



INTERVIEW

## MEET JEAN-MARC GOOSSENS

International lawyer, real estate investment expert and Papuan tribe member.

Jean-Marc seems to be brought up to be a lawyer unlike any other. He kickstarted his professional career in the early nineties as the legal sidekick of French Formula 1 driver Bertrand Gachot, lived in a tribe in Papua New Guinea for three months, opened an office in Beijing and ended up with an intriguing international track record. Today, his ambition is no less.

**Jean-Marc, when exactly did the world become your playground?** My father, Albert Borschette, was a writer and Luxembourgian diplomat. He ended his career as European Competition Commissioner. Unfortunately he passed away when I was only a teenager. But his open mind must be in the genes. Years later, my stepfather started working for Sabena. I felt very fortunate to be able to enjoy the perks that came with his job. When I turned 16 I literally travelled to all possible Sabena destinations, more than once. The world opened up to me. That childlike sense of wonder while meeting new faces and places won't let go ever since.

**Did you aim for an international clientele for that reason, when you started working?** Actually it was my college friend Bertrand Gachot in particular, who got that ball rolling. While we were studying together, he made up his mind to become a Formula 1 pilot. With utmost success. By the time I graduated as a lawyer, he had conquered a F1 seat and became one of the better racers of his time. I was taking care of all his sponsor deals and contracts.

When Michael Schumacher replaced him on Francorchamps after an incident, I negotiated his first Formula 1 contract. We signed it outside, on a plastic garden table. Back then, I was more famous in the F1 world than

he was. (laughs) But from that moment on his career was launched. Soon other F1 teams and some renowned golf and tennis players followed, whom I accompanied all over the world. So, in a way, my career started in the fast lane too!

**The next few years you moved things up a gear, going fast on a multifaceted career path.** True, I pursued my passion, travelled a lot and created a career around it for a few years. But I hardly had the chance to see the F1 towns - let alone countries - I stayed in. I was discussing this with the CEO of an American NGO while playing golf in Mexico, when my professional life took another turn. He suggested to come and help him with the logistics and legal issues of expeditions for NGOs in South-East Asia, mainly in Papua New Guinea. I accepted his offer a few years later. Eight months a year, I lived in Port Moresby, the capital. During the other four months I lived on the Australian Gold Coast. I helped researchers, photographers and film crews of National Geographic to organise themselves in the rainforest. Getting permissions from the different tribes seemed the hardest part. While negotiating with them, I became more and more intrigued by their way of life. I was so fascinated, that I decided to join the Huli tribe and went through an initiation rite. I lived among them for three months without









The Huli tribe, the largest indigenous group on Papua New Guinea, wear ornamented wigs from their own hair and paint their faces yellow, red and white. An intimidating first encounter.

water, electricity or any kind of information from the outside world. I slept in a tree and spent my days hunting and fishing. It was a golden time, but I wasn't making much money. It still helps me to put everything in perspective. Even today, I often think of the Huli.

**That must have been the ultimate trigger for the Socrates family to entitle you as Extraordinary Traveler! How did you meet Alain and Michou?** True that! After the crisis hit hard in 2008, everything changed. When the stock market crashed, I had to adjust, just like my clients did. I moved to Miami and went back to the origin of the crisis to take apart its mechanism. I realized very quickly that when the market recovered there were a lot of opportunities to be realized. The 'capital of South America' would soon become very attractive for potential investors, for many reasons. I was lucky to be the right man in the right place at this perfect tipping point.

"THE BEST INVESTMENTS YOU CAN MAKE ARE THE JOURNEYS YOU UNDERTAKE. THEY BRING WISDOM. THEY CHANGE YOU FOREVER AND FOR THE BETTER. THAT'S WHAT I LOVE MOST ABOUT SOCRATES PROJECTS. IT CELEBRATES THIS WAY OF LIFE TO THE MAX."

JEAN-MARC GOOSSENS

Meanwhile, Alain and his family had travelled extensively through South and North America and Africa, and they were looking for investment projects in real estate. Alain read an article about my Miami business in *Le Soir*, that headlined that Huli experience as well. I tend to camouflage this 'wilder side' of me, because it's likely to scare off investors. But, nonetheless, for Alain it seemed to be the deciding factor. A lawyer living in the jungle... that surely grabbed his attention. It's this shared passion for extraordinary travel experiences that brought us together. The fact alone that Alain became the family's personal pilot is fantastic... I often put my life into a pilot's hands. It demands so much self-discipline to earn a place into the cockpit.

**You've explored the world in many different ways. What was your most memorable trip, next to the Huli experience?** My solo hike around Easter Island, one of

the most isolated islands in the world. Its 887 giant Moai statues have turned it into one of the most well known and most mysterious islands. A physically very demanding, but unforgettable trip.

**Do you still have a bucket list, after all this? A trip with Socrates Projects, maybe?** Hell yeah, I'm never not travelling. Once I've earned enough money, I start dreaming and packing again. At the moment I'm teaching International Investments in Singapore's Management University. The first thing I teach my students is that the best investments you can make are the journeys you undertake. They bring wisdom. They change you forever and for the better. That's what I love most about Socrates Projects. It celebrates this way of life to the max. It's an honor to be part of their exclusive league. I hope to encounter more extraordinary travellers through this initiative *en cours de route*.