

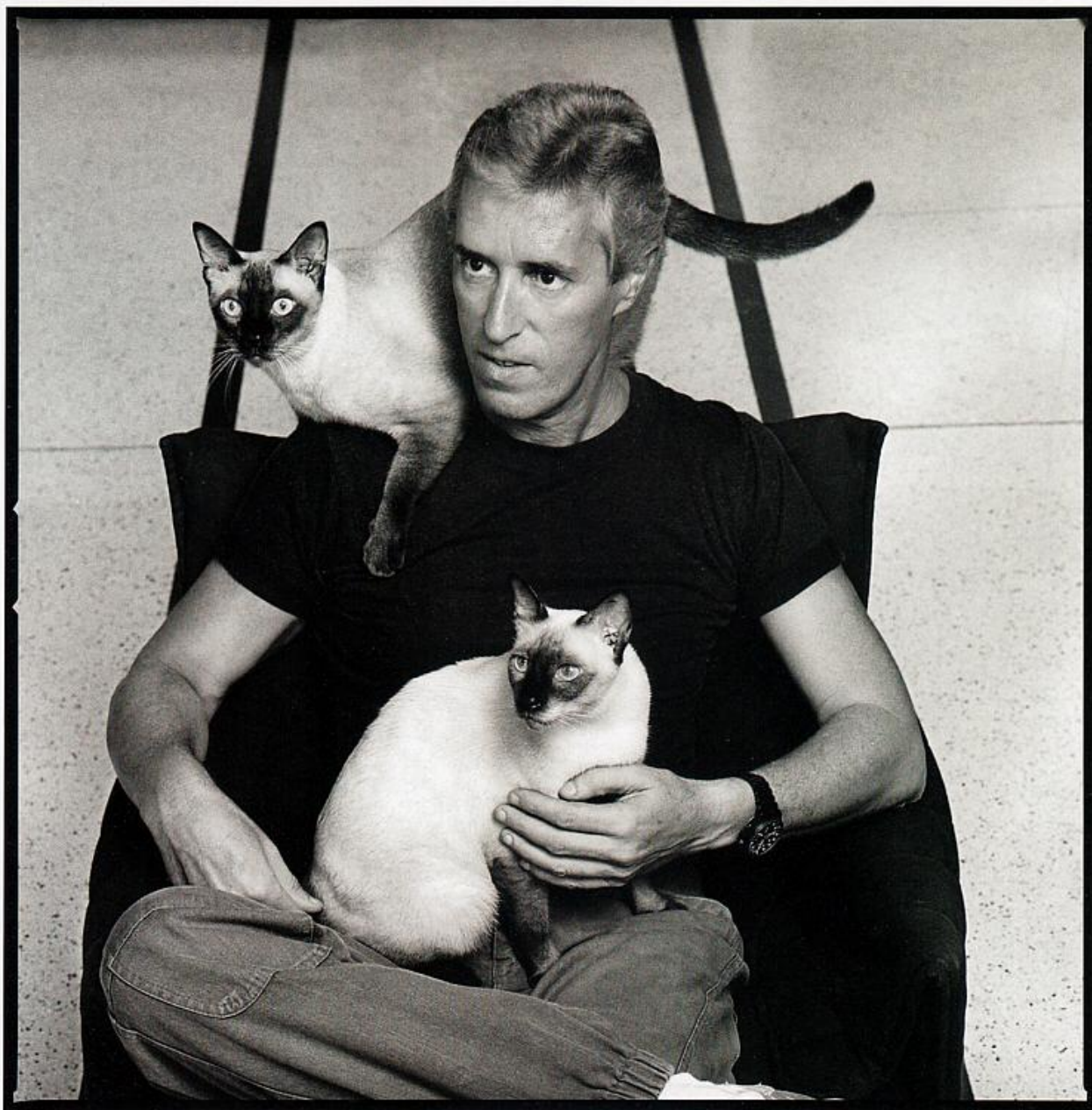


Patrick de Koenigswarter came to Manila in 1969 looking to open an office for his then employer (a multinational mining company). As a man of aristocratic lineage, he was subsequently ushered into the heart of Manila's society, turning into a Lord Snowdon of sorts, taking photographs of society. In this issue, he writes about his mother, the jazz baroness Pannonica "Nica" Rothschild, an important figurehead for jazz musicians, including Thelonius Monk and Charlie Parker.



**THE
BARON
NEXT
DOOR**

PORTRAITS BY STEVE TIRONA & WIG TYSMANS



All a Baron means, in Filipino terms, is that “one of your ancestors was a ‘crony’ of a King or an Emperor, and received the title as *utang na loob*—in our case, without land or castles regretfully!” shares British-French photographer Patrick de Koenigswarter—a Baron fully vetted by Burke’s Peerage and Debrett’s, if one cares to look.

“It’s actually one of the lesser titles of nobility in terms of ranking. In fact, [my family] has several of them—a French one, an Austrian one, and a Portuguese one, all baronial. There is even, I am told, a title of Papal Count awarded to one of our relatives, which we are supposedly entitled to claim.”

Members of the aristocracy have always tended to band themselves into one of two camps. One is firmly entrenched in tradition, predictably stodgy, right-wing, and conservative when it comes to politics. The other camp is progressive, freethinking, reformist, and open-minded—children of the Enlightenment, rather than entitlement.

The latter is where 78-year-old de Koenigswarter, a titled aristocrat

issuing from a wealthy capitalist family, has pitched his tent.

Based in the Philippines for over 40 years, he calls himself a “religious skeptic” and a “political atheist” with truly catholic tastes in virtually all matters other than religion. That the skeptic happens to be a gentleman with an illustrious pedigree—and a clean rap sheet to boot, with no whispers of profligacy, debauchery, drug-dealing, or bigamy—is impressive.

On the side of his father, the diplomat Baron Jules de Koenigswarter, he is a member of the French nobility. On the side of his mother, jazz patron Baroness Pannonica “Nica” Rothschild de Koenigswarter, he hails from the English arm of the Rothschilds, the once all-powerful Jewish banking dynasty with branches firmly entrenched in France, Great Britain, and Germany.

In this ostensibly more meritocratic world, titles may not mean as much, but they still carry some cachet in some societies—including the Philippines—where there seems to be a fair bit of jostling in certain circles for the closest thing to an aristocratic title, complete with sash-wearing privileges: honorary consul of this and that middling republic or, even better, a papal distinction.

While he doesn’t quite thrust his titles in your face, de Koenigswarter



THE RIGHT CIRCLES

The grounds of Tring Park, the 3,000-acre Rothschild estate in Hertfordshire, England, which was purchased in 1872 by Baron Lionel de Rothschild (Patrick de Koenigswarter's great-great-grandfather). **Below:** Banker and zoologist Lord Walter Rothschild in Hyde Park, London, 1930. **Opposite page:** De Koenigswarter photographed by Wig Tysmans with his two Siamese cats, Tai and Chi, in Manila, early 1980s.

All a Baron means, in Filipino terms, is that “one of your ancestors was a ‘crony’ of a King, and received the title as *utang na loob*—in our case, without land or castles regretfully!”

is not knocking it. In the past, he muses, a title might have been useful in bagging reservations at the snootiest restaurants, or, in shades of *Downton Abbey*, “the enhanced possibility of snaring a rich American heiress.” He recalls, bemused, how his Philippine-born son, David, was once referred to by local gossip columns (“thanks to Maurice [Arcache!]”) as “Baroncito David.”

With most title-dispensing countries now republics, the use of a noble title is unofficial and more complimentary. “On the other hand, in England a Baron is still addressed as ‘My Lord’ or ‘Your Lordship,’ which I must admit that I rather appreciate the sound of—especially considering my well-known views on religion!” says de Koenigswarter.

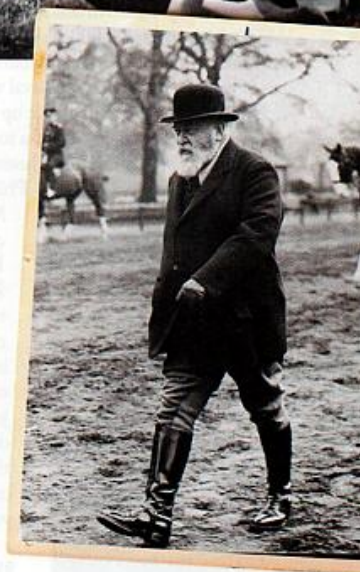
BEING BORN into the noble classes had its advantages in the good old days, when its members were not expected to exert themselves too much in order to make a living, and could devote more time to hobbies, passions, and pursuits ranging from the scientific to the eccentric.

The Rothschild family alone has produced a host of fascinating characters. There is de Koenigswarter’s grand-uncle Walter, the second Baron Rothschild. A banker and politician whose real love was zoology,

Lord Rothschild famously kept a carriage drawn by zebras, which he once drove to Buckingham Palace to prove that the striped equines could be tamed. He also amassed one of the largest natural history collections in the world at the family’s Hertfordshire estate, Tring Park.

De Koenigswarter’s grandfather, Charles Rothschild, was an entomologist who preferred insects to banking. His uncle, Victor, the third Baron Rothschild, was a biologist. A young cousin, David de Rothschild, is an environmentalist who campaigns against plastic waste by traversing the world’s oceans in his *Plastiki*, a boat made from plastic bottles.

“My real idol was Aunt Miriam,” he says, referring to his mother’s late sister, the distinguished entomologist and zoologist Dame Miriam Rothschild. Like his grandfather, she was a natural scientist with a particular penchant for fleas and parasites. He got to know his aunt when his parents decamped to Mexico, where his father had been named the



TRING PARK: PHILIP HORBURN/PHILIP HORBURN/PHOTOGRAPHY; WALTER ROTHSCHILD: PHOTODISC/GETTY IMAGES; 7: JIM RAY/PHOTO; 8: PHILIP HORBURN/PHOTOGRAPHY



French ambassador after World War II. The young Patrick was sent to England to stay with Miriam in her Northamptonshire estate, Ashton Wold, which covered 5,000 acres, including "agricultural land and a very large mansion built by my grandfather at the turn of the century, in the one of the last-remaining medieval woodlands in England."

De Koenigswarter had an ace up his sleeve over his distinguished aunt, however. As he recounts, "Thanks to my good friend, the abstract artist and Filipino butterfly collector Justin 'Tiny' Nuyda, there is a cute little

Philippine butterfly subspecies from Mindoro named after me: *Jamides cyta koenigswarteri*. 'Named after Baron Patrick de Koenigswarter, a keen photographer of insect life and vitally engaged in preserving natural environments.' When I proudly informed my world-renowned aunt of this, she replied that she was 'madly jealous,' because while she had half a dozen creatures named in her honor, they are all parasites or fleas, 'not one of them an attractive insect like your butterfly!'"

BUT PERHAPS the most colorful and rebellious Rothschild was de Koenigswarter's mother, Nica, who was named after an

extremely rare moth species. And like that winged creature, Nica often flew close to the proverbial flame.

Even before she became known as the "Jazz Baroness" for her unstinting, if eyebrow-raising friendship with many prominent jazz musicians of 1950s New York (she was the patron of composer-pianist Thelonious Monk and saxophonist Charlie Parker, among others), Nica was already a daring, unconventional trailblazer in many ways.

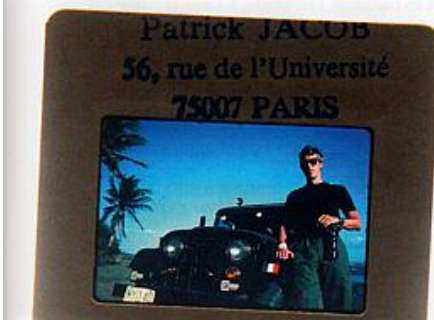
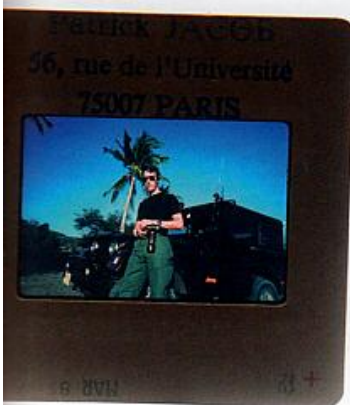
Instead of waiting out the war in the relative comfort of the Harry Guggenheim estate in Long Island, where she had deposited her children—Patrick, 4, and Janka, 2—for safekeeping, she found a way to join her husband in Africa, where he was fighting with Charles de Gaulle's Free French Army.

While de Koenigswarter had "a wonderful war, happily living in peace and luxury for some five years, commuting between the Guggenheim's summertime residence Falaise (a French medieval castle overlooking Long Island Sound), their Manhattan mansion, and hunting lodges on plantations in North Carolina and Georgia, and mingled with all sorts of American celebrities, famous writers, Broadway and publishing tycoons, literati, and politicians," his parents were living in decidedly more harrowing circumstances on the other side of the world.

"After the war, my much-bemedalled parents, both of whom miraculously survived an incredible number of mortal hazards during their campaigns with the Allied forces, arrived in New York in 1945 to reclaim us, and together we set off for my father's first post-war job as a French diplomat in Oslo, Norway," he says.

Unfortunately, the life of a diplomat's wife was not Nica's calling. Even the arrival of three more children—Shaun, Berit, and Kari—was not enough to keep her at her husband's side after he took up his ambassadorial post in Mexico.

"My mother began taking more frequent and longer trips to New York, where she increasingly immersed herself in the city's jazz circles," recalls de Koenigswarter. "She had been introduced to the famous jazz pianist Teddy Wilson by her brother, Lord Victor Rothschild, a keen jazz fan himself who



Thelonious Monk was not the cause of the marriage's demise. What prompted his father to initiate divorce proceedings was the death of saxophonist Charlie Parker in Pannonica's Fifth Avenue apartment—and the media scandal that followed.

had befriended and taken a series of piano lessons from Teddy, who in turn escorted Nica to all the hot jazz spots in the Big Apple and introduced her to musicians.

"My mother's warmth and down-to-earth charm did the rest, as did her obvious complete lack of prejudice or awkwardness in the company of black musicians, whom most white people in those days looked down upon as degenerates."

Through his mother he, too, became immersed in the world of jazz, though not quite in the same degree. "In early 1952, when I was 15, I spent a couple of weeks accompanying my mother on her nightly rounds to jazz clubs from Harlem to the Village, to concert venues and recording sessions. Nica was great fun to be with, and she brought me to famous nightspots such as the Stork Club, the Copacabana, Jilly's (Frank Sinatra's favorite after-hours dive), and even to a celebrated gay spot—I believe it was called the Cinderella Club—as she thought it time for me to learn about 'some of the hazards of life that face a young man.'"

His parents' split was not without controversy. While Nica's passion for jazz propelled her to move permanently to New York, ceding custody of her younger children to her husband, de Koenigswarter believes that the union of two very different people with strong personalities was bound to crumble sooner or later.

Although Nica was to devote her life to the unsteady jazz genius that was Thelonius Monk, he was not the cause of the marriage's demise. The single incident that prompted Baron Jules de Koenigswarter to initiate divorce proceedings was the controversial March 1955 death of Charlie Parker in Nica's Stanhope Hotel apartment on Fifth Avenue, and the resulting media scandal that followed.

THOUGH HE LIVED in the world's most glamorous and exotic locales—New York, Mexico, Madrid, and Marbella—before making Manila his permanent home, de Koenigswarter took some time to settle down. He finally married, at the age of 51, the dusky Filipina beauty and socialite Eva Abesamis in 1987.

The two had known each other for years when they were both with different partners. But it wasn't until some 15 years later, both newly single, that they began dating. Before then, he candidly admits, he was "having too much fun as a footloose, carefree bachelor amidst so many charming and lovely Filipina ladies."

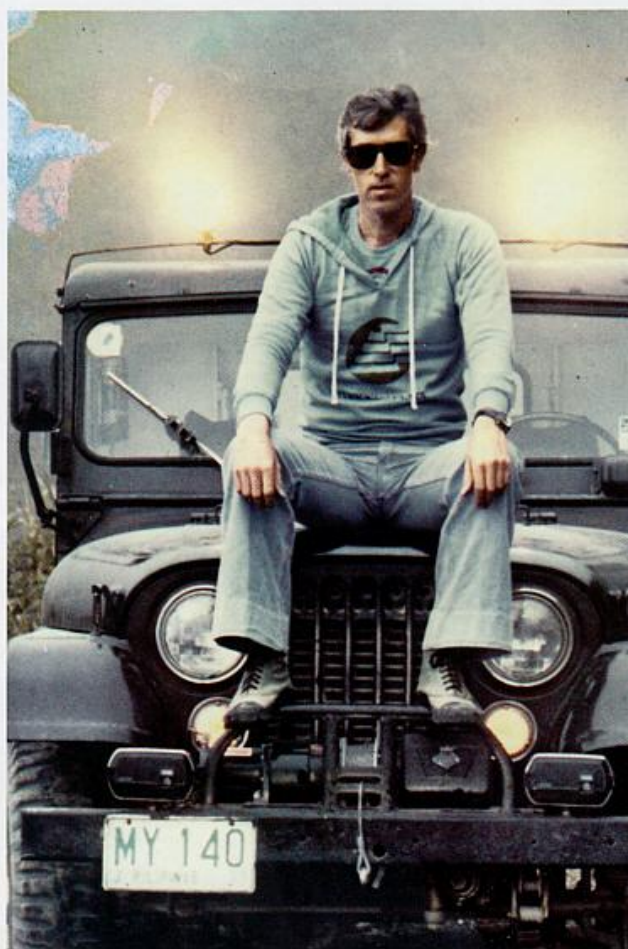
De Koenigswarter, who had studied Mechanical Engineering and Economics at Northeastern University in Boston, and earned an MBA from Columbia University, had come to Manila in 1969 at the behest of his employer, a multinational mining company that wanted him to look into the possibility of opening an office in the country. The two-week trip turned into a permanent posting.

"My initial meeting with the Philippines turned out to be a case of love at first sight: I felt at home since there were so many familiar factors that reminded me of my happy years in Mexico, except that I found Filipinos considerably more open and friendly than the rather stolid and reserved Mexicans, many of whom tended to regard all Occidentals *a primera vista* with a fair amount of skepticism as *gringos*."

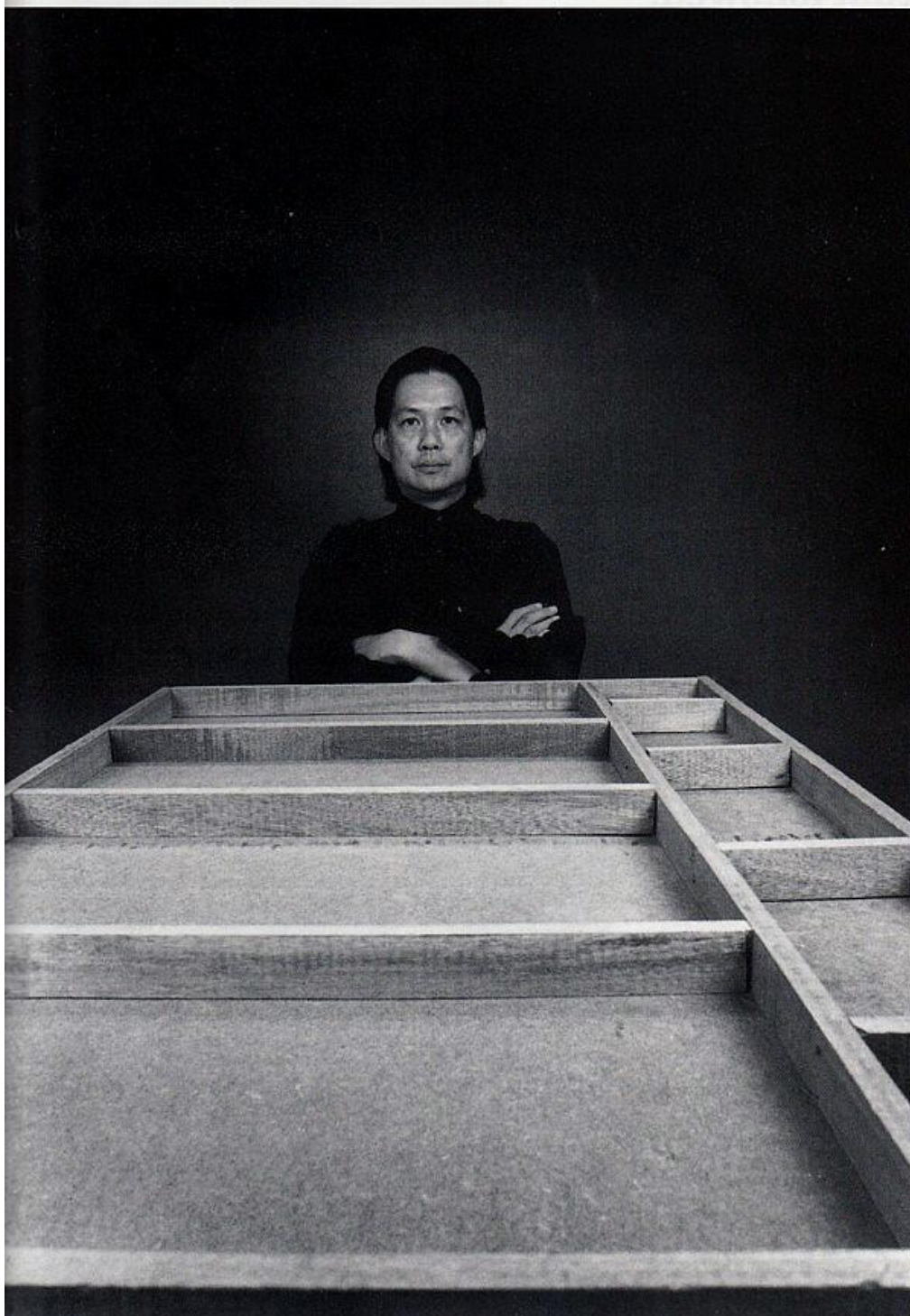


THE SHOOTING PARTY

Clockwise, from opposite page, left: Actor James Cagney (center) with Baron Jules de Koenigswarter and Baroness Nica Rothschild de Koenigswarter in Hollywood, 1937; Patrick de Koenigswarter, carrying a camera, during his "wet belly" macro-photography days, 1970s; in Banaue, sitting on the hood of his bl "Gozdilla," a modified 1975 Jeep CJ-5; on the shores of Lake Taal, photograph by Patrick Jacob for *Vogue Paris Hommes*' 1981 portfolio on the Philippines.



Suave, urbane, and witty, it wasn't long before he formed close friendships with Arturo Luz, Chona Kasten, Mary Prieto, Jaime Zobel, and Pitoy Moreno, snapping glamorous photos of Manila society like a Lord Snowdon or Patrick Lichfield.



FRAME OF MIND

Left: Abstract artist Lao Lianben, photographed by Patrick de Koenigswarter in the 1980s. **Clockwise, from top left:** A de Koenigswarter photograph of National Artist Ang Kiukok, whose angry expressionist paintings he admired ("Ang had the sort of angular, sculptured features that matched his works and practically demanded to be photographed. I asked him if I could have one with a smile, to which I received a polite but emphatic, 'No!', which I thought very cool"); his portrait of socialites Georgie Diaz, ex-wife Eva Abesamis (center), and Maryanne Ojeda; a black-and-white shot of Sam Eduque, granddaughter of Elvira Manahan; a framed art assemblage of de Koenigswarter by his friend Arturo Luz ("He included objects that reflect my interests in art, photography, and nature").



Suave, urbane, and witty, it wasn't long before de Koenigswarter was ushered straight into the bosom of Philippine society, forming close friendships with Tessie and Arturo Luz, Chona Kasten, Mary Prieto, Jaime Zobel de Ayala, and Pitoy Moreno.

The title helped, too, though he didn't flaunt it much. "Somehow, the information that I happened to be an eligible, never-married bachelor, a member of the Rothschild family, and the holder of a Baronial title to boot, seemed to have spread around town like wildfire and had even, to my total surprise, gotten into the popular newspaper and magazine gossip columns, which led to even further invitations of all kinds, so much so that I was finding it difficult to arrange and attend all the meetings with the business people I needed to consult with."

IT WAS IN THE PHILIPPINES that photography became a full-blown hobby. Like Lord Snowdon and Patrick Lichfield—the title-bearing photographers of the English upper crust and British royal family—he became known as the aristocrat who happened to take photos, snapping glamorous portraits of Manila society.

But his preferred subject has always been nature. "Photography was always more of a hobby which gradually evolved—largely unintentionally—into something more than that," he says. "I look upon photography as a tool which I use in order to expand my knowledge and understanding of nature, which is my real passion, and which is deeply embedded in my genes."

David de Koenigswarter, his 23-year-old son with Eva Abesamis,

seems to have inherited these eccentric Rothschild genes, particularly his grandmother Nica's passion for music. An entrepreneur and part-time jazz musician, David and his blues band, The Brat Pack, will compete this February at the 2014 International Blues Challenge in Memphis, Tennessee.

Last year, while David was attending a jazz workshop in Manila conducted by leading Japanese instrumentalists, a guitar *sensei* heard his name and immediately inquired if he was related to the famous Jazz Baroness. "When my son confirmed that he was, indeed, Nica's grandson, the venerable Japanese musician began bending down and bowing repeatedly before a surprised and embarrassed young David!" says de Koenigswarter.

"I am actually very proud of David, who is tough but soft-hearted and *carinoso*—quite different from what I had anticipated when I thought about the possibility of someday having a kind of mini-me!" he says. "He gets along swimmingly with all kinds of people, a take-charge kind of person, popular with all and sundry, an outstanding athlete, like me rather lazy at studies (but does enough to get through), a talented musician, and is turning into a successful and imaginative businessman. In one word: *galing!*"

As to which camp the next Baron de Koenigswarter belongs to, suffice it to say that the young, hardworking David describes himself as "a proud Catholic who believes that a lot of our local church leaders do not know or understand enough about humanity and modern day life."

Definitely enlightened, not entitled. ■