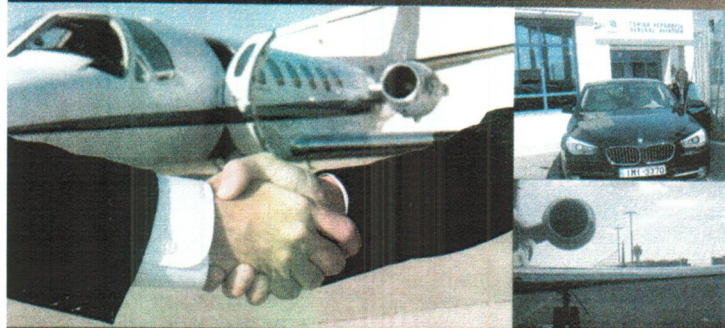
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FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA

Coppola uses his Falcon 7X for long trips.



RICHARD ROFELEWSKI

Francis Ford Coppola's Business Aircraft

	Falcon 7X	TBM 850
Manufacturer	Dassault	Daher-Socata
Model years produced	2007–current	2006–2013
Variable cost/hour for latest model	\$4,133	\$936
Seating (exec/max)	12/19	5/6
Range (nm)	5,803	818
Maximum cruise speed (kt)	495	320
Maximum takeoff weight (lb)	70,000	7,394
Cost new (millions)	\$52.8	N.A.
Cost range used (millions)	\$29–\$49	\$1.9–\$3.1

Sources: Conklin & de Decker Aircraft Cost Evaluator and Aircraft Performance Comparator; Vref Aircraft Value Reference.

Assumptions: Jet fuel, \$7.13/gal; variable cost includes fuel, maintenance reserves and misc. expenses.

Range based on four passengers (200 lb each, including baggage), NBAA IFR fuel reserves, 200 nm alternate.

thing is sitting around with her doing nothing. Then I come down to my bungalow and work on scripts. I have lunch with my wife, and by the afternoon I'm thinking about what to do that evening, but I like to stay home.

You've been married for more than 50 years. Do you have any thoughts on what makes a marriage successful?

I think you must maintain a degree of privacy; you both have to have things you love that the marriage is resilient enough to handle. If my wife wants to go on a trip somewhere, that only makes

her more interesting when she comes home. I think the secret of a long-term marriage is you find the person that you like being with and you love to talk to them.

What do you still want to achieve?

I've never made a film that was as emotional and as heart wrenching as certain works that I've seen. I hope to be able to make a human expression of what I think is the most beautiful and profound human emotional experience. I don't feel I've ever made a film like that and I'm hoping I might have that potential. **BJT**

Frequent contributor **Margie Goldsmith** (mgoldsmith@bjtonline.com) interviewed entertainer Harry Connick, Jr. for our last issue.