

WORLD



A brief encounter with Sophia Loren taught jetsetting agent the importance of location

THE deal that saw Sarafina join Teruya Yoshida's broodmare band in a private purchase from the Aga Khan was handled by Italian-born, Florida-based agent Eugenio Colombo. His list of clients is like an international 'who's who' of the thoroughbred world.

Beyond the Yoshida family and the Aga Khan, other notables include, but by no means are limited to, John Messara, the Wildenstein family, the Wertheimer family, Frank Stronach and Three Chimneys Farm.

Colombo, who has worked with both parties in the Sarafina deal for decades, says: "I bought Elusive Kate [for Yoshida] before the Breeders' Cup, so I spent the week of the Breeders' Cup in Kentucky. I fell in love with Sarafina's conformation at Churchill Downs. And it is a good pedigree too because of the Aga Khan."

The charismatic 67-year-old has built quite a portfolio during his time as a bloodstock agent, which is the profession he turned to in order to stay connected with horses.

"I used to be a gentleman rider in Italy," Colombo says. "One morning I fell from a horse. I went back the next day to the same horse that I was afraid of, and I fell for the second day in a row. I said 'Stop, no more!' When you are afraid to ride, that is when you get hurt. So, my only option if I wanted to stay in the horse business was to become a bloodstock agent."

It proved to be a smart move, as Colombo has been involved in the sale of 29 champions and/or Classic winners as well as countless

WEDNESDAY FOCUS

Amanda Duckworth talks to charismatic bloodstock figure Eugenio Colombo, who brokered the sale of Sarafina to Japan



Pattern-race winners, among them Tony Bin, Falbrav, Bob Back and Rakti.

Colombo started his bloodstock agency in Italy in 1969. That year he took his first trip to the United States, and that experience eventually led him to relocate in 1978.

"I fell in love with America right away," he says. "I started to go back and forth. Anytime there was a cargo plane coming from Italy to New York, I asked the shipping company to be an attendant so I would have a free ticket. The 60s and 70s were the golden era of US breeding and racing."

In the course of building his bloodstock business, Colombo met Zenya Yoshida (Teruya's late father) while at Tattersalls during a December sale. Their relationship got off to a fantastic beginning when the first horse Colombo bought for Yoshida won a Group 1 contest.

"I was able to buy Sortingo and it was a very lucky start," says Colombo. "A month after we bought him, he won the

Gran Premio di Milano for Mr Yoshida. It was very lucky. He was a fantastic man. I don't consider that family as clients. They are friends, and we work together."

AFTER moving to America, Colombo worked for Fasig-Tipton and organised the 1987 'Night of the Stars'. The evening has been reformatting and now exists as the one-session November select sale.

"It is very difficult to keep a top executive [interested in buying horses] for three or four days, so I thought why don't we put together one night, and we will give him the greatest show on earth?" Colombo recalls. "That was the idea of the Night of the Stars, and it was very successful."

The easiest way to understand the depth of Colombo's passion for horses is to bring up his favourite runner, Ribot. He can tell you in charming detail about the champion's colourful life.

"Ribot is the horse of my heart," says Colombo. "He was a very intelligent horse. He was the boss, he was the leader. He's such a legend. I grew up with two great idols: Ribot and Fausto Coppi. They were the heroes of my childhood. The hero of my puberty was Sophia Loren."

Italy's Coppi was one of the greatest cyclists the world has known, and cycling still holds a special place in Colombo's

life. As does Loren. During a movie festival, the actor's car parked directly in front of a young Colombo, who was sitting on the lower board of a barricade. According to Colombo, when Loren emerged wearing a dress, he caught a glimpse of her underwear and learned the value of 'location, location, location'.

Passion is something that drives Colombo's life and he feels it is also the key to having success in racing.

"Buy horses if you enjoy the game," he says. "All the great owners of my generation and the generation before mine were riders. They have natural passion and they understood how to respect the horse."

"Now my hardest task is to explain to the new generation of owners that horses are not machines. It's a game for sportsmen and for people who love and enjoy horses."



Eugenio Colombo: "I fell in love with America right away"



Sophia Loren: a hero of Colombo's adolescence

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