

LEFT: Dom Sicilia.
ABOVE: Polished Grey Lace marble field tile with Graffiti hand cut inlays done on site.

SET IN STONE

When Dom Sicilia was growing up, a career in the computer business was top of mind. He never dreamed he'd end up a thriving entrepreneur in various industries and an altruistic philanthropist.

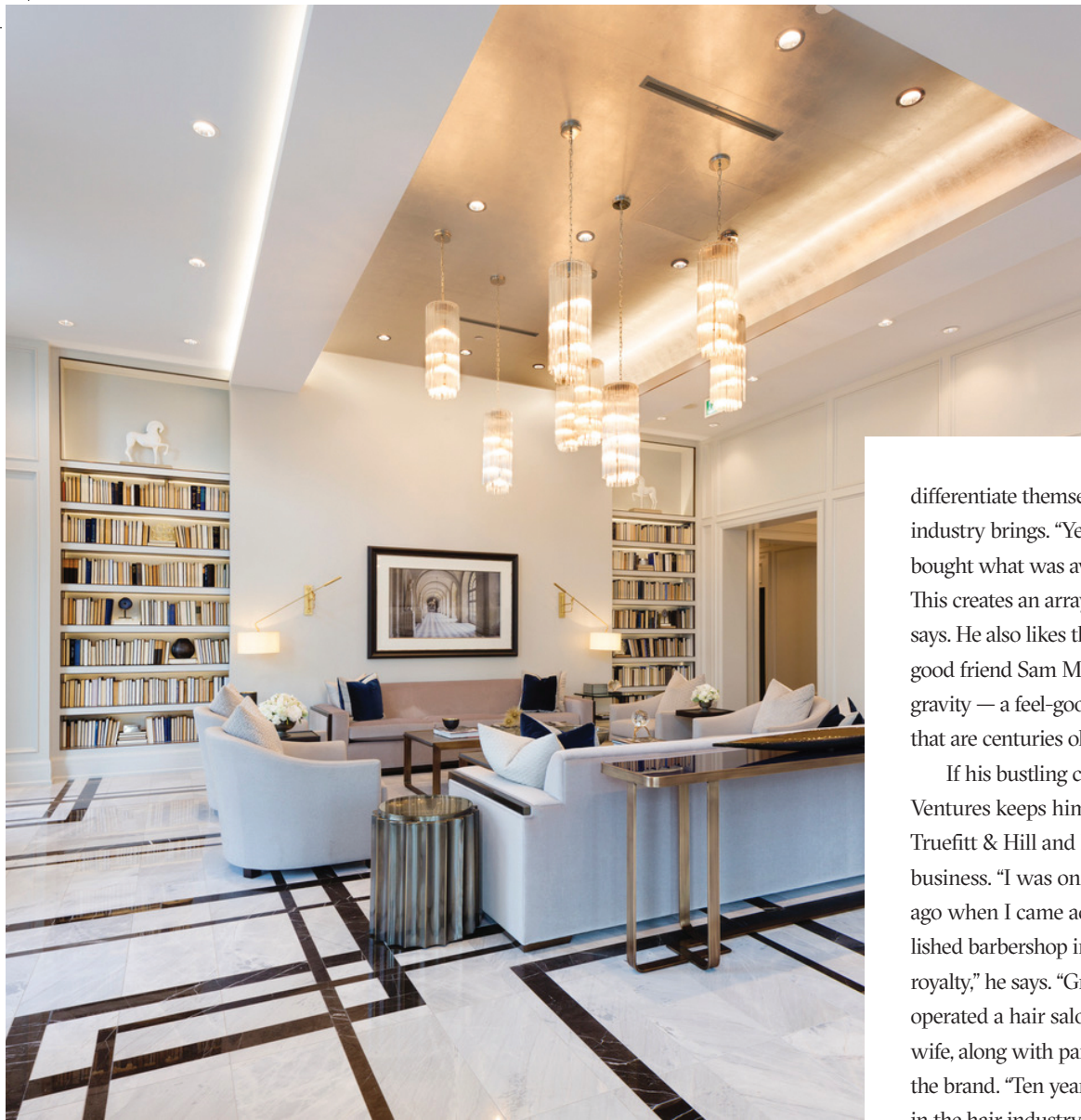
By Lisa van de Geyn

Dom Sicilia says there are a few people he thanks for his business acumen and work ethic — family is truly the secret to his success, as is having a good network and connections.

In addition to his role as executive director at Gemstar Group, a supplier and installer of natural stone and hard-surface finishes, Sicilia is the president of Sherwood Ventures, a management consulting company that owns Truefitt & Hill and Blowdry Lounge brands.

The 58-year-old who lives in Mississauga with his high school sweetheart (and business partner), Lorena (the two also have a son and daughter), was born to Italian immigrants, Franco and Ada. They arrived in Canada in 1954 and Franco — a hairdresser — opened his first salon in 1964 in Toronto. “He had a strong work ethic and was very entrepreneurial,” says Sicilia. “I grew up in his salon as a teenager, but I always wanted to embark on a computer career. Computers were high-ticket items then, and I wanted to sell high-priced merchandise.”

After graduating in computer science in 1982, Sicilia worked as a junior partner at a small ▶



LEFT: This incredible flooring is in the lobby at the Mizrahi Developments office on Toronto's Davenport Road.

company that processed accounting applications and income-tax returns for accounting and law firms and small businesses. "When IBM introduced their personal computer (PC), a group of us saw an opportunity to bring the computing of taxes onto a PC, enabling the accountant to prepare their clients' tax returns in the comfort of their own offices," he says. "We were successful, and over the next five years, we captured significant market share. Entrepreneur Kevin O'Leary owned a software company at the time. He saw a void in the market, and he approached us to buy our company. We made a deal where we took back shares in exchange for a buyout in his company. The rest is history."

Later, Sicilia got into the natural stone game after being introduced to Gemstar Group founder and president, Frank Rossi. "Since that introduction a few years back, Frank and I have partnered and worked collaboratively on many projects like Hotel X Toronto and the Shangri-La, as well as the Telus building in Vancouver." The Shangri-La Hotel, for instance, has 500,000 square feet of interior and exterior slab and tile finishes, including 375 condos with book-matched marble full wall slabs.

Today, the hard-surface and natural stone industry has grown immensely — there's competition and developers are trying to impart their unique signature to

differentiate themselves. Still, Sicilia likes the challenge of what the industry brings. "Years ago, you went to your local supplier and bought what was available. Now, the world is open for business. This creates an array of opportunities — our reach is global," he says. He also likes the timelessness of stone. "In the words of my good friend Sam Mizrahi (developer of The One), natural stone has gravity — a feel-good sense. Look at cathedrals around the world that are centuries old. Quality should never be forsaken for price."

If his bustling career in stone wasn't enough, Sicilia's Sherwood Ventures keeps him busy. The two companies under Sherwood, Truefitt & Hill and Blowdry Lounge, pay homage to his father's business. "I was on a business trip in London, England, 25 years ago when I came across what was known as 'the oldest established barbershop in the world,' and court hairdressers to British royalty," he says. "Growing up in a family whose father owned and operated a hair salon, it was always in my DNA." So, he and his wife, along with partner Rick Ricci, bought the Canadian rights to the brand. "Ten years later, I embarked on expanding our presence in the hair industry by opening Blowdry Lounge salons with my wife, along with my kid brother and celebrity hairstylist, Beni. We now operate three. I've always been driven to be surrounded with the best-of-the-best brands."

Sicilia is zealous about his businesses, but he's even more passionate about his family. "Lorena has been my partner and a leading force in our family and business success," he says with pride. His daughter, Amanda, works in marketing and social media, while his son, Andrew, is a Toronto firefighter. "I'm very proud of both my children," he says, adding he's a die-hard cottager and loves boating, cars, motorcycling and playing ice hockey. "My best times and most restful periods are spent on Georgian Bay."

Perhaps the most inspiring quality about Sicilia is his philanthropy. He started a charity golf tournament nearly 20 years ago that's raised a significant amount of money for Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children, for example. He also started a computer bursary endowment grant at York University and a founding member of the Crohns and Colitis Celebrity Gala. "I go out of my way to make things happen. I put people together who can benefit and help each other," he says. "I've always been passionate about helping others." **11**