

# W GENTRY WEALTH

PEOPLE • INVESTING • ENJOYING • GIVING



PIONEERING VC REID DENNIS | JETS, YACHTS, AND MORE  
HIGH END TRAVEL NOW | VALUE OF EXECUTIVE MEDICINE  
SPOTLIGHT ON THE INDEPENDENT INSTITUTE  
ASTON MARTIN'S VIRAGE | WHITEWATER ADVENTURE

AUTUMN 2011

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On November 15, the Bay Area-based  
nonprofit, The Independent Institute, will  
celebrate 25 years of non-partisan, scholar-  
ly research and education focused on  
in-depth studies of critical social and eco-  
nomic issues with a gala reception honor-  
ing former President of Poland and Nobel  
Laureate Lech Walesa, world-acclaimed  
novelist, politician, journalist, and essayist  
Mario Vargas Llosa, and economist and  
historian Robert Higgs. All three will be  
presented with the Alexis de Tocqueville  
Award in recognition of their exceptional  
contributions to humanity in advancing  
the ideas and ideals of individual liberty,  
entrepreneurship, personal responsibility,  
civic virtue, and the rule of law. *Gentry  
Wealth* reports.



## EDITOR

### L'ART DE VIVRE

While compiling this fall issue of *Gentry Wealth*, our Editorial team pondered the question: What does it mean to live well? Obvious answers include meeting one's creature comforts and exceeding them, but we wanted to take this notion a step further. To that end, we interviewed legendary Silicon Valley venture capitalist Reid Dennis. Dennis will be recognized in November with the Stanley Hiller Intrepid Pioneer Award for his extraordinary efforts in aviation. Dennis is also a major philanthropist carefully choosing where his dollars can make the most impact (*The Pioneer*, page 20).

Contributing Editor Kristine Carber also catches up with travel guru Gwen Books. Do you need to put together a family reunion for 30 people in the Loire Valley and don't know where to begin? Are you up for a safari in Botswana, but haven't a clue who to call? Books does. She has made a career of traveling the globe and acquiring an astonishing little black book of contacts that she calls on to make the vacations of a lifetime for her clients precisely that. Carber discusses the luxury travel industry today with Books and discovers some of Books' current favorite destinations (*The Wanderer*, page 22).

*Gentry Wealth's* Robin Hindery takes a look at Executive Medicine. Increasingly, companies are demanding that c-level executives and board members have executive physicals, but the mainstream population is catching on as well. These detailed exams are all about understanding your health and mapping a plan of prevention versus reaction to a health crisis. What might seem expensive in the short term could very well prove to be the best investment you ever make (*Executive Medicine*, page 48).



Stefanie Lingle Beasley, Editorial Director

Also in this issue, Brennan Rego takes on the Salmon River and Brian Douglas gets behind the wheel of the newest Aston Martin.

Finally, we take a look at the Independent Institute and the extraordinary committee behind this year's Independent Institute Gala in San Francisco on November 15 honoring former President of Poland, Lech Walesa (*Philanthropy*, page 58). Enjoy!

# W GENTRY WEALTH

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**P**

Eight years after launching her company, Gwen Books is still very much in demand, and it's easy to see why. She loves her work. She knows the business. And she is devoted to her clients. "I'm here for them 24/7," she says. "I know their needs. I know their wants." Many are friends as well as clients.

Books is a luxury concierge, a destination diva, a travel guru who specializes in memorable vacations. She calls it "legacy" travel because her trips create memories that will be with her clients forever. Over the years she has planned private yacht trips down the Nile, oyster odysseys along the coasts of France and Spain, and four-wheel excursions through the Sahara desert.

"Time is precious for my clients so they never say they want a luxurious journey. They want an experience. That is what luxury travel is about: the legacy. I have a client who is

taking her parents, both in their 80s, to Turkey this year. I love that she's taking them. It will be a wonderful moment for them, and great memories for her."

Growing up in Ojai in Southern California, Books never dreamed she would someday run a high-end travel company. She attended an all-girls school before getting married and moving to the Bay Area. "I led a sheltered life," she says. She took her first job working for a CEO at age 38. Part of the job involved planning offsite and personal travel.

"That gave me a unique perspective on what CEOs needed," she says. She wanted to expand this experience into a business. "I love research, I love to travel, and I am extremely organized and detail oriented." It was a natural fit.

Books approached a venture capitalist friend about her idea. "He called in his partner and said, 'Aren't you going to Europe this year?'" That week Books had her first client and the business was launched. Today her client roster reads like a Who's Who of CEOs: Reed Hastings of Netflix, Jeff Brody of Redpoint Venture Capital, and Frank Brosens of Taconic Capital.

Though her specialty is behind-the-scenes tours (cooking with a Michelin-rated chef, dance lessons at the Lido, or visiting Coco Chanel's apartment), she also loves to send clients to hidden gems they might miss on their own: a romantic caviar bar in an old palazzo or a special shop offering obscure souvenirs. "One client wanted an unusual gift from Rome and I sent him to the store that makes clothes for the Pope. He bought a pair of papal socks. Where else can you buy socks made for the pope?" she says.

Another client had taken a four-wheel drive across the Sahara desert in college and wanted to recreate it for his family. The trip started in Marrakech where the family rented a villa and explored souks (markets) for two days before taking a helicopter ride over the High Atlas Mountains to a kasbah (village), where they stayed in a large luxury tent. In the morning and at dusk they rode camels up the dunes to see the sunrise and sunset, and after dark, a local astronomer gave them stargazing lessons. The highlight was their four-wheel excursion through the desert.

As her client base grows, so do her resources. Books has a preferred list of airlines, tour guides ("they can make or break a trip"), accommodations, and drivers. "I've created a global network of specialists and they've all become friends." She conducts her own →

## THE WANDERER

TRAVEL EXPERT GWEN BOOKS DISCUSSES LUXURY TRAVEL NOW WITH GENTRY WEALTH'S KRISTINE CARBER.

PORTRAIT BY LIZ EDLUND  
TEXT BY KRISTINE CARBER

GWEN BOOKS LIFESTYLE MANAGEMENT JOURNEYS

*She knows the business. And she is devoted to her clients. "I'm here for them 24/7," she says. "I know their needs. I know their wants."*



site inspections, and will only work with hotels where she has an "inside" connection. "I need to know that someone will personally greet my clients," she says. She has just one yacht broker because "she knows right down to the napkin what I want." Recently, Books' son, Benjamin Kolwich, has joined the business. "I'm very particular and he understands my taste."

As far as what's "hot" in travel, Books says that her clients still find Paris "magical" and Italy "stunning," but the new favorite is Turkey. "I love Turkey. It's very exotic, very welcoming. I have 42 clients who went this summer and I have several who went this fall. One family of 22 booked tandem gulets."

Venice, Spain, and Morocco are also big draws, she adds, as well as Asia, with its Silk Road, spice tour, sacred temples, and wonderful history.

As for favorite hotels, she confides that in Paris she likes the Plaza Athénée. "It's the height of elegance. You'll never see luggage in the lobby there." Others are Le Bristol, Le Meurice, and the Four Seasons. In Istanbul, she's partial to Kempinski Palace and the Four Seasons. "Kempinski is much more elegant, but the Four Seasons is intimate and has a great pool for kids. They're both on the Bosphorus and I always begin the trip with a ride down the Bosphorus."

When it comes to her own special retreat, she says: "Sitting in a foreign café or bistro where I don't understand the language. That's like escaping into a new world. It's my ultimate soul food, global therapy." Travel, she says, is all about making dreams come true. ■