



# ROCKET MAN!



## *Vahe Vartanian interviews Per Wimmer, CEO, Wimmer Family Office*

**P**er Wimmer is a Danish philanthropist, space advocate, entrepreneur, financier and author. He founded his own investment bank and a family office following a successful career in finance in both New York and London. However what sets him apart is his desire for adventure and exploration in extreme environments, including space and sky diving over Mount Everest.



### **Tell us a bit about your background and how your journey started**

I was born in Denmark and have always had a desire to learn both formally and informally. As humans we learn, explore and search for new adventures. I have 4 master degrees but also have learnt much from the University of Life: I've lived with Indians in the Amazon; dived with sharks in Fiji; and skied at 5,500 feet at the highest resort. In 2008 I was the first person to participate in a tandem skydive from Mount Everest with Ralph Mitchell.

My dad was a very successful entrepreneur who started in the automotive sector and subsequently went on to invest in real estate. Although I've made much of my own money I consider myself to be both G1 and G2. My sister now runs the family office to manage my late father's wealth and stocks and shares. My mother worked in a school for the disabled which taught me the importance of the heart.

### **What was your more formal education and career path?**

I studied both in Denmark and France. In Denmark I graduated with a focus on mathematics and physics, in France I took the French Baccalaureate in just one year and focused on philosophy and French literature.

I then studied law and briefly worked at a law firm before going to Bruges and gained an MA in European Political Science. There I was fast-tracked to the Cabinet of the Vice President of the European Commission and regularly saw the Finance Ministers from across Europe as well such dignitaries as Yasser Arafat (who

was followed everywhere by a mini ambulance ready in case of attack). This time really taught how important diplomacy is. It was a wonderful experience. With my boss being in charge of the ECU (precursor to the Euro) I saw European economics at close hand. Once my boss' term ended I stayed on in Belgium and wrote my first book in French about the future of Europe and called "Vers une Europe a la carte: Analyse des derogations après Maastricht". Looking at it now it's amazing how many of the predictions have come true!

I then moved to Boston to study a Master of Public Administration degree at Harvard University. Being hungry for knowledge I found this the most amazing opportunity as it gave me carte blanche to choose a wide range of topics that interested me. In the first year I'd almost finished two years of study!

At the end of the first year I spent the summer at McKinsey & Co which I absolutely loved as I got involved in some huge projects. I asked Harvard whether I might finish my degree early as I had almost completed most of the work already, but they refused so I decided to take a year out of my degree and complete my media project at McKinsey. Once this project was completed I then went travelling - visiting every country in South America, as well as Asia and Australia. I had some incredible adventures and learnt much from the University of Life.

When I returned to Harvard to finish my degree I had almost finished my work so it gave me a great chance to party as well as do charity work. I ran a number of workshops for my fellow students to help them with the application process.

I had many offers of work after I left but in particular two tore me in different directions. One was to join the White House under Bill Clinton - I was the only non-American to be offered a job that year. The other, after 38 interviews in Boston, London and New York, was for Goldman Sachs. After much deliberation I decided to take the Goldman Sachs offer up because of my interest in finance (I had financed my second year at Harvard by investing my scholarship money).

When I joined Goldman Sachs in the late 1990s Wall Street was a crazy and exciting place especially for a young man looking to work and party hard. I'm not sure when I slept! When Goldman Sachs expanded into Europe I took the opportunity to return to London, closer to my family and 22 years later I'm still here.

### **So how did you go from being a Goldman Sachs employee to owning your own international corporate financial advisory firm?**

When Goldman Sachs IPO'd I was fortunate to benefit from that (as well as 3 subsequent IPO's). That IPO allowed me to buy my first ticket to travel to space - but more of that later! After Goldman Sachs I joined Collins Stewart (now Canaccord) and then the MAN Group where I advised on equities. ▶



After the MAN Group's IPO I decided I was ready to walk the talk as an entrepreneur. On October 4 2007 (the 50th anniversary of Sputnik) I set up Wimmer Financial. On day one it was just me, a laptop and an application to the FSA to set up my own investment bank. I needed to work out how do it without a huge balance sheet but now we are a corporate advisory boutique investment bank with global reach through a network of partners and clients all over the world. 2007-2008 was a baptism of fire! During the same week as Lehman Brothers collapsed I was due to fly to Nepal to do my Everest sky dive - I decided to go ahead and the dive took place on October 6 2008.

After a couple of less eventful years I then decided to set up Wimmer Family Office in 2011 in order to institutionalise all my investments and have a more stable income. I now also have Wimmer Horizon LLP which is a hedge fund that's been going for 15 years but which I bought a stake in 14 months ago and re-branded. As an entrepreneur I never sit still and am always looking for new opportunities.

The final string to my bow is Wimmer Space which looks after all my adventures and in the process inspire today's children to live out their dreams, and to encourage their interest in space and science. Wimmer Space also looks after my charitable activities - I work with some great charities.

**So what's the interest in Space?**

As an adventurer I am always looking for the next adventure. We have explored most of the earth - wherever you travel there is always a Coca Cola dispenser! But space is the new frontier and to truly push the boundaries for mankind that is where we need to go. To date less than 600 people have been to space so it's an exciting time and we have to wonder what further exploration could lead to. There has been more money spent on space exploration

in the last 3 years than was spent in the previous 10 years. As private money has been invested costs have gone down and innovations have increased. Although there are many geo-political tensions in the world surprisingly space exploration benefits from many collaborations. For example China's probe Chang'e 4 (carried equipment from Europe and Russia), which landed on the dark side of the moon only happened because the Americans helped them and the equipment was made by many countries. When you are in space you see how small, unique and fragile the earth is and this translates into being more environmentally aware.



**What has been your journey to get into space?**

After the Goldman Sachs IPO I bought and fully paid for travel into space. I thought I would go in 2005/2006 - I'm still waiting! I bought several tickets in order to hedge my bets. I've now only got my Virgin Galactic ticket.

I did my first space training in 2001 in Russia. There I did centrifuge training, flew a fighter jet (at Mark 3 which is completely silent as sound can't keep up!) as well weightless training. Seeing the curvature of the earth, as well as both night and day at once, was a privilege.

I am hoping to be in space in the next 18 months.

**What have been the unexpected benefits of being involved in the space adventure?**

I have met many extraordinary people and am now fortunate to call many (such as Buzz Aldrin and Richard Branson and his family) my

friends. I've also socialised with many celebrities and met many unsung heroes which both have benefited all my charitable endeavors. I have seen it as a privilege, pleasure and duty to talk about my experiences in space at schools, which has inspired kids to get into science and maths. This work with schools has tied in with my passion for learning and investing in the next generation.

**Tell us about your "space watch"?**

Last year I was approached by Fortis Watches, who are owned by a Swiss Single Family Office, to collaborate on producing the Per WimmerSpace Fortis Watch which I will wear when I go into space. I worked with the designer for a year to design it and can't wait to wear it for my trip.

**What lesson have you learnt?**

The sky is no limit!!!

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