

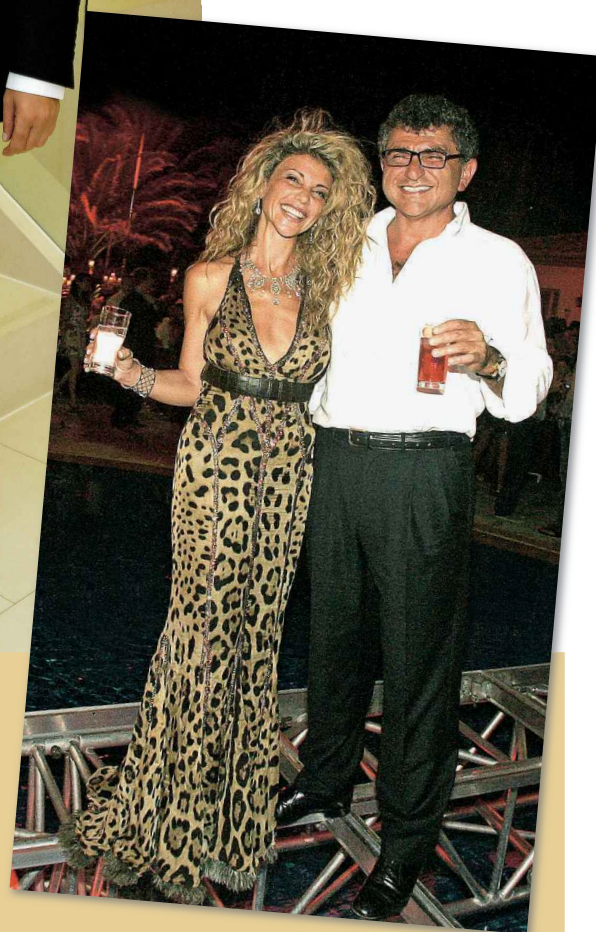


Above: Robert Tchenguiz with his wife Heather Bird in 2006



Left: Vivian Imerman in 2006 when he was CEO of Whyte & Mackay. Below: Lisa Tchenguiz with her brother Vincent, hosting a Dior fashion party at their St Tropez villa in 2006

Tchenguiz family in the War of the Rolls



The grapes of wrath

War has broken out between Vivian Imerman, the lecherous, luxurious man from Del Monte, and the billionaire Tchenguiz brothers. **Mark Hollingsworth** tells a very juicy tale of sex, money, divorce and a bulletproof Roller

If money, power, fame and luxury living are the ultimate aphrodisiac, then the wealthy fruit juice entrepreneur Vivian Imerman, renowned for being the Man from Del Monte, sure knows how to exploit it. Back in 1998, the multimillionaire South African tycoon embarked on a steamy affair with Tania Levin, a striking 19-year-old pop singer and the daughter of a close friend. They met in

London at the launch party for her new single. A tanned, broad-shouldered and physically imposing fitness fanatic, Imerman arrived in a dark blue £76,000 Porsche convertible and immediately turned on the flattery. 'You're absolutely gorgeous,' he whispered. 'So, are you the Man from Del Monte?' she asked teasingly. 'Yes,' he replied, smiling.

Within two weeks, the hazel-eyed blonde was spending a three-week holiday with Imerman in Singapore at the colonial home of a friend.

Imerman approached the relationship like a merger or acquisition. 'He knew exactly how to turn a woman on,' Levin told the *News of the World*. 'He made love to me for an hour and a half in every position. And then we did it again and again – five hours in all. I was so exhausted, I couldn't keep my eyes open any more. But when I woke up the next morning, he had gone jogging.'

The next day, the couple flew to Thailand for a business trip and stayed in the Presidential suite →



Below: Imerman with Robert Tchenguiz in St Tropez in 2006 and (left) Leconfield House, the shared office Robert Tchenguiz locked him out of earlier this year



of the Amanpuri Hotel in Phuket. After another marathon sex session, Levin woke up to be greeted by a silver tray on which lay a string of pearls. Imerman then took her out shopping and it was like a scene from *Pretty Woman*. 'He led me into the most opulent store and told me to try on anything I liked. As I went into the changing room, the girls kept on bringing me more and more of the dresses he had chosen while he sat sipping coffee. The bill was around £10,000.' On another occasion, Imerman picked up a copy of *Vogue*, chose the most expensive design from one of its pages and it was delivered to their hotel room within nine hours.

Levin's father, a friend and business associate of Imerman, was enraged. 'I don't want to be left to pick up the pieces,' he warned. But Tania was in love and the presents kept flowing. The next trip was to the tycoon's picturesque home in South Africa, on Clifton Beach in Cape Town, set on a secluded beach with a magnificent swimming pool. He bought his mistress thousands of pounds worth of jewellery: bracelets, a gold watch, a gold and diamond ring decorated with three elephants, a £1,500 Cartier watch, a blue amethyst heart ring of the same value and another pearl necklace.

But then the relationship took a less romantic turn: Imerman asked Levin to join him in group sex sessions. Another turn-off for Levin was that Imerman was always flaunting his wealth. 'How many people can live like me?' he told her. But he appeared serious about the relationship and asked her to move in with him. He even accompanied her to her father's 50th birthday party. But Levin became weary of the endless sexual demands and walked out. Imerman was shocked. 'But I treated you like gold,' he complained. 'That was the problem,' she

'The divorce is all about egos, a tit-for-tat thing'

said later. 'I was just another commodity to him.'

For many tycoons, sex is inextricably linked to a successful commercial career. 'There are those who believe business all comes down to sex,' wrote entrepreneur Luke Johnson in his book *The Maverick*. 'It is hard not to detect the influence of testosterone in the cut and thrust of takeovers. The thrill of the chase and the glory of the winner could apply equally to business or romantic conquests.'

For Imerman, the pursuit of the prey is clearly a motivating force. Now 53, this buccaneering financier, worth an estimated £450 million, has become a celebrity tycoon – a South African Sir Richard Branson. His fruit juice corporation was famous for its TV advertisement that declared in an excitable Spanish accent: 'The man from Del Monte, he say yes.'

Since 1993 Imerman has been based in London. Characteristically, he is driven around town in a £250,000 bulletproof Rolls-Royce with a black ash veneer, two DVD screens in the back and a personalised numberplate. Until very recently he lived in an elegant 18th-century townhouse in Mayfair with his second wife Elizabeth (Lisa) Tchenguiz.

Lisa was born in Teheran on 20 January 1965, the younger sister of the Iranian corporate raiders and property tycoons Robert and Vincent Tchenguiz. Robert, who introduced Princess Diana to Dodi Fayed, was one of the highest-profile victims of the credit crunch, although he and Vincent are still billionaires. Lisa is a glamorous and wealthy London socialite and has invested in a number of pet projects. She has been executive producer on two

films, *I Can't Think Straight* and *The World Unseen*, both of which starred Lisa Ray and Sheetal Sheth as leads – lesbian partners in real life who play lesbian characters in both films. She is also a partner in an Italian restaurant in St Tropez with her friend, fellow socialite Ivana Trump. She has her own yacht and drives a Rolls-Royce Phantom, which was presented to her in 2007 by Rolls-Royce chairman and chief executive Ian Robertson. In June 2008, she donated £100,000 to the Conservative party. She was previously married to the former Radio 1 DJ Gary Davies, whom she married in November 1992. The couple had a daughter, Ariella, but separated some time in late 2000 or early 2001, and in January 2001 she started a relationship with Imerman whom she had met at her birthday party in 1998. They married in November 2001 in London.

The Mayfair house in which Vivian and Lisa lived is owned by the Rotch Property Group Ltd, the investment vehicle of the Tchenguiz brothers. It was an idyllic arrangement as around the corner Imerman's three daughters from his first marriage live in a 7,000sq ft Georgian mansion.

But earlier this year Imerman's world imploded in acrimony. His marriage to Lisa ended and they embarked on an epic battle for the matrimonial assets worth millions of pounds, including the Rolls-Royce. 'It's all about egos and a tit-for-tat thing,' observed a friend of both sides. Even by divorce standards, the proceedings and negotiations have been vicious. 'I hope that I will never see this case again,' said High Court Judge Nicholas Warren in a rare moment



Vivian and Lisa at the Tory Summer Ball at the Roundhouse in 2008

of judicial candour. 'I will transfer this to the Family Division if it ever comes back before me.'

Imerman's brother-in-law, Robert Tchenguiz, was so enraged over the way he believed that his sister had been treated that he banned Imerman from entering the Mayfair office block the brothers-in-law shared. Tchenguiz issued strict instructions to his security staff to prevent Imerman from entering his fifth-floor office at Leconfield House, the former MI5 headquarters on Curzon Street. Imerman was furious and alleged that confidential commercial information had been downloaded from a computer server he shared with the Tchenguiz brothers. He secured an emergency injunction from the High Court in order to retrieve his possessions.

The South African may have been evicted from his office and home but he is far from destitute. When he sold his stake in Del Monte in 1999, he raked in £380 million. And in 2007 he shared a multimillion windfall with the Tchenguiz brothers when they sold the distillers Whyte & Mackay for £595 million.

For all his sexual adventures and flamboyant lifestyle, Imerman has come a long way from his modest South African origins. He was born Vivian Saul Imerman in Johannesburg on 21 September 1955. His grandfather was a Russian Jew who emigrated to South Africa after the 1917 revolution. His son, Samuel Imerman, became a successful chemist and businessman. By 1967, the 12-year-old Vivian had caught the family business bug and was serving customers in his grandfather's clothing shop before going to school. As a teenager in Johannesburg, Imerman dreamed of being a tycoon and, soon after leaving school, he bought into a nightclub. Impatient and ambitious, he started a business law degree but never found the time to complete his studies. It was at the height of the apartheid regime and, like most young men, he was conscripted into the South African armed forces and did his national military service.

As soon as he returned from the Border Wars that took place in southwest Africa (now Namibia) and Angola between South Africa and the Angolan government from 1966 to 1989, Imerman launched his first business venture in the chemicals industry. He began buying

redundant chemicals from factories and selling them to other companies. But like many self-made tycoons, he was given a head start by his father. He learned his trade by working for his father's company Lovasz, a chemical broking business. He travelled round factories with, as he later recalled, a 'truck and a black guy', buying used chemicals from one factory and selling them on to the next at a profit.

In the early Eighties, Imerman expanded into 'insurance salvage' products. He would buy goods damaged in transportation, repair them and sell them on at a hefty profit. But he found his calling in selling branded pharmaceutical goods and listed his company on the South African stock exchange in 1987.

Energetic and an enterprising risk-taker, Imerman acknowledged that his success was due to self-belief instilled in him by his father. 'He left me with the impression that I could conquer the world,' he said later. Indeed he used his father's company as a platform for expanding into branded foods. He then capitalised on the opportunities created by the divestment of American corporate interests in apartheid South Africa. He had already listed four companies in the food and pharmaceutical sectors. And when political pressure on the South African regime in the late Eighties intensified and prompted Western firms to sell and leave the country, Imerman made his move.

'I was very fortunate that I took advantage of that situation,' he later told the *Financial Mail*. 'When the Americans were forced to disinvest, I saw that as a great opportunity to try to pick up some of the very good assets that were extremely well run and were being sold off for other than commercial reasons.' In 1989 he bought into several US interests including Nabisco, Del Monte and the Ferro chemical group.

It was his purchase of Nabisco South Africa that propelled him to the big time. The deal included an option to buy Del Monte South Africa, which in 1993 enabled him to buy Del Monte International, backed by an investment from Anglo American and capital raised from his flotation of the food giant Royal Beech-Nut.

Smart, strategic and forward-looking, Imerman expanded his stake in Del Monte. By 1995 shrewd financial engineering resulted in the South African

'I'm not in business to be popular but to be effective'

increasing Del Monte International's stake in the separate Del Monte Asia from 15 per cent to 50 per cent without even putting in any more capital. He became managing director, Del Monte's earnings grew tenfold, he listed the company in Singapore at the height of the Asian boom and its value rocketed.

With cash to burn, Imerman moved to London. He bought

Heath House, a beautifully decorated mansion in Hampstead, and moved in with his then wife Gina, whom he had married in 1981. But his marriage collapsed due to his high workload. Imerman sold the property to Michael Dobson, the London head of Deutsche Bank, and after his divorce, moved into a beautiful £5 million Grade I-listed house on Hanover Terrace, overlooking the boating lake in Regent's Park. In 2001 he married Lisa Tchenguiz and they moved nearby into a new house on Cambridge Gate.

Imerman saw his future with the Tchenguiz clan. Later that year he bought into Kyndal (now Whyte & Mackay) with the brothers. Imerman was appointed executive chairman and invested heavily in the firm, expanding control, shedding jobs and displacing senior management. Six months later the chief executive, Brian Megson, left and was promptly replaced by Imerman.

Advised by management consultants, the hyperactive Imerman was ruthless in shaking up Whyte & Mackay. He cut costs, implemented redundancies and slashed management bureaucracies. In 2003 he increased his stake from 35 per cent to 60 per cent by controversially buying out the 60 shareholding employees. 'I am not in business to be popular,' he remarked at the time. 'I'm in business to be effective.'

In 2005 Imerman and the Tchenguiz family took control of the company after concluding a deal with the German investment bank WestLB, which had provided the £190 million in debt cover for the original buyout. In 2007 they sold Whyte & Mackay to United Spirits. The deal netted them a cool £595 million.

Today the formerly turbo-charged Imerman is said by business associates to have calmed down. He is divorced from Lisa and his business partners. And the story may yet have a happy ending. He is reportedly being consoled by his first wife Gina, who left him after his sexual misdemeanours were exposed ten years ago. The man from Del Monte may yet say yes for a third time. ■

'My father left me with the impression that I could conquer the world'