

THE AGA KHAN'S EARTHLY KINGDOM

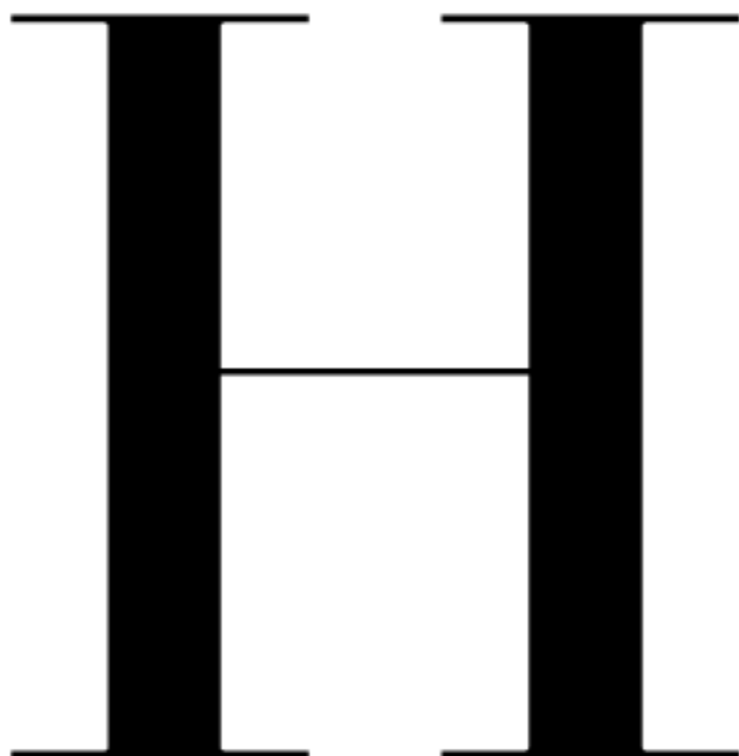
Multi-billionaire
prince, spiritual
leader of 15 million
Ismaili Muslims,
and one-man state,
the fourth Aga
Khan defies all
boundaries

By JAMES REGINATO



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JONATHAN BECKER





is Highness Prince Karim, the fourth Aga Khan and 49th hereditary imam of the world's 15 million Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims, remains a paradox to many people. The Pope of his flock, he also possesses fabled wealth and inhabits a world of marvelous châteaux, yachts, jets, and Thoroughbred horses. To be sure, few persons bridge so many divides—between the spiritual and the material; East and West; Muslim and Christian—as gracefully as he does.

Born in Geneva, brought up in Nairobi, educated at Le Rosey and Harvard, the Aga Khan has a British passport and spends a great deal of his time aloft in his private aircraft, but his base is Aiglemont, a vast estate near Chantilly, 25 miles north of Paris. On-site, in addition to

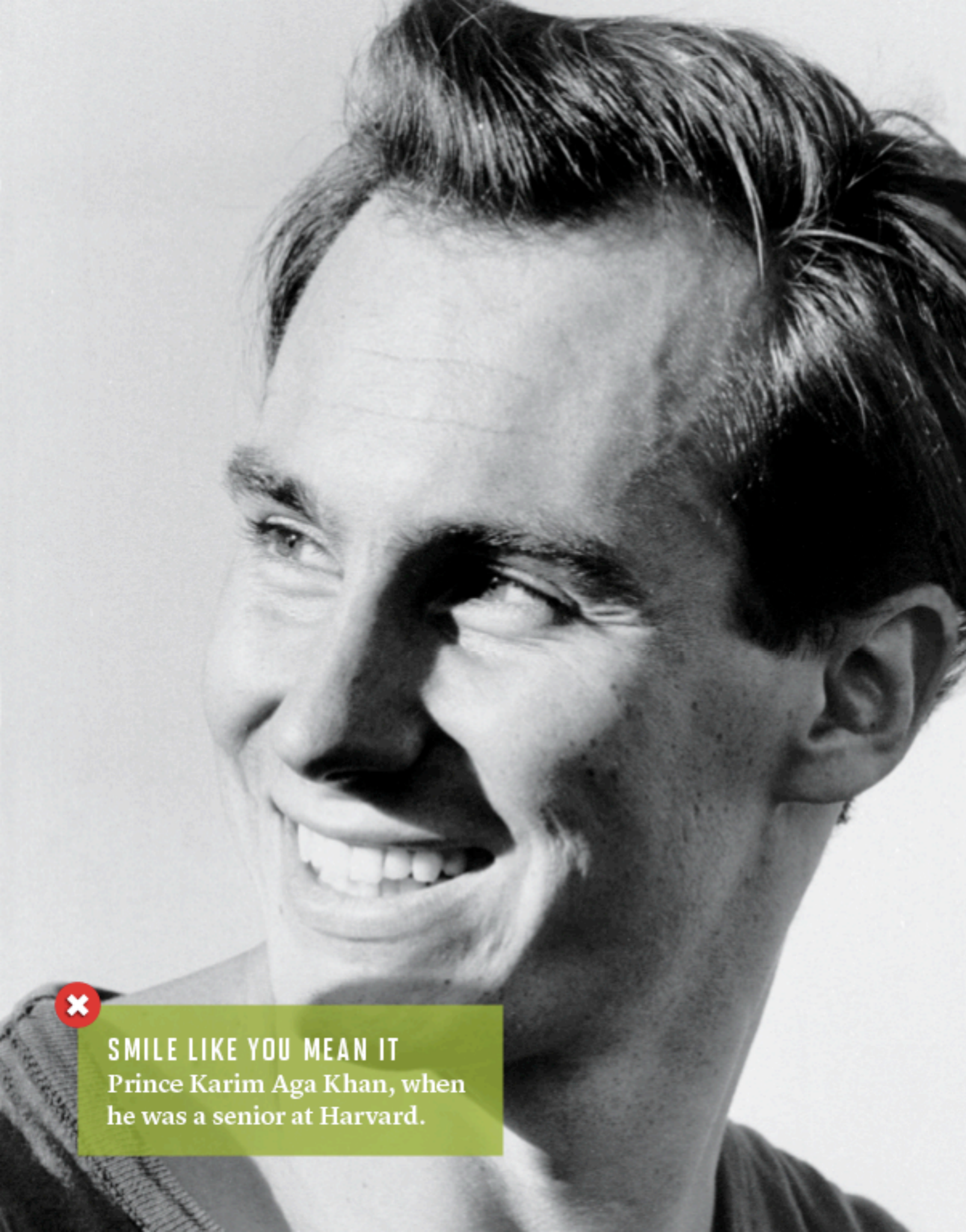
a château and an elaborate training center for about a hundred of his Thoroughbreds, is the Secretariat, a modern office block that houses the nerve center of what might be described as his own U.N., the Aga Khan Development Network. A staggeringly large and effective organization, it employs 80,000 people in 30 countries. Although it is generally known for the nonprofit work it does in poor and war-torn parts of the globe, the A.K.D.N. also includes an enormous portfolio of for-profit businesses in sectors ranging from energy and aviation to pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, and luxury hotels. In 2010 these generated \$2.3 billion in revenue. The extent of these endeavors might not be so well known to the general public, since the Aga Khan usually shuns the press and stays out of the public eye.

Though he has no political territory, the Aga Khan is virtually a one-man state and is often received like a head of state when he travels. As imam he is responsible for looking after the material as well as spiritual needs of his followers, who are scattered in more than 25 countries across Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and North America. His projects, however, benefit people of all faiths.

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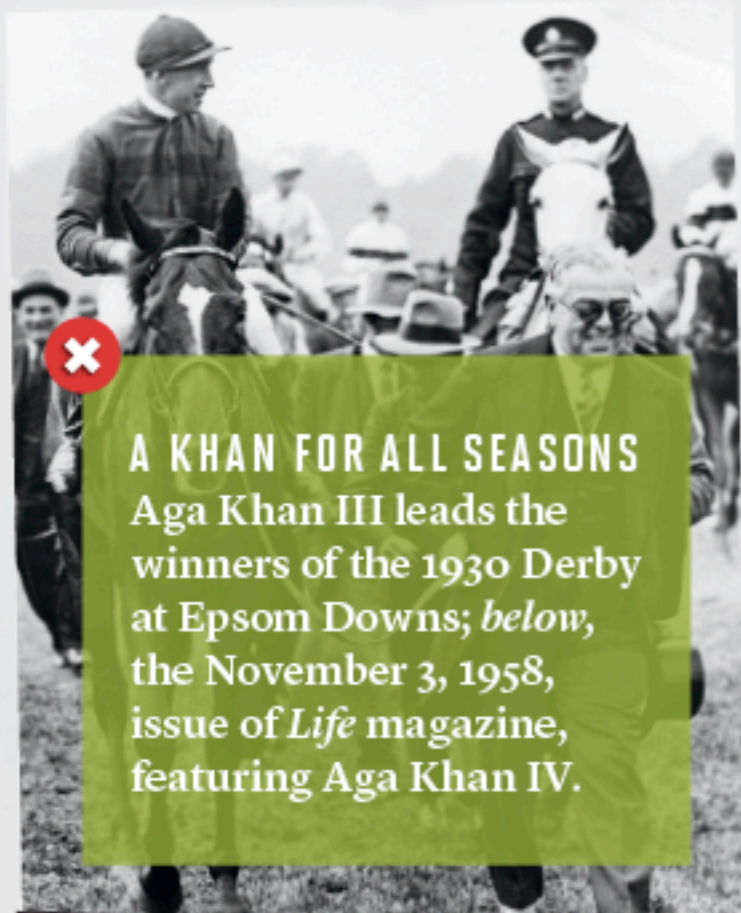


SMILE LIKE YOU MEAN IT
Prince Karim Aga Khan, when he was a senior at Harvard.

glimpse of him occurs on a certain Sunday in June, in Chantilly, at the annual Prix de Diane, which for more than a century has been the most prestigious horse race in France. It takes place pretty much in his backyard, at the historic Hippodrome de Chantilly, just a few kilometers from Aiglemont. Dating from 1843, the Prix de Diane is the high point of the Continental horse-racing calendar, on the turf and off. Members of France's top horse-owner clans, such as the Wildensteins and the Wertheimers, typically appear, along with sheikhs from Qatar and Dubai, and glamorous women in heavily feathered headgear.

Had it not been for the Aga Khan, however, this storied racetrack would probably not exist today, and its surroundings might be heading to ruin. In a highly unusual arrangement, the Aga Khan adopted, you might say, the entire 20,000-acre Domaine de Chantilly, which also contains one of France's foremost but relatively unknown cultural treasures, the Château de Chantilly. Somewhat ironically, he is using expertise gained in his development projects from Kabul to—literally—Timbuktu to rescue this lush swath of France.





A KHAN FOR ALL SEASONS
Aga Khan III leads the winners of the 1930 Derby at Epsom Downs; *below*, the November 3, 1958, issue of *Life* magazine, featuring Aga Khan IV.



“His Highness will see you now,” an assistant informs me in the cool white marble lobby of the Secretariat, then ushers me down a long corridor and through what appears to be a heavily fortified door. (Though his closest friends call him “K,” the Aga Khan, 76, is referred to by most of his associates as “His Highness,” “H.H.” for short.)

The Aga Khan’s private office is a large room of minimalist-modern design, with one unexpected feature. Colorful, highly polished spheres—geological specimens from around the world—appear to be floating on the walls, wizard-like.

“It’s a little bit of what’s beautiful *under* the earth,” His Highness explains as he sits down for a rare interview. “This one is from Madagascar, that’s from Brazil,” he elaborates. On a Saturday morning, he is wearing an impeccably tailored suit with a tie. He has a courtly charm and speaks in a captivating low voice.

Last summer marked the 55th anniversary of his imamate. It was an inheritance no one—himself included—expected him to receive when the news was announced on July 11, 1957, during a reading of the will of his grandfather His Highness Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III. It was the first time in the family’s 1,300-year history that a generation—Karim’s father—had been skipped over. Though historians have written about the events of that day, Prince Karim has rarely publicly commented on his own feelings.

“It was a shock,” he reveals today, “but I don’t think anyone in my situation would have been prepared.”

He was a junior at Harvard, where his roommates had included Adlai Stevenson’s son John, but in April of that year Prince Karim left abruptly when he received an urgent summons from his ailing 79-year-old grandfather, who was at his villa near Cannes.

“He just said, ‘Come and see me,’” he recalls.

Eighteen months later, when he was able to resume his studies, he reappeared in Cambridge with a longer name—Queen Elizabeth had conferred the style of “Highness” on him two weeks after he became Aga Khan IV. Ac-





HEIRS' BREADTH

A 1949 family portrait. Seated: Aga Khan III and his daughter-in-law Rita Hayworth (wife of his son Aly). At rear: his wife, the Begum Om Habibeh Aga Khan; grandson Aryn; son Sadruddin; Aly; and grandson Karim, the current Aga Khan. *Inset*, Karim Aga Khan succeeds his grandfather as imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, 1957.



According to a letter from the secretary of state for the colonies, it was granted “in view of his succession to the Imamate and his position as spiritual Head of the Ismaili Community, many members of which reside in Her Majesty’s territories.” His dormitory must have been crowded, too. “I returned with two secretaries and a personal assistant,” he re-

calls. His retinue was “a big joke” on campus, he says with a laugh.

The title Aga Khan—meaning, in a combination of Turkish and Persian, commanding chief—was granted in the 1830s by the Emperor of Persia to Karim’s great-great-grandfather when he married the emperor’s daughter. But Aga Khan I was also the 46th hereditary imam of the Ismaili Muslims of the world, in a line that descends directly from the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century.

In 1885, Prince Karim’s grandfather (who was born in India) was seven years old when he assumed the imamate upon his father’s death. The following year, he received his “His Highness” from Queen Victoria. In the early 1900s he moved to Europe, in part to pursue his passion for horse breeding and racing, in which he would become a celebrated figure. All the while, he looked after his flock remarkably well, building a huge network of hospitals, schools, banks, and mosques for them. “My duties are wider than those of the Pope,” he once explained. “The Pope is only concerned with the spiritual welfare of his flock.”

“He was an extraordinary personality, a very powerful intellect,” recalls his grandson. “When he left India and established himself



in Europe, he became very fascinated with the philosophy of the Western world. He brought that knowledge to his community.”

And they showed their appreciation. On his Golden Jubilee, in 1936, his followers famously gave him his weight in gold, a spectacle some 30,000 onlookers jammed a square in Bombay to witness. Upon his Diamond and Platinum Jubilees, he received similar tributes in

ON HIS GOLDEN JUBILEE, IN 1936, AGA KHAN III'S FOLLOWERS FAMOUSLY GAVE HIM HIS WEIGHT IN GOLD.

the appropriate stones and metal. The sizable funds from those tributes pale, however, compared with the zakat money traditionally paid by members of the Ismaili community, some of whom believe their imam is semi-divine. (Prince Karim categorically denies any suggestion that he is divine.) Though exact figures

are not known, it is thought members who can afford to do so provide a tithe of around 10 to 12 percent of their annual income. According to some estimates, that may amount to hundreds of millions a year. While the Aga Khan has complete control over these funds, they are not meant for his personal use. It has always been difficult to calculate his own wealth versus that which belongs to the imamate, and estimates vary widely, but a recent tally put Aga Khan IV's fortune at \$13.3 billion.

His father, Prince Aly Khan, was born in Turin in 1911 to the second of Aga Khan III's four wives, Theresa Magliano, an Italian ballerina. Aly, one of the most handsome and dashing men of his generation, met his first wife in 1933, though the lady had a husband. But by the first course at a dinner party in Deauville, he whispered “Darling, will you marry me?” to the then Mrs. Loel Guinness, née Joan Yarde-Buller, an aristocratic English beauty. They married in Paris in May 1936, and Karim was born to the couple on December 13, 1936; his brother, Prince Ayn, arrived the following year.

Though Aly had a well-known affair with Pamela Harriman, he will always be best remembered for his romance with Rita Hayworth, whom he met on the Riviera in 1948





A CASTLE OF HIS OWN 
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shortly after she had divorced Orson Welles. Aly soon obtained his divorce and the two married in Paris on May 27, 1949. Their daughter, Princess Yasmin, was born on December 28, 1949. The marriage soon proved unhappy, and the pair separated in 1953.

In the spring of 1957 the old Aga Khan clearly had his reasons for summoning his elder grandson. The young man remained with his grandfather until his death, in the early-morning hours of July 11, at his residence near Lake Geneva. Later that day, the family gathered in the drawing room to hear the reading of the will, which had been brought in a locked case from Lloyds Bank in London.

“It has always been the tradition of our family that each imam chooses his successor at his absolute and unfettered discretion from amongst any of his descendants whether they be sons or other male issue,” read the old Aga Khan’s solicitor. “In view of the fundamentally altered conditions in the world . . . including the discoveries of atomic science, I am convinced that it is in the best interest of the Shia Muslim Ismaili Community that I should be succeeded by a young man who has been brought up and developed . . . in the midst of the new age. For these reasons . . . I



appoint my grandson Karim, son of my son.”

Prince Karim, now Aga Khan IV as well as the 49th imam, announced solemnly, “My religious responsibilities begin as of today.”

Half a century later, he hints he might not have been as confident as he appeared to be. “My grandfather had been imam for 72 years,” he says. “I was 20 years old.”

Though he embarked on a worldwide tour of his community, he resisted the wishes of the community elders to begin his duties immediately. He returned instead to Harvard to finish his B.A. in Islamic history. “There was knowledge there that I needed,” he says. But once back on campus he was not like the other boys in so many ways: “I was an undergraduate who knew what his work for the rest of his life was going to be,” he says, rather quietly.

Although the Aga Khan has agreed to this interview to discuss the restoration of Chantilly, he readily chats about contemporary politics.

The West fails to recognize the pluralistic nature of the Islamic world, he believes: “None of these situations are identical. You cannot take one set of issues from one country

and apply it to another. They are all different, in terms of history, and the religious compositions of the populations involved.”

The problems in the Middle East are not caused primarily by religion, he adds. “Relations between various communities within Islam are obviously impacted by theocratic forces, but I don’t think theocratic forces are the cause of the situations. They are politically driven. But the faith dimension comes on top of that, and that makes things more complicated.”

In Afghanistan, one should analyze and approach the country regionally, he says. “It’s going to be a question of province by province. The whole country cannot reconstruct itself at the same speed. So you have to think in terms of how improved provinces can become sustainable in their own right and become patterns of change. In some provinces, it’s happening. Not everything is lost. I don’t believe that.”

Switching gears, the conversation turns to the topic of bloodstock, which reveals a more personal side and brings up the death of his father, who died in a car accident outside Paris in 1960. “When Daddy was killed, the three of us found ourselves with this family tradition none of us knew the first thing about,”





His Highness the Aga Khan speaking with President John F. Kennedy in the White House Oval Office, March 14, 1961.



The Aga Khan conferring with one of his jockeys in Chantilly last summer.



Queen Elizabeth II hosts a dinner at Buckingham Palace to mark the Golden Jubilee of Prince Karim, Aga Khan IV, July 7, 2008.

THE PATH OF KHAN

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Prince Karim Aga Khan perches on the prow of his yacht *Amaloun* on the Costa Smeralda, Sardinia, 1967.



The Aga Khan strolls the grounds of Chantilly with his wife, the Begum Inaara Aga Khan, 2001.



Princess Grace of Monaco dances with Karim Aga Khan in Monte Carlo, 1966.



he says, referring to how he and Aryn and Yasmin grappled with taking on the Aga Khan Stud—a massive operation with nine farms in Ireland and France. After Aga Khan III died, Prince Aly took control of the business and

HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THE AGA KHAN, THE STORIED HIPPODROME RACETRACK WOULD PROBABLY NOT EXIST.

managed it until his death, when his children inherited it. During those three years, Aly was highly successful.

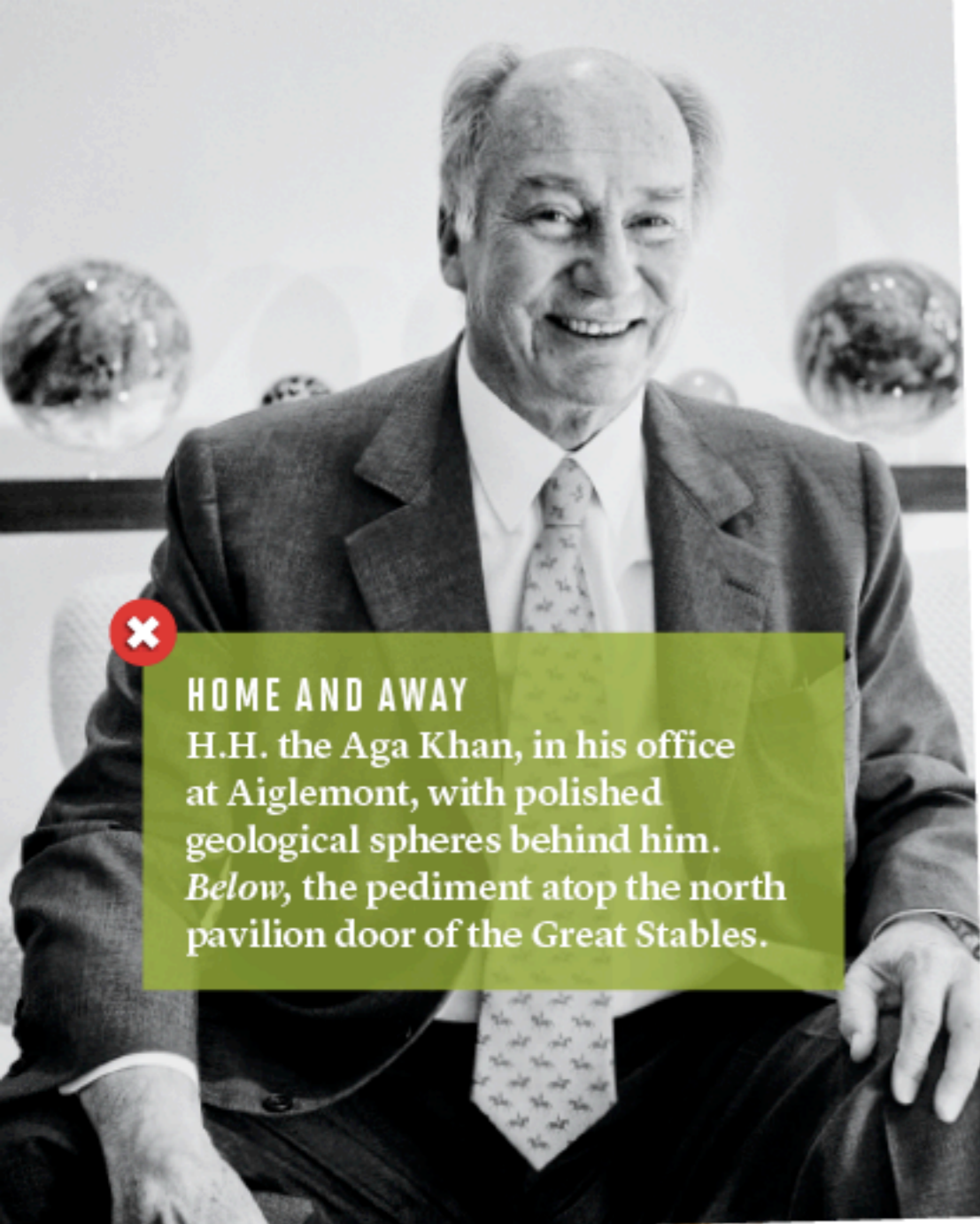
Horses were a world with which Prince Karim was then wholly unfamiliar. “I never had any interest in it. Harvard is a great institution, but it doesn’t teach about Thoroughbred breeding. So it was a total surprise.

“It was a very difficult decision to keep it going,” he continues. “Having three generations’ activity that is so successful—if the fourth generation makes a mess of it . . . that was my risk. And it was not part of the imamate, was not an activity that was particularly well regarded in certain countries.”

Still, he decided to buy out his siblings’ shares and try to make a go of it. His many wins have long since put him in the very top echelon of the bloodstock world. (At last year’s Prix de Diane, on June 17, the Aga Khan shattered a century-old record in French racing when his filly, Valyra, crossed the finish line first, giving H.H. his seventh Diane. Since 2010 he had held a tie with renowned owner Auguste Lupin, who notched his sixth Diane in 1886.) “I’ve come to love it,” he says of the sport. “It’s so exciting, a constant challenge. Every time you sit down and breed you are playing a game of chess with nature.”

In the long and close relationship between the British royal family and his, horses have been the bond. When the Queen and Prince Philip married, Aga Khan III gave them a filly, which she named Astrakhan. More recently, in 2008, the Queen hosted a dinner at Buckingham Palace to celebrate Aga Khan IV’s Golden





HOME AND AWAY

H.H. the Aga Khan, in his office at Aiglemont, with polished geological spheres behind him. *Below*, the pediment atop the north pavilion door of the Great Stables.



Jubilee. In 2011, on her historic visit to the Republic of Ireland, Her Majesty slipped away from her official itinerary to visit the Aga Khan's Giltown stud, where he hosted a private lunch for her. No doubt they discussed her colt Carlton House, who was the favorite in the upcoming Epsom Derby, the only classic race the Queen has yet to win. The Aga Khan's jockeys, wearing his emerald-green silk livery, have triumphed there four times.

(Carlton House came in third.)

It's a long way from Buckingham Palace to Timbuktu, Mali. There, His Highness recently restored the mud walls of the 14th-century Djingereyber Mosque, the oldest earthen build-

ing in sub-Saharan Africa. Over the last decade, he's also made vital improvements in Mali's educational system and in nearly every sector of its infrastructure, including water, electricity, aviation, agriculture, health, and education. He prefers to take this "area-based approach" to development, as he calls it. "We try to avoid the single-building syndrome. You have to look at the big picture. If you try to put social and cultural development ahead of economic development, it doesn't work. You have to do it all together." In Kabul, that has meant restoring key architectural components of the Old City while also building a five-star hotel and a new mobile-telephone network. In Uganda, he owns the country's largest pharmaceutical company, a bank, a tannery, and a fishnet factory. Most impressively, he built—with the Blackstone Group as a partner—a \$750 million hydroelectric system. Said to be the most innovative electrification program in Africa, it has brought 18 hours of electricity a day to the poor West Nile area, where there had been 4 hours every other day.

Aga Khan IV is thus both philanthropist and venture capitalist. But the high level of synergy he maintains between his nonprofit and commercial activities is probably unique





CHANTILLY RACE
A view of the private training grounds at Chantilly.

in the world. All of the surpluses from his profit-making companies are re-invested in his development work. “He has a very fine mind for investing—and he does a bloody good job balancing the task of increasing his capital with that of advancing the needs of his followers,” says former World Bank president James Wolfensohn, a good friend. “At the end of the day, he is looking for human profits.”

“In a strange way, I am bringing to Chantilly our experience from similar work in the developing world,” says the Aga Khan. “There are a number of commonalities. The first is a fairly large number of stakeholders.”

The Château de Chantilly, at the center of the Domaine de Chantilly, was begun in 1528 by the Constable Anne de Montmorency, a renowned soldier and connoisseur. In 1643 it was inherited by another branch of the Bourbon-Condé family, cousins of the royal family, when it became the property of the family of Louis, Prince of Condé, who became known as Le Grand Condé after a great battlefield victory. By 1659, Condé seems to have hung up his swords and devoted himself to turning Chantilly into a



pleasure palace that would rival Versailles. Not surprisingly, Chantilly did not fare well during the French Revolution. Many of the buildings were destroyed and the art treasures confiscated. After the fall of Napoleon, in 1815, however, Condé's heirs returned from exile, reclaimed the estate, and began to restore it. In 1830, it was inherited by

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Henri d'Orléans, Duc d'Aumale. The son of King Louis-Philippe, who had ascended the French throne after the 1830 revolution, he was eight years old at the time of the bequest. After becoming a celebrated war hero himself, while fighting in Algeria, Aumale was forced by the Revolution of 1848 into a 24-year exile, in England. It was quite a comfortable one, though. The Orléans family, of

which he was the principal heir, had held on to their huge fortune, so he was one of the richest men of his time.

Denied the power to make history, he bought it. Aumale devoted himself to assembling a collection of art, books, and manuscripts that was unmatched in his era. Many of these objects had been seized from his family during the French Revolution. Today, in France, his collection of paintings—including works by Raphael, Van Dyck, Poussin, and Ingres—is considered second only to that of the Louvre. In an oration given in 1862, Benjamin Disraeli extolled Aumale: "Happy the prince, who, though exiled from his palaces and military pursuits through no fault of his own, finds a consolation in books and an occupation in the rich domain of Art."

In 1871, when he was finally able to return to Chantilly, he arranged all these treasures majestically in the Renaissance-style grand château, which would be more or less completely rebuilt by the architect Honoré Daumet to Aumale's specifications, starting in 1875. (Daumet also designed the grandstands of the Hippodrome.) With no direct heirs—all of his children had died by 1872—Aumale reconstructed the château to stand as a

monument to his family and their lost world.

In the 1880s another political upheaval threatened Aumale with exile yet again. To thwart seizure of the property and preserve it, he bequeathed the entire Domaine de Chantilly to the Institut de France, with the stipulation that almost nothing could

“EVERY TIME YOU SIT DOWN
AND BREED YOU ARE PLAYING
A GAME OF CHESS
WITH NATURE,” SAYS
THE AGA KHAN.

be altered. In 1898 it was opened to the public by appointment, two days a week.

The Institut de France, which is virtually synonymous with the Académie Française—the oldest and most prestigious of its five learned societies—is arguably the world’s most exclusive institution. Once elected, the 40 members of the Académie, known as “the

Immortals,” keep their fauteuils for life, and it is their primary task to guard the purity of the French language.

But as the 20th century progressed, the institute’s ability to maintain the Domaine declined. As a result, the little-visited château became “one of the world’s best-kept secrets,” according to Gary Tinterow, the director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Then serious maintenance issues developed, prompting the World Monuments Fund in 1998 to put Chantilly on its watch list of endangered monuments. Things were even worse at the Hippodrome. In 1994, its state of deterioration prompted the government to announce that it would be closing the facility.

“Forgive the expression,” says His Highness, “but all hell broke loose.” (Not every day does one get to hear a “pope” say “hell.”)

The heads of France Galop, the governing body of French horse racing, which had long leased the Hippodrome from the Institut, made an emergency visit to the Aga Khan, to ask for his help.

“I’m not going to restore just the racecourse,” he recalls telling them. “My interests are much wider.” He subsequently scheduled



meetings with the various other stakeholders—primarily the Institut de France, but also with local, regional, and national officials. “Why don’t we think of the bigger scheme of things?” he challenged them all.

“The entire area has enormous economic potential, which has never been thought through. We are so close to one of the largest transportation hubs in the world,” he explains today.

But it took two years of personal negotiations with the chancellor of the Institut, Prince Gabriel de Broglie, to hammer out the contract, signed in 2005, to create the Foundation for the Safe-Keeping and Development of the Domaine de Chantilly. A unique agreement, it has ambitious goals but a limited life span—20 years. During this period the Aga Khan pledges to restore the Domaine to its “princely lustre.” To accomplish this he has donated 40 million euros, more than half of the projected budget.

Last fall saw the completion of significant linchpins in his plan to promote year-round tourism in the Domaine, including restoration of the Jardin Anglais and the Jeu de Paume, which now houses a major exhibition space. Just across

the street, and a short walk from the château, a newly built, ultra-chic hotel—the Auberge du Jeu de Paume—opened its doors.

“When the foundation has finished its work, everything goes back to the Institut, when I hope the Domaine will be a totally rethought, re-structured cultural asset and an economic unit that will stand on its own,” says the Aga Khan.

“I did a lot of homework. I would never have dared to get involved in this unless I had enough experience,” he adds.

Accomplishing all this has required something the French in general—and perhaps the Immortals in particular—are not so well known for: cooperation. Yet during an interview with the Institut’s chancellor in his stately paneled office, he is positively effusive. “It’s like a fairy tale!” Prince de Broglie says. “The Institut de France very much approves of the way things are being conducted. We are profoundly happy.” A very formal gentleman, he is wearing his ceremonial *habit vert*, a long black coat richly embroidered in green, accessorized with his military decorations and a sizable sword.

Joining forces with this organization, it’s obvious, is no lark. According to one person



who has worked with the Aga Khan, it is his impeccable manners—combined with his regal bearing and confidence—that help him to prevail: “He imposes his will with the utmost grace. In meetings, for example, he will ask—so politely—‘I wonder whether it would be a good idea if we do such and such . . . ’ That means, *We’re doing it*. No one would dream of challenging him.”

“Karim has a great deal of charm,” says an old friend, “but underneath he’s made of steel. He does exactly what he wants, when he wants.”

A highly concise description of the Aga Khan comes from Betty Lagardère, the widow of French tycoon Jean-Luc Lagardère and a longtime friend. “He’s a god,” she declares straightaway (disregarding Prince Karim’s demurrals of any immortality). His “divine” stature, she says, extends from his work to his personal style. “He is so elegant, so refined.”

Notwithstanding his social skills, Aga Khan IV has never been “social,” however. “Parties are not his thing,” says a childhood friend. “He was never gregarious or outgoing, the way his father was.”

“At this point, he is very reclusive,” says another friend. “He’s becoming a bit of a Howard Hughes. He sees few people.”

And though he clearly seems to appreciate female beauty, the friend scoffs at the thought of Karim’s being labeled a playboy, like his dad: “Absolutely not. Karim is maniacal about work. He never drinks or smokes. He is extremely precise, serious, and hardworking.”

Still, he has led a full life. In 1968 while in Gstaad, he fell in love with Sally Crichton-Stuart, a tall blonde model. They married the following year and produced three children. Today, all work within the imamate. Princess Zahra, 42, a Harvard graduate, heads the Social Welfare Department; Prince Rahim, 41, a Brown graduate, is executive director of the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development; Prince Hussain, 38, educated at Williams College, works in the environmental sector. Three years after his divorce from Sally, in 1995, H.H. married the German-born Princess Gabriele zu Leiningen. After a brief career as a pop singer in Europe, she was working as a consultant to UNESCO. In 2000 they had a son, Prince Aly Muhammad, but they separated a few years later, and are currently



negotiating a divorce. For some time now, his companion has been the Danish-born Beatrice von der Schulenburg, 44, who was previously married to a business executive in London.

While the apparent contradiction between the Aga Khan's lifestyle and his role as a spiritual leader continues to puzzle some, it is more interesting to try to square his activities as a highly astute venture capitalist with his religious duties. But that, the Aga Khan says, is elementary. "It comes from a basic understanding of what an imam is required to do," he says. "An imam is not expected to withdraw from everyday life. On the contrary, he's expected to protect his community and contribute to their quality of life. Therefore, the notion of the divide between faith and world is foreign to Islam. The imamate does not divide world and faith. That's very little understood outside Islam. In the West, your financial systems are all built around that divide."

For a moment, he speaks as though Muslims and Republicans actually might have more in common than either side would dream: "We have no notion of the accumulation of wealth being evil," he says. But

clearly he's not going to be any poster boy for the R.N.C.: "It's how you use it," he continues, speaking about wealth. "The Islamic ethic is that if God has given you the capacity or good fortune to be a privileged individual in society, you have a moral responsibility to society."

Say what you will about the Aga Khan's lifestyle, he has done an extraordinarily good job performing the duties of his imamate, while maintaining a rare charm. "He is many things to many people," says James Wolfensohn. "But, for a god, he's a fantastically good friend!"



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