

A full-page photograph of Roger Martin, a middle-aged man with thinning hair, wearing a black tuxedo and a bow tie. He is standing on a stage, holding a vintage-style microphone in his right hand. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background consists of heavy red curtains. Two bright spotlights are visible: one above his head and one to his right, creating a dramatic effect with lens flares and casting a shadow of him on the dark stage floor.

# *the* DEAN MARTIN SHOW

BY GERALD HANNON  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SANDY NICHOLSON

**HOW ROGER MARTIN ACCOMPLISHED THE REMARKABLE FEAT OF  
PUSHING THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO'S JOSEPH L. ROTMAN  
SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT NEAR THE TOP OF THE BUSINESS SCHOOL HEAP**

**HINT: A LITTLE RAZZLE-DAZZLE**



One very sultry evening in early August, a small group of faculty from the University of Toronto's Joseph L. Rotman School of Management has gathered to host the annual barbecue welcoming into second year the five members of the student council. We are picturesquely distributed about the lovely colonnaded terrace backing Rotman dean Roger Martin's Rosedale home. It overlooks a swimming pool, and a cascade of trees and shrubbery leading down to one of the enclave's quiet streets. The student council's four young men and one young woman (who points out that the percentage of women enrolled at Rotman is about the same—27% at last reckoning) are personable, confident, chatty.

Martin is a little late, but finally beams in with his characteristic verve, wearing a salmon-coloured New Yorker polo shirt, beige shorts and—nice touch—turquoise flip-flops. He is at ease with the students, casual. At one point, he takes the whole gang to the basement for a tour of his climate-controlled wine cellar—"my vice," he calls it. He talks about his hometown of Wallenstein, Ontario, and

operate as artists almost as much as they do as number crunchers—a belief that has shaped an approach to business he calls "integrative thinking." This belief is also at the core of the Rotman curriculum, and it's a concept many say is behind the spectacular rise in the school's fortunes (though detractors—and there are some—feel Martin's greatest talent is in crafting media "sizzle" when a big chunk of the "steak" came courtesy of donor Joseph Rotman's multimillion-dollar gift to the school). Since his appointment in 1998, Martin has accomplished the remarkable feat of moving Rotman's *Financial Times* ranking as an MBA-granting business school from 72nd place to 24th in the world—with a promise to take it into the top 10 before the end of his tenure four years from now.

Martin is also the author of the well-received business book *The Responsibility Virus*, a contributor of newspaper opinion pieces, the subject of many a business profile and an advocate of what he calls "business design." He has also written about virtue and happiness, topics one thinks of as more the province of a Plato or Aristotle than as naturals for a business world that has given us Enron and its kin.

His sense of virtue, moderation and restraint extends to his domestic arrangements. His house is large, but not vulgar. We spend an evening in the living room, which is comfortable but, like the rest of the place, not showy. There



**MARTIN HATED HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL, DESCRIBING IT AS ANTI-INTELLECTUAL.**

**"I REMEMBER ONE STUDENT SAYING NO, THERE MUST BE A NEW WAY OF LOOKING AT THIS, AND THE GUY WAS HISSED"**

the feed business his family operated, about his days as a student at Harvard and about Monitor Co., the consulting firm that made his fortune. Somehow, the presence of an apricot in the dessert leads him to an anecdote about pro-bono work he did in Russia, which leads to his bringing out sets of Russian matryoshka dolls representing that country's political leaders. But he listens as well, probing the students on what they want and what they're planning. When he hears that one of their priorities will be to strengthen the bond between first- and second-year students, he's exultant. "I love it," he says. "The second-year students at Harvard couldn't give a rat's ass about first-year students."

He says he hated Harvard Business School, describes it as having been anti-intellectual and obsessed with conventional case studies that break the business world into manageable bits when the real world, the big picture, is never quite that tidy. "I remember one student saying no, there must be a new way of looking at this," he says, "and the guy was hissed."

The real world, in Roger Martin's mind, requires that businessmen and women

are paintings, some of them by his wife, Nancy Lang. There are books. Some pottery. There is a vintage table-soccer game (he has two sons, Lloyd, 20, and Daniel, 15, and a daughter, Jennifer, 18). There are two black cats, Harriet and Olivia, and a white bichon frise called Snowy. When he sinks into the sofa, 50-year-old Roger Martin takes off his socks.

It is a given that people who know Martin will describe him as "energetic." Even he describes himself so, but in a situation like this, it's not obvious. He's not the kind of man who fidgets. When he eats, he takes small, precise bites. He's not a rat-a-tat-tat speaker—in fact, he has an odd, almost teenage inclination to up-speak. When he leans back into the sofa, one arm arched back over his head, legs out just so, you might even describe him as relaxed. But behind the stillness is an energy that is coiled and tremblingly ready to move. When he stands up to get you something, a drink perhaps, the action is sudden, decisive. These are lifelong traits, say his family and friends. "To my mind, Roger has always been Roger," says his younger brother Brad, a lawyer in Toronto. "Smart, competent and driven. If you'd asked me when I was 12 years old and he was just 15 whether he'd accomplish a lot, I would have said sure. It was clear, even then."

Mind you, there would not have been a lot of boys to compare him with in the small southwestern Ontario village of Wallenstein, a region of farms and related businesses, and home to a large Mennonite community, of which his family were members. There were about 50 people in the village when Roger was growing up, with, as he puts it, "a general store, three houses on one side of the road, and four houses on the other." (The immediate Martin family would have comprised seven of those 50 people—Delphine and Lloyd Martin had five children.) There was also the family business, Wallenstein Feed & Supply, started by his father in 1958, and run today by Roger's older brother, Rick.

By his own account and those of others, Martin was not an exceptional



high school student. "I liked to learn," he says, "but I was really into sports—my persona was as a jock. I had a steady high school girlfriend. I wasn't into drugs or fast cars. I was a boring, regular guy."

So much so, it seems, and with so developed a reputation as a jock, that his high school guidance counsellor didn't take him seriously when he asked for advice on which university he should attend (he was considering law). They're all the same, his counsellor told him, presumably assuming the boy, like every other jock, would end up at the school with the best sports team. Martin's reaction, he says, was "moral outrage. I was athlete of the year, but it was clear he hadn't checked my academic records. So it popped into my head—I'm going to go to Harvard. I'll show him."

He was accepted—"I'm sure," he says today, "that I got in on the novelty ticket"—but he almost didn't go. "I had a steady girlfriend, and my parents had a very Mennonite reaction against my going: 'It's a fancy place where you pay big bucks to get a fancy degree to become a fancy person.' So I did the unthinkable.

arts baccalaureate, economics major, in 1979, but he wasn't ready to leave. He wanted to be with his girlfriend, who would be studying at the John F. Kennedy School of Government in Cambridge. And he had a chance to coach the Harvard men's volleyball team, a job he very much wanted. "I needed an irreproachable excuse to stay in Cambridge," he says. (It seems not to have occurred to him, probably for reasons Mennonitical, that he might stay on merely for pleasure.) The solution? Enroll in Harvard Business School.

Harvard Business School is not easy to get into. He went about it in typical Martinitical fashion. He did not do what you are supposed to do to gain admission—that is, get the recommendation of someone called a "pre-business tutor" associated with the school. In fact, he deplored what you are supposed to do. "I hated the sense of a connection getting you places," he says. "I hated the notion of sucking up to a pre-business tutor in hopes that he'd write you a letter." Nine of those admitted that year came directly from college. He was the only one of those nine who managed it without that recommendation.

**H**is first job, after graduating with an MBA and returning to Toronto, was with the Canada Consulting Group in 1981. He was just 24, and describes himself then as "positively annoying. I'm surprised they put up with me. I remember two months after I got there, a senior partner gave me a report he'd worked on and asked for an analysis. I wrote that the thing was shabbily done, that the conclusions were completely unrelated to the data and had clearly been written before the analysis was done." Martin got hell for that. Instead of backing off, he tightened up his analysis and sent it to *The Globe and Mail*—which published it on the editorial page. "There was a blow-up," he remembers. "The partner was embarrassed,

**MARTIN WAS EARNING \$3 MILLION (U.S.) A YEAR AT MONITOR.**

**HE LEFT PARTLY BECAUSE HE HAD DEVELOPED A RADICAL NEW VISION OF WHAT A CONSULTING COMPANY MIGHT BE,**

**A VISION NOT SHARED BY OTHERS AT MONITOR**

I let the deadline for acceptance pass. But I had this great teacher, my history teacher, and he took me aside and pointed to a wall and said, 'If I could put you up against that wall and beat you till you accept going to Harvard, I'd do it.' So I did some more thinking. And I called Harvard back and they said, 'Okay, if you send us a telegram and a deposit by courier.'

He was in, to study economics, math, statistics and psychology, but he didn't much like it when he got there. "I was very unhappy my first year," he remembers. "At home I was used to walking a few hundred yards out the front door and being nowhere, and I found the city oppressive. I was doing terribly—got a C in economics on the first test. I called home for sympathy, and my mother said, 'Oh Roger, that's okay. Why not just quit and come back and go to Waterloo?'" Smart psychology on his mother's part. Her son's reaction? "I'm not gonna quit." She had pissed him off. So he hunkered down.

It paid off. Soon he was getting As, had fallen in love with economics, began making friends (including a girlfriend) and threw himself into sports, particularly volleyball. He would graduate, with an

and I thought I'd get fired." He wasn't. "I was young and foolish. I'm much more mature now, but life is too short," he says, "to have to work at something in a stupid way."

Not ever having to work in a stupid way was one of the reasons he stayed at Monitor for 13 years. He joined in 1985, just two years after its founding by a group of Harvard grads. One of the founding members was Mike Porter, who had recently published a book, *Competitive Strategy*, that had made him something of a guru. "We were the Mike Porter firm and had his tool set," Martin says, "and that made us very popular. We had big clients right at the start, which is unusual for a new firm. But there was an enormous amount of risk and sacrifice, too—at our first office, our desks were doors lying across metal filing cabinets. I loved it. I miss it."

He loved the kind of consulting work he got—"the odd ones, the one-offs, that was my portfolio at Monitor. I tended to do studies where there wasn't already a good diagnosis of the problem. That's what I like—the more abstract and weird, the better." He also loved the fact that Monitor was as much a cause to him as a job. He wanted to make the world a better place by helping businesses to be better run, more efficient and more competitive. Not only because that would make more money for shareholders, but because, he says, business is the most important force on the planet for bettering people's lives, more important than governments, which merely set the context in which business operates. (It's unlikely that all the other principals in the company shared those beliefs—he says he was the only one at a company retreat who didn't bother answering the question, "How much do you want to make?") During his years with Monitor, he saw it grow from a handful of Harvard buddies to a firm with offices in 15 cities, and though he may not have cared how much he made, he was earning some \$3 million (U.S.) a year by the end of his time there (he earns \$350,000 at U of T). He left partly because he had developed a radical



new vision of what a consulting company might be, a vision that wasn't shared by others at Monitor. "I had to decide," he says, "whether I wanted to be a guy at the forefront of a mainstream firm, or a guy who carves out a different niche."

He has made the University of Toronto that niche, and endowed Rotman with the Martin-inspired and -developed brand, integrative thinking. It is "an art," he wrote in the fall, 1999, issue of *Rotman* magazine, "not a formula or algorithm that can be followed routinely from start to finish." Business training is so functional—that is, marketing, finance, strategy, organizational behaviour—that schools have been turning out narrow automatons. Integrative thinking should mean opening up thinking across functions, a big part of Martin's thrust. Martin believes that business leaders tend to simplify complex problems—for very understandable reasons. Difficult problems do seem manageable if you pare off elements that seem minor or peripheral, but obsession with stability and clarity, he feels, can stifle and derail a truly innovative, creative solution that integrates these ele-

ments were heading elsewhere. Within his first seven-year term, Martin managed to quadruple the school's endowment (to \$83 million), quadruple tuition fees (the two-year program at Rotman costs a Canadian \$56,450) and raise professors' salaries to competitive levels.

Competition for both students and faculty is clearly intense. David Saunders, dean of the School of Business at Queen's University, says, "I have great respect for Roger Martin. He's bright, articulate and passionate, and a great leader for Rotman. But I would still fight him for the next great faculty member or student, and he'd fight me." True enough—the combative Martin has had a run-in with Carol Stephenson, dean of the Richard Ivey School of Business at the University of Western Ontario, though the two are generally on collegial terms. A student told Martin that Ivey was sending letters to Rotman students, proposing that an Ivey representative talk to them about their decision to choose Rotman over Ivey. "I phoned the dean at Ivey," Martin says, "and I said, 'I understand what you're doing, but you must understand that for every student you get to switch schools, I will get one of yours to switch to us, no matter how much it costs me. That is my firm goal, because this is bad behaviour, and it will be a terrible thing if I encourage you.'"

According to Della Bradshaw, business-education editor at the *Financial Times* and the woman responsible for compiling the paper's highly respected global rankings of MBA schools, the most significant improvements under Martin's leadership have been the appointments "of a lot of very good new faculty, often from the U.S.," and the fact that "the school is getting its students better jobs, notably in finance." She also credits integrative thinking with "increasing the profile of the school internationally, particularly amongst other business schools." Though she thinks Martin is a great ambassador for the school, she also notes that he did take over at a time when the school had just been given a gift of some \$15 million from Toronto businessman Joseph Rotman: "The only way was up."

**F**rom his office on the third floor of the school's building on St. George Street, Martin presides over some 900 students (about 200 are part-time) and 90 full-time faculty. I have Martin's schedule for September through December. He does spend a lot of time talking with and advising students. The schedule shows all the usual administrative meetings, the teaching, the commitments to boards both public and private, but at least once a week he meets with current students or graduates



**ONE JOURNALIST DESCRIBES MARTIN AS A GREAT AMBASSADOR FOR THE SCHOOL, BUT SHE ALSO NOTES THAT HE TOOK OVER JUST AFTER IT WAS GIVEN A GIFT OF SOME \$15 MILLION: "THE ONLY WAY WAS UP"**

ments. He gives as an example a manager who makes changes in a production process without considering the impact on the workers "because people and their feelings are notoriously hard to model." Accept that complexity, he argues. Welcome surprise. Don't fear seeming incompetent—you'll make mistakes, but you'll also develop new skills.

Then-president of U of T Rob Prichard offered Martin the dean's job in 1998. The previous dean had resigned the year before, having been accused of mismanaging a conflict-of-interest scandal. Tuition fees were low. Professors' salaries were low as well, which meant the best

who turn to him for advice, or for help in finding a job. I spoke with Shruti Owerie, the one woman on the Rotman student council. She says, "I knew he wouldn't be a typical academic, but I'm surprised at how hands-on he is and how visible around the school. He offered to help me find a summer job—for a dean to do that? I tell this to students from other schools, and they're like 'no way.'"

He also does a lot of media. "It's important for the school to be known in the international milieu," he says, "and I do a lot of talking with journalists from outside Canada" (September alone involved interviews with a Danish journalist, and with representatives from the magazines *BusinessWeek* and *Fast Company*). It can pay off big-time. In its August 1, 2005, issue, *BusinessWeek* tapped Martin as one of just seven "innovation gurus," and he has since gone on to write a column for *BusinessWeek Online*.

He loves to write, says he has a good four more books in him, that "writing makes me happy when I'm really tired. I like ideas, figuring stuff out and distilling it down to something comprehensible." His regular appearances



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in prominent national and international publications are also, of course, smart strategy for boosting Rotman's profile, and his essays have appeared in, among others, the *Harvard Business Review* and *Barron's*.

His articles display a wide range of interests, and attempt considerably more than wise counsel on maximizing profits and efficiency. He has written on how to improve Canadian television drama, on why stock-based compensation for executives is a bad idea, on redesigning health care, on tax reform, on how to reform the equalization payment system among the provinces. The issues and preoccupations are as much a citizen's as a businessman's.

As a journalist, he is lucid and persuasive. As a theoretician in the arcane world of the business book or the academic essay, he is an exemplar of a style previously the exclusive province of French critical theory—one that runs the gamut from the comically obvious to the cosmically impenetrable. His writings can sometimes be a swamp of words and phrases like "heuristic," "salience," "disequilibrium" and "disintegrating the causal map"—when about all he seems to be saying is that you have to look at the big picture, that business is more than a formula, and that you shouldn't be afraid to take chances. *The Responsibility Virus*, a self-helper on avoiding the control-freak and shrinking-violet syndromes, is easier on the reader (though, like many such books, it has a weakness for the non-illuminating diagram), relies on cute little scenarios (even domestic ones) for illustration and analysis, and impresses as much for its goodness of heart as for its insights. He really does want the world of business, and the world in general, to be a better place.

His brother Terry compares Mennonites to Jews (we're not as intellectually playful, he says, but we are more highly utilitarian). "We developed the skills and mindset of an outsider community," he explains, "with considerable cultural capital. When communities like that secularize, they are quite successful, and bring values that are both entrepreneurial and moral. We're part of the secularizing generation, the first to really go out into the world with both a core morality and utilitarianism. For us, ideas have to serve a purpose. You have to actualize them."

Martin's wife, Nancy Lang, adds that it's important to remember that the highest calling in the Mennonite community is to be a teacher. "He's back

*the* **ANTI-  
MARTIN**



**ROGER MARTIN MAY BE NO. 1 AMONG CANADIAN BUSINESS DEANS IN GARNERING MEDIA ATTENTION, BUT HE IS NO. 2 IN BRAGGING RIGHTS FOR WHO RUNS THE TOP CANADIAN BUSINESS SCHOOL**

When Dezső Horváth took over the Schulich School of Business, located on the York University campus in a nondescript suburb of Toronto, the cross-town rival to Rotman was labelled "the factory"—for its bland appearance and its reputation for churning out graduates. But in the past 18 years, Horváth has positioned Schulich as a thoroughly modern institution. He moved the school into a striking new \$110-million building, with the funding support of his lead benefactor, gold magnate Seymour Schulich. He has buffed the curriculum, building a strong international business component, as well as strengthening its focus on teaching social responsibility and ethics. And he has developed networks of partner schools in Latin America, Asia and the United States.

At first glance, Horváth is the anti-Martin, the antithesis to the U.S.-trained former management consultant. At 63, the Schulich dean is a career academic and Euro-intellectual. Born in Hungary and educated in Sweden, he has a strong residue of a Hungarian accent, which becomes thicker as he lurches into impassioned monologues on his school's virtues. While some academic critics still sneer at Horváth's pretensions to business-school supremacy, no one denies his ambition and drive. He has given the feisty, suburban Schulich a profile that, for the first time, rivals its snootier downtown rival. The proof is in the numbers: Horváth guided his faculty to No. 18 in the widely followed *Financial Times* rankings of global MBA schools for 2006, six spots ahead of Rotman.



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to his Mennonite roots in a way. He'd hope to be remembered as a teacher rather than as the dean."

He is certainly remembered. Greer Hozack, now a director with pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, was a Rotman student before and during Martin's tenure. She recalls the shaky administrative feel of the place before his arrival, and how "as soon as he came in, he began to talk long-term. He gave us a rudder, a sense of stability. It also seemed personal to him—it wasn't just another job. He was very vested in it." Hozack's opinions aren't universally accepted, however. Even today, students and professors debate the merits and otherwise of the Martin regime, how important branding is, whether or not, given enough funding, it was a bit of a no-brainer to create a great business school in the country's principal business city. Though there are decidedly different takes among alumni on the Martin years, most will agree, Hozack says, that "his links to the business world gave the school the seal of approval for recruiters. A lot more high-falutin' companies came to Rotman after Roger arrived. And he brought a ton of energy and commitment. He's energized by what he does, and he energizes people around him."

Sally Osberg, president and CEO of the Skoll Foundation, a California-based organization devoted to "investing in, connecting and celebrating social entrepreneurs," and on whose board Martin sits, talked about an influential piece he wrote for the *Harvard Business Review*. Called "The Virtue Matrix," it delineates, she says, "the barriers and opportunities for corporations who want to conduct themselves as good corporate global citizens and still fulfill shareholder expectations. That is the kind of thinking he forces our foundation to pursue. He's not interested in altruistic behaviour per se; he's interested in a highly leveraged philanthropy that gets at root causes, and in finding the right solutions for the right places at the right time to get long-lasting results. He is a man of character and principle, and he is driving a new paradigm for business education in the 21st century."

Whether a brand like integrative thinking is truly innovative is still open to debate, though it has its champions. Richard Schnieders, chair and CEO of Sysco Corp. (North America's leading food-service marketer and distributor), calls himself a "big proponent of integrative thinking, partly because many of the problems that business has caused have been the result of non-integrative thinking. Take Enron—essentially the result of following the profit motive at any cost. If there'd been a broader perspective in the executive suite, they'd have been thinking of the broader impact for society. I find Roger's ideas, and his organizing his school around integrative thinking, have real applicability on the ground." There are, of course, other assessments. Basil Kalymon, a onetime prof at Rotman and now a professor of finance at the Ivey School, describes integrative thinking as "frankly, more sizzle than steak. I was there for the integrative thinking announcement, but really not much has changed from the previous regime." Kalymon says Ivey, with its emphasis on general management and case studies, has historically been the school with a true integrative mentality, though he concedes "we're only beginning to catch up on the PR side." In mid-September last year, Ivey's website and newspaper ads began trumpeting "Cross-Enterprise Leadership" as a "revolution in business education."

The system sounded like a straight rip-off of integrative thinking. I suggested as much to Martin in an e-mail, and his response began by saying, "I guess if imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, we should feel flattered. All in all, I think that this is a good thing...if after watching us do integrative thinking for seven years, Ivey became convinced it is the right direction, we should see that as a good thing." He then went on for more than 700 words explaining the ways in which the Ivey system was defective, how it lay "somewhere between considerably downstream from integrative thinking."

In the high-stakes world of competition for MBA students flush with cash, those Ivey newspaper ads mean that Rotman under Roger Martin is setting at least the PR agenda for Canadian business schools. The man's done more than that, of course. Bumping a business school's ranking up 48 points in seven years is no small achievement. If Martin successfully pilots Rotman into the Top 10 by 2010, he'll have made a rather convincing argument for what he set as a goal back in 2002: "developing the world's first truly integrative business curriculum."