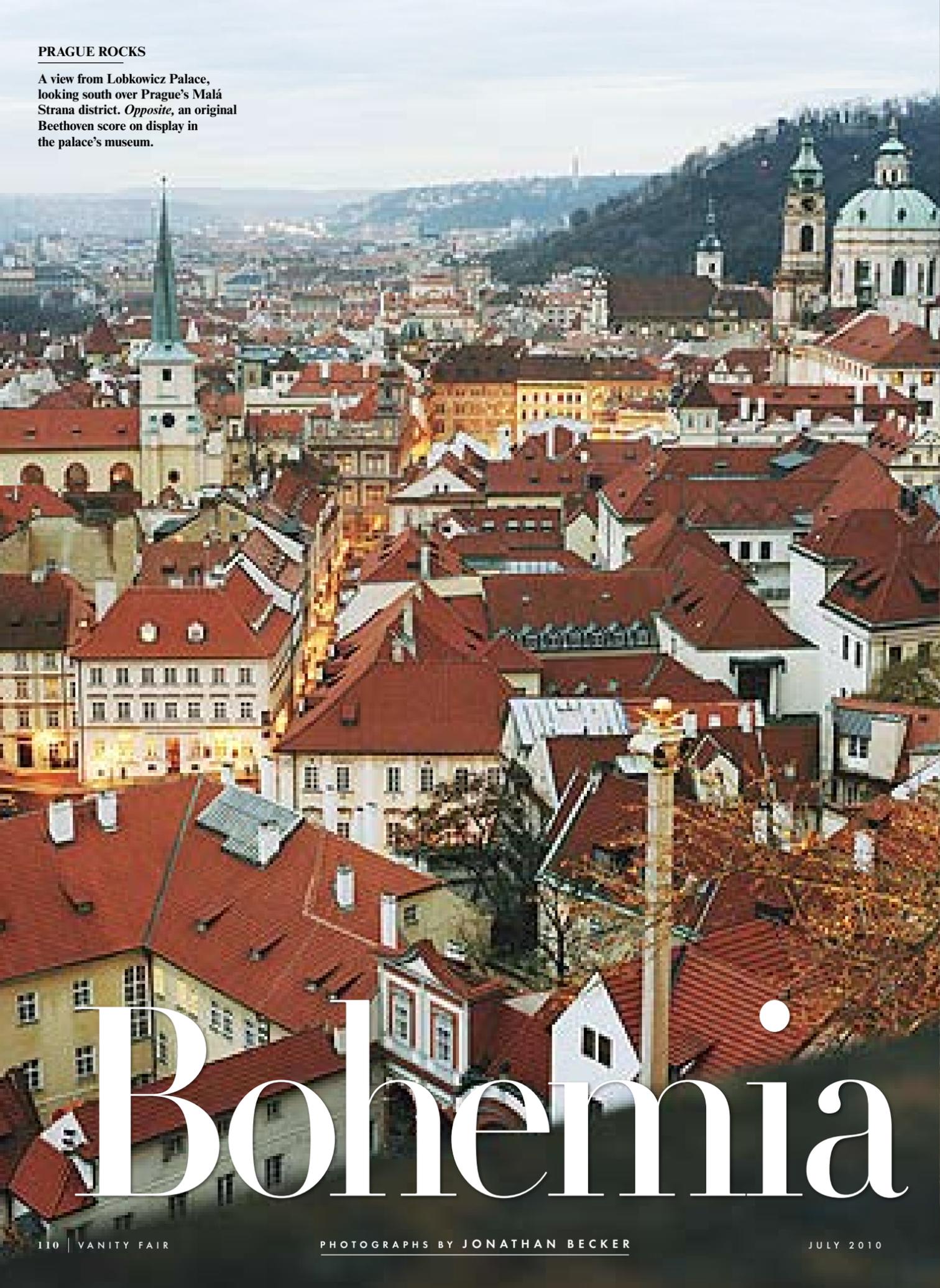
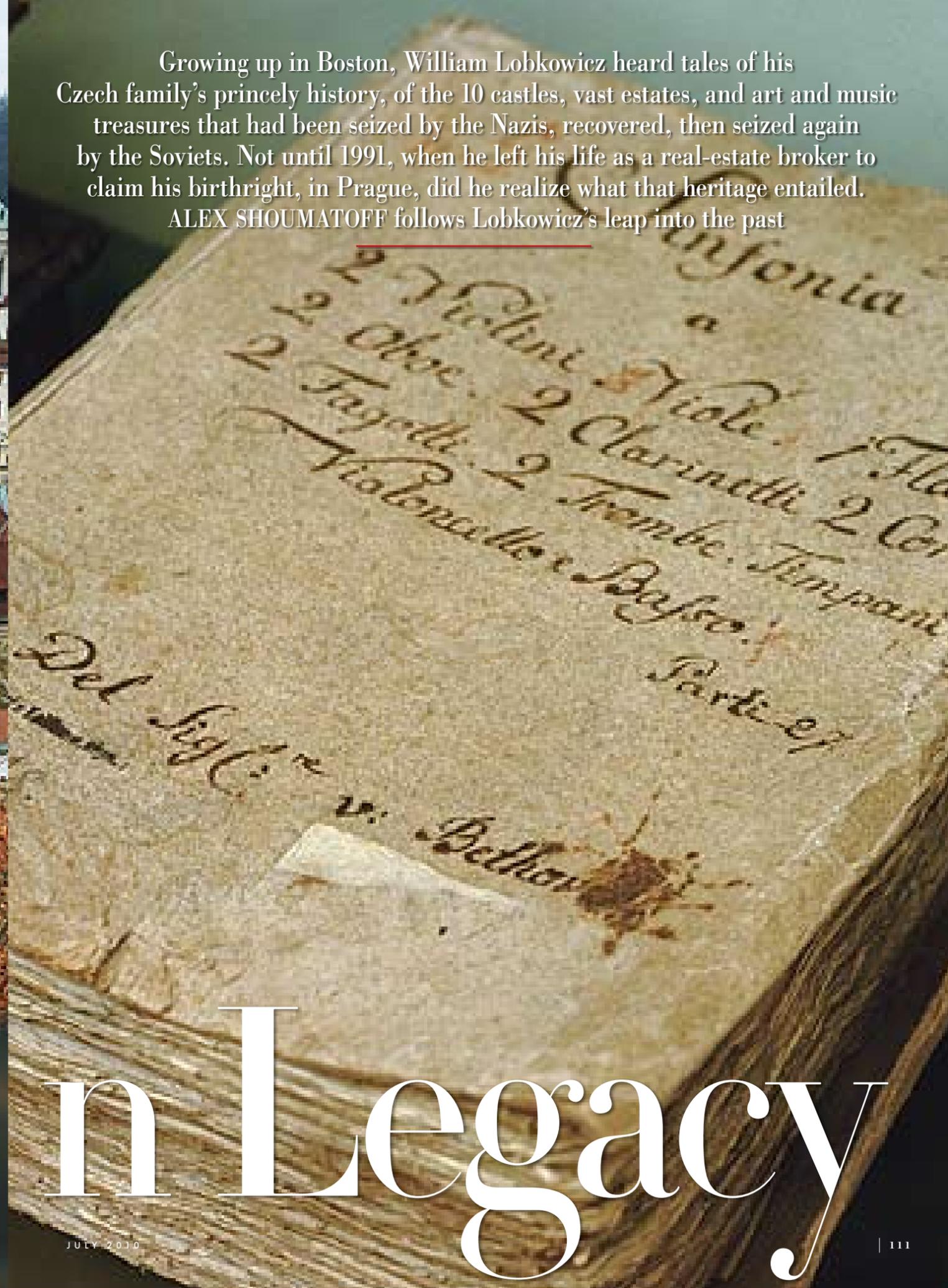


PRAGUE ROCKS

A view from Lobkowitz Palace, looking south over Prague's Malá Strana district. *Opposite*, an original Beethoven score on display in the palace's museum.



Growing up in Boston, William Lobkowitz heard tales of his Czech family's princely history, of the 10 castles, vast estates, and art and music treasures that had been seized by the Nazis, recovered, then seized again by the Soviets. Not until 1991, when he left his life as a real-estate broker to claim his birthright, in Prague, did he realize what that heritage entailed. ALEX SHOUMATOFF follows Lobkowitz's leap into the past



# Bohemia • n Legacy

The Lobkowicz family in the courtyard of Nelahozeves Castle. From left: William, Sandra, William (père), Ileana, and Sophia.

I make my way up a cobblestone, tourist-choked ramp to Prague Castle—the Hrad to Czechs—the world's largest ancient fortress, its square-footage equaling 87 White Houses or six Buckingham Palaces. For centuries the Hrad was the seat of the kings of Bohemia. Now it houses the presidency of the Czech Republic. The country just celebrated its 20th anniversary of freedom from Soviet Communist oppression and is doing pretty well, not in small measure because this enchanting city is such a tourist mecca. Across the Vltava River below, glimpses of Prague's Baroque splendor swirl in a nippy mist.

## AFTER W.W. II, the Lobkowicz family got pretty much everything back—then, in 1948, the family lost everything for a second time.

I pass through the castle's eastern gate, manned by two blue-uniformed fusiliers standing as still as statues in their little guard huts. To the immediate left, extending along the Hrad's southeastern wall, is the three-story Lobkowicz Palace, the city residence of the princely family of Lobkowicz, who for generations were the high chancellors of the King of Bohemia and nobles in the Hapsburg court. The 10th and last prince was Ferdinand Zdenko Lobkowicz (1858–1938). Titles were abolished in 1918, when Bohemia united with Moravia and Slovakia—and slices of Silesia and Ruthenia—and became the Republic of Czechoslovakia. But the Lobkowicz family retained their hereditary estates, including 10 castles, tens of thousands of acres of forest and farmland, and their magnificent art collection—until 1938, when the Nazis

rolled in on the pretext of safeguarding the ethnic Germans in the Sudetenland. Most of the family's masterpieces, including the Brueghel, the Cranach, the Canaletto, the Velázquez, and the Peter Paul Rubens, were carted off for a new Führermuseum Hitler was building in Linz, Austria, his hometown. Prince Ferdinand's son, Maximilian, escaped to London, where he became the exile government's ambassador to the Court of St. James's and was active in the underground. When the bombing of London started in 1940, he sent his 11-year-old son, Martin, to Boston, where a woman from a wealthy old Boston family took him in, sending him to Milton Academy and, later, Harvard.

After the war, the Lobkowicz family got pretty much everything back—then, in 1948, when Czechoslovakia was annexed by the U.S.S.R. and all private property was nationalized by the new Communist regime, the family lost everything for a second time. The brutal occupation lasted 41 years, ending with the spontaneous implosion of the U.S.S.R. and the Velvet Revolution in November 1989, which led to the creation of the Czech Republic in 1993. Slovakia went off on its own in the Velvet

Divorce. The new president, elected by a euphoric majority of Czechs, was the disident playwright Václav Havel, who had spent years in Communist prisons. In 1991, as part of the healing process, Havel signed three restitution laws enabling Czechs to recover the movable property, buildings, and land they had lost under Communism. Martin Lobkowicz's then 29-year-old son, William, a Boston real-estate broker, moved to Prague to see what could be recovered, and was joined a year later by his Romanian-American girlfriend, Alexandra (Sandra) Florescu, whom he married. After 19 years and filing thousands of separate claims, William has gotten back the 10 castles, about 25,000 acres of the forest and farmland, the art, and the family's equally priceless library, which includes more than 700 pre-1501 manuscripts and



a trove of original musical scores, one in the hand of Mozart. He thought it would take only a few years, but it has become his life's work—not only getting it all back but now restoring it and figuring out how to finance the upkeep of the properties. Just the electric bill for Nelahozeves, the first castle William got back, is tens of thousands a year. Now 48, he is still not breaking even, despite the income from the castle tours, gift shop, restaurant, concerts, and events—weddings, corporate retreats, and annual board meetings of companies that hire his “full-service destination” events-management company to take care of everything during their stay in Prague.

William still has a long way to go before he even discovers everything his family left behind. There are tens of thousands of boxes and folios of family archival materials spanning 700 years that still haven't been opened.

### Palace Intrigue

**W**illiam greets me at the entrance to Lobkowicz Palace, where the family's permanent collection is housed. It's been open to the public for three years. Eighty percent of the visitors are foreign tourists. William is six feet five inches—and bald on top. He looks like a taller Prince Albert of Monaco. He is completely without pretense, and very American. He doesn't give off the slightest whiff of entitlement. He and Sandra have three children: William, 15; Ileana, 12; and Sophia, 8. They're the first Lobkowicz to grow up in their native Bohemia in three-quarters of a century.

William suggests I take the tour of the palace. It should answer many of my questions about his family, plus he wants to know what I think of the audio he and his wife and his parents have recorded. I put on the headset, dial the English version (the tour is available in eight languages), and head up the stairs, where I meet William's grandfather Maximilian Lobkowicz in a blown-up, old, tinted black-and-white photo. He's the ultimate aristocrat, with the classic aquiline features and piercing, eagle-like gaze. Maximilian married an English-Irish woman, Gillian Somerville, who saved the day, William's voice says, in 1939, when she overheard some German officers on a train talking about “big events”—the Nazi invasion—happening in three days. This enabled her and her husband and their three children to get out of the country in the nick of time.

There's a roomful of monumental fam-



### BIG HOUSE

- (1) A spinet in the music room of Nelahozeves Castle—the first recovered by William Lobkowicz—which took 60 years to build, beginning around 1500.
- (2) Ileana and Sophia Lobkowicz frolicking in the courtyard. Along with their older brother, they are the first Lobkowicz to be raised in their native Bohemia in three-quarters of a century.
- (3) Sophia and Ileana.
- (4) William in the gun room.
- (5) A Nelahozeves bedroom.
- (6) Late-18th-century, multi-volume tree-specimen collection.
- (7) Sixteenth-century Spanish portraits at the Lobkowicz Palace museum, in Prague.
- (8) Hunt symbols highlight an antler desk.
- (9) The antler room at Nelahozeves.

Roudnice Castle, 30 miles outside Prague, is the fourth-largest castle in the country. *Bottom: left*, a hallway at Roudnice; *right*, a custodian with the keys to the castle.

ily portraits: Lobkowicz princes in tights with codpieces and richly brocaded velvet tunics; Polyxena Pernstejn, the most famous woman in the family, who in 1618, as legend has it, hid under her voluminous skirts two emissaries of the new, Catholic crown prince of Bohemia. (They had just been thrown out of a window by the Protestant faction of the court and landed on a huge pile of dung and survived.) This incident, known as the Defenestration of Prague, triggered the Thirty Years' War, one of the bloodiest conflicts in European history.

The music room contains an extraordinary collection of ancient wind and string instruments and musical manuscripts, including Handel's *Messiah*, with Mozart's extensive handwritten changes, which doubled the size of the orchestra. The seventh prince, Joseph Frantisek Maximilian (1772–1816), who had a bad leg and a booming baritone, kept full-time orchestras at both his Roudnice and Vienna palaces, and gave Beethoven an annuity, which left him free to compose whatever he wanted. Beethoven dedicated the *Eroica* and *Pastoral* Symphonies and several other works to the seventh prince, whose passion for music nearly bankrupted the House of Lobkowicz.

As I make my way through the galleries, I realize that this has to be one of the greatest private collections of old masters anywhere, rivaling that of the Frick, in New York. And this is only one of the palaces. As the booklet on the Lobkowicz Collections that William gave me says, "On a scale of few other families in Central Europe, the Lobkowicz identified themselves through the architecture, paintings, books, music and decorative arts they commissioned." There's Pieter Brueghel the Elder's *Haymaking*, from 1565, one of the cornerstones of Western civilization, the first time the landscape comes into its own and common people are shown going about their ordinary tasks, following the natural cycles of the seasons; a monumental Canaletto of the river Thames, full of every manner of watercraft, from sumptuous pleasure barges to humble fishermen's skiffs, on Lord Mayor's Day, 1748, with St. Paul's Cathedral in the background; a 1520s Cranach, of the Virgin and Child with Saints Barbara and Catherine of Alexandria.

I begin to understand why William has made this his life's work—anyone with such an extraordinary heritage would have little choice, almost an obligation, to

do everything he could to recover, restore, and secure these treasures. But it has been a gargantuan task that's not even close to completion.

#### Loss and Exile

So, how did you like it?," William asks me about the tour. "Unbelievable," I tell him. William's wife, Sandra, joins us in the gift shop. Her father, Radu Florescu, is an emeritus professor at Boston College and the author of a best-seller on the historical Count Dracula. The Florescus are an ancient Romanian boyar family. One of Sandra's ancestors, also named Radu Florescu, met the first Prince Lobkowicz in 1601 (the husband of the illustrious Polyxena) when he went to Prague with Michael the Brave to seek help against the invading Turks. In the 18th century, the Florescus were made counts by the Hapsburg emperor. When the Fascist regime took over Romania in 1939, Radu fled, was educated at Christ Church, Oxford, married a Frenchwoman, and landed a few blocks from the Lobkowicz on Boston's Beacon Hill. Sandra recalls first becoming aware of William when he walked under her window on his way to a recital at Milton, which he had followed his father to. He had a Walkman on and was singing along to Fauré's "Chanson d'Amour," unaware of how loud he was. They didn't actually meet until years later, at a block party on Bastille Day in 1987. By then William was a real-estate broker and Sandra was teaching sixth grade at a private school in Back Bay. They soon discovered that their backgrounds and family histories were remarkably similar—"Both our parents had funny accents," as William put it—and they started dating. But it was another four years before he finally popped the question, on a balcony of Lobkowicz Palace with a glorious panorama of Prague as a backdrop.

Sandra is the perfect helpmate, having studied fine arts at the Sorbonne and possessing the kind of precise, retentive mind that can micro-manage large amounts of information. She is involved in every facet of the operation, from the restoration of the paintings to the design of the exhibitions to the menu of the restaurant, which offers traditional Czech fare, quick service, and Lobkowicz wine and beer. She is as down to earth and unaffected as he is. They are postmodern aristocrats, who don't put on airs, and to whom loss and exile have given a perspective on privilege.

#### Bohemian Rhapsody

I had a very American-ordinary childhood," William, at the wheel of the family's Volvo S.U.V., tells me as we head out of Prague on the road toward Dresden, which is only an hour and a half north, to see the two out-of-town palaces, Roudnice and Nelahozeves. "But it was wonderful. My parents were really supportive and did everything for us children." William's mother is a dentist's daughter from Kentucky who met his father on a blind date while at Wellesley College. His three siblings are in Boston, Florida, and Prague. His father, Martin, started out as a door-to-door salesman of Fuller brushes and Cutco knives and, raising himself up in classic immigrant fashion, ended up as a stockbroker at H. C. Wainwright.

William points out a solitary mountain (more like a hill) called Ríp—and pronounced "zhip"—that is sticking up in the dead, flat landscape. This is where Father Czech, the "Father of the Nation," told his followers: Here we are going to settle. The original Czechs were Celts. "The Bohemian fabric was Czech, German, and Jewish," he tells me. "The culture was known for its religious and ethnic tolerance. It was a place where different kinds of people lived side by side, and created beautiful music and architecture. The 1300s were the peak, when Charles IV, the emperor of civilized Europe at the time, made Prague the seat of the Holy Roman Empire.

"After the Communists took over and my grandfather lost everything the second time, and it didn't look like the family had much of a future in their homeland, he and his wife came over from London and lived with us. My grandmother lived into her 90s, until the mid-1980s, so I heard many of her stories, and we had all these refugee relatives—aunts and uncles and cousins from the old Czech families, who would come at Christmas and in the summertime—Schwarzenbergs, Kinskys, Sternbergs, other branches of Lobkowicz. Often we were more closely related to their wives. My favorite was Franzi Schwarzenberg, who lived in Chicago. We called him Uncle Franzi, but he was really a distant cousin. He had been the exile government's ambassador to the Vatican and was Maximilian's best friend. So we had people who could bring it to life. We had none of the trappings—a few photo albums and illustrated books. But Uncle Franzi would tell me about the balls, the castles, the Golden Fleece, which many of my ancestors had won.

"In 1976, we went on a big European tour and visited the Czech Socialist Repub-



"[VÁCLAV] HAVEL enacted the three restitution laws in 1991, and the possibility of getting our property back again became real."



THE BUCK STOPS HERE

The desk made entirely of antlers in Nelahozeves Castle. *Opposite*, the music room of the Lobkowitz Palace museum, in Prague.



THERE ARE TENS OF thousands of boxes and folios of family archival materials spanning 700 years that still haven't been opened.



## PARTY OF FIVE

The Lobkowicz family in the almost five-centuries-old Nelahozeves Castle.



lic, as our country was called. I was 14. I saw our palaces from the outside. Roudnice was a military installation, a military music school. Armed guards yelled at my sister: Get away, no pictures. Under the stucco of the outer wall, where some of it had broken off, I saw the letter *L*.

“We got into Nelahozeves, where there was a little museum with some of our paintings. We visited Jerezi Castle, in Northern Bohemia, which had been a prison for Allied air-force officers during the war. The Prince of Montenegro and Charles de Gaulle’s brother were imprisoned there. Now it was a facility of the secret police. There was a sign with a skull and crossbones and the words *pozor* [attention] and *zakaz* [forbidden]. We heard yelling and gunshots within, so we left.

“The first thing we did when we arrived in the country was visit the church with the Infant of Prague”—an exquisite wax Jesulus, or baby Jesus, that Polyxena in-

brewed the old-fashioned way and even got it exported to the States,” William says, “but in the late 90s the big players like Heineken, South African Breweries, and the Belgian Interbrew moved in and went after the smaller breweries to close them down. This is the country of beer. It’s cheaper than water, and we didn’t have a chance. I brought in a partner and eventually sold it to him, and he sold it to this new owner. So the family brewery, like a lot of small breweries, was a casualty of the beer wars. Letting it go was one of the hard decisions we had to make, like six of the castles which no longer had the financial underpinnings of their estates and were impossible to make productive.

“We wanted to show we had survived the Nazis and the Communists. That’s what drove a lot of the restitution. Hope that the country would come back. But the heritage has to be financed by a successful operation. It can’t just be like Disneyland.

## THE LOBKOWICZES

are postmodern aristocrats,  
to whom loss and exile have given a  
perspective on privilege.

herited from her Spanish mother; it’s said to have miraculous healing powers—“with Grandfather’s only surviving sister, Polla Lobkowicz, who hadn’t gotten out when the Communists took over and was 80. We all got down on our knees and prayed. It was really emotional. My great-aunt was crying. We all were. She was living with five other people in the leaky three-room basement apartment of a crummy house. I felt all these emotions I didn’t understand. Father was so sweet and gentle. He kept it together. Aunt Polla was very simple, discreet, and humble. She never talked in the restaurants. We were followed and watched everywhere. But I felt, more than I had ever felt before, completely in my element, as if this, not Yankee Massachusetts, was where I belonged. But the thought of actually returning, with the way things were, never crossed any of our minds.”

We pass a billboard for Lobkowicz beer, the first one William has seen that the new owners have put up. There are three labels, Prince, Knight, and Baron. The brewery had been in the family since 1474. “I tried to market our beer as

There has to be lots of interesting information. But the audience is not only curators of the Louvre, either. There are people from the Midwest on their first trip to their homeland, too. It’s too bad we didn’t get back the big mineral-water company that my grandfather had shares in. That would have really helped. You can only get back what you were the sole outright owner of in 1948.”

### Havel to the Castle

**W**illiam got into Harvard but, after graduating from Milton in 1979, he took a gap year in Vienna, where he studied German language and literature. He visited the enormous Lobkowicz Palace, in Lobkowitzplatz, across the street from the Spanish Riding School and the Hofburg Imperial Palace of the Hapsburgs, where the *Eroica* Symphony was premiered. Today it is part of Vienna’s Kunsthistorisches Museum. Theater and opera are still performed

in it. William graduated from Harvard in 1984 and chose a conventional, safe path of entry into the “real world,” moving to New York as a credit analyst for Chemical Bank. After a year, he realized this was not his bag and moved back to Boston, where he switched to commercial real estate, as a broker for Leggat McCall, which was bought up by Grubb & Ellis a year later.

In 1989, the Communist system, a far cry from what Marx and Engels had envisaged, was spontaneously rejected by the people who had been suffering under it for 70 years, and the Soviet Union began to disintegrate. There were nonviolent revolutions in Poland, Hungary, East Germany, and, in November, Czechoslovakia, which had its Velvet Revolution. As William recalls, “I watched the evening-news clips of the East Germans pouring over the wall into the garden of the West German Embassy in Prague, which had been a Lobkowitz palace, and 350,000 people with lighters and candles chanting ‘Havel na Hrad’—‘Havel to the Castle’—in Wenceslas Square. Sandra was more interested in what was happening in Romania, where Ceaușescu’s 25-year reign of terror was unraveling and would end with his execution a month later.

“I called my father and said, ‘You have to see this. It’s unbelievable. I’m going over to see what it’s all about.’ I immediately started to think of going back and being part of the rebirth of the country of my ancestors, whose history I knew and loved. I am half American and spent my formative years in the States, but I never really felt it was me. My first thought was that I could become the local knowledge, helping foreign people to invest in the new democracy.

“We started having family discussions in 1990. I did a scouting trip with a friend. Then Havel enacted the three restitution laws in 1991, and the possibility of getting our property back again became real.”

Martin told his son, “I’m too old. You have the young legs. You must run with them.”

“I had no mortgage, no debts, no family responsibilities,” William goes on. “I didn’t see myself moving office space for the rest of my life, and the timing was perfect, because there was a slump in the real-estate market. I realized that I’d always wanted to go back. I had always felt the call of our roots since I was little. Mother said, ‘Go with your gut. Do what you think is right.’ There was no doubt in my mind. I had to go home.”

Sandra had committed to another year of teaching in Boston, so they would be separated. William moved to Prague in January 1991. “We kept our expectations low. Dad cashed in his pension so we could hire some lawyers, and things started to move. The first building we got was a little forester’s hut in the mountains. Then we got Nelahozeves. Once we started to get back the castles, we could use them as collateral for loans.”

### Land Lord

Thirty miles north of Prague we reach Roudnice Castle, in the middle of a medieval town of the same name, surrounded by high walls. It is the fourth-largest castle in the country. The original structure is 14th-century Gothic. It was the seat of the archbishop of Prague. Martin Lobkowitz grew up here and, though he left when he was a boy, has many memories of Roudnice. William got it back in 1992. It continued to be a military music school after Communism—the cadets were 12 to 18—until last January. “We let them stay because the rental income enabled us to keep it up,” he explains. “We re-roofed it and sunk over a million dollars into it over eight years.” Now the castle is empty, awaiting its next incarnation.

A woman meets us in the courtyard with a shoebox full of keys, and we go up a grand staircase and enter the palace. William takes me into the room which housed the Christmas tree, under which his father opened his presents 75 years ago. He points out the plaque commemorating the beloved librarian and family archivist who was thrown from the top of the staircase down three flights to his death by Communists when they took over in 1948.

The castle is gorgeous, but it will take a lot of work and a lot of money to properly restore it. Tacky socialist paneling and flooring has to be ripped out. The ceiling that was put in the family chapel 20 feet up to save heat has already been removed, revealing a dome with lovely frescoes. “You will appreciate the Kafka-esque humor of this,” William tells me as he takes me up to a basketball court made from the top half of the concert hall, where the seventh prince’s orchestra had played the groundbreaking compositions of Beethoven at the turn of the 19th century. Along one wall of the court, the upper halves of a row of arch-topped windows are protected by wire mesh. “The cadets had to exercise somewhere,” William says, laughing it off.

He takes me out to the balcony for “a quick visual.” It has a nice view of the Elbe River, where world rowing championships are sometimes held. Across the water is a wooded park, which the last prince gave to the town, and the family vineyard, which produces a fine Saint Laurent. (Havel served it to Queen Elizabeth II when she came to Prague.) The wine cellar is in the basement of the palace, as it was in the old days and even during the Communist era. “These are places from another time,” he says. “We don’t live in castles anymore. Just keeping them up is brutal. They don’t have the financial underpinnings of their estates. That’s the key point.” All that’s left of Roudnice’s land is an overgrown park. William has successfully negotiated with the

town and it will open soon to the public.

He shows me the stables, which have enough stalls and tackle rooms and apartments for grooms and trainers for a riding school, but was just for the family and their guests. “Roudnice was a projection of the power of the chancellor of Bohemia. There was tremendous show in this way of life.” We walk outside the castle into the ruined church, behind which barefoot monks of the Discalced Carmelite order tended to the poor and sick, then down to the family crypt, which is empty. “We don’t know where the bodies are,” Williams says.

He leads me toward the river and says, “I want to show you something special.” Behind a wall of trees is a tile-lined swimming pool, but the water is full of scummy algae, dead leaves, and branches. “This is where my father learned to swim.”

### Native Son

“You have to assume the worst,” William tells me as we continue to Nelahozeves Castle, or Nela, as he calls it fondly. “Maybe you’ll have to sell it. You have a Plan A and B and C, and if the dream scenario doesn’t work, you try the next thing. The endgame is it’s better off in someone else’s hands, because you don’t have the money to do the protection of these great buildings.” He’s still holding on to Strekov, which is in Northern Bohemia and was built in 1316 for John of Luxembourg (King of Bohemia and father of Charles IV) to guard an important trade route to Germany. It’s been a ruin for a long time—it inspired Wagner to compose his opera *Tannhäuser*, in 1843. Strekov was acquired by Václav Lobkowitz in 1563 and passed into the Roudnice branch of the family in 1615.

The Lobkowitzes originally hailed from a village on the Polish border—which is why the name sounds Polish—near another of their castles, Jezeri, where the family summered, but William has had to let Jezeri go. It is too remote for tourism, and the valley it overlooks was gutted by strip-mining under Communism. William thought of turning the devastation into something positive by creating an environmental center, where things like land reclamation, soil pollution, acid rain, and reforestation could be studied. Jezeri had a beautiful botanical garden that was in terrible condition. He brought Prince Charles to look at it, and he was very sympathetic and supportive, but in the end William couldn’t find anyone to go in with him and gave Jezeri back to the state, with the provisions that it be declared a cultural monument and that no coal mining be done under or around it. Another upside of the exchange is that Jezeri may now qualify for a European Union reconstruction fund for devastated castles.

Fifteen miles north of Prague, we reach

Nela as darkness is falling. There is just enough light to see its sgraffito façade. The fourth palace still in the family, Nela took 60 years to build, starting around 1500. Avant-garde for the time, it is an example of Italian Mannerist *castello fortezza* architecture.

‘This is the Renaissance castle,’ William explains. ‘It’s the first one we got back, and it was in pretty much the shape we left it in, because it had housed a small museum all along of Socialist art and some Lobkowicz pieces.’ There are only a hundred rooms—an ‘outhouse’ compared with Roudnice, he says. On the third floor there is an exhibition called ‘Private Spaces: A Noble Family at Home,’ where everything has been re-created to look the way it did when the last prince was in residence, circa 1900. ‘We had a German group today,’ the pretty young ticket girl tells William.

We start with the second floor, where the 65,000-book library is housed. Most of the books had been in Roudnice, and William had to track them down and reclaim them from three separate national repositories. Visits to the library are by appointment only. ‘We keep track of everybody who comes in and out of here,’ he says, signing the register at the curator’s desk in the small reading room, ‘even us.’ Around the room on glass-encased shelves and in drawers below them is a beautiful shell collection from the last quarter of the 18th century, when exotic travel and the collecting of specimens of flora and fauna were the rage.

‘The oldest of our incubula is a ninth-century gospel,’ William says as we wander in the stacks. There’s a 1462 Fust and Schoeffer Bible—Schoeffer was Gutenberg’s principal workman. He opens a folio set of Albrecht Dürer’s engravings of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: ‘Look at the detail of this horsehair. And Dürer carved these on wood, and backwards.’

But the most special part of the collection is the 500 musical scores amassed by the seventh prince. We leaf through a concerto in F major written by the prince’s Kapellmeister Antonín Vranický for his birthday. ‘It was only played once, in the early 19th century. Wouldn’t it be great if we could get an orchestra to be the first to play these old compositions on the actual instru-

ments of the seventh prince’s two orchestras, which we have? Here’s Haydn’s *Creation*, which premiered in another Lobkowicz palace, in Prague. The seventh prince sang the part of the Archangel Raphael.’

We proceed to the exhibition upstairs, the residential quarters at the turn of the 20th century, meticulously re-created from old photographs. William’s mother, who has an interior-decorating business with his sister, really got into the project, and it had prominent English art and arms curators. There is no recorded tour in the living family members’ voices, but the exhibition is laid out as if you’d arrived for the weekend or for dinner. On the walls, among family portraits, are a Pannini, a Veronese, a Peter Paul Rubens, a Lucas Cranach the Younger (who has painted himself into the picture), and a Brueghel (Jan) of St. Mar-

ing them in the ass, but not killing them. There is a desk made entirely of antlers, and dozens of masterpieces of gunsmithing in cabinets and on racks. ‘Our gun curator, John Batty, did the permanent installation at Edinburgh Castle.’

The furniture is exquisite, including a *pietra dura* cabinet inlaid with ivory, mother-of-pearl, tortoiseshell, and various contrasting hues and grains of precious wood. In his full-length portrait in the portrait gallery, the lanky eighth prince, Ferdinand Joseph (1797–1868), I notice, looks amazingly like William. ‘Everybody points that out,’ he tells me. According to the mathematics of descent, William has only one-thirty-second of his third great-grandfather’s genes, but the facial resemblance is strong, and he doesn’t look at all like his intimidating aquiline grandfather, Maximilian.

‘Everything is a cultural monument,’

William continues. ‘I can’t sell it, because it can’t be taken out of the country, so it’s worthless. Nobody buys what they can’t move. There are a few rich people in the C.R. who might be interested in some things, but we haven’t put anything up for sale, nor do we intend to. This exhibit was put together from tens of thousands of objects we collected from the 10 castles, 103 locations in all, which required filling out and submitting tens, maybe hundreds, of thousands of pages of claim forms. In the early 90s, to meet one of the deadlines for filing claims, we rented a copy shop for the weekend. I peeled off 200 bucks, and Sandra and I spent the weekend xerox-

ing documents, one at a time. We didn’t have multiple-runoff machines. Each claim had to have three to six attachments, like my grandfather’s birth certificate, which had the stamps and ribbons of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Just that weekend we ran off 12,000 pages, and on Monday morning we—and our associates—took off in five different cars to the jurisdictions where they had to be filed. This was before we had children.

‘Even though this is a permanent collection, we have to keep it fresh, have new exhibits, new creations, or people will not keep coming,’ he continues. ‘We’ve had 600 concerts here, a wine festival, and Renaissance and arts-and-crafts fairs. Look out the window. See that humble stucco dwelling just below? That’s where Antonín Dvořák was



#### CASTLE MAGIC

The Lobkowiczes—Ileana, William, William, Sandra, and Sophia—in front of Nelahozeves Castle.

tin dividing his cloak, all of which were stolen by Hitler, retrieved, nationalized by the Communists, retrieved again, and restored—the Rubens by the late Hubert von Sonnenburg of the Met.

‘We’ve lent paintings to the National Gallery, the Royal Academy, the Rijksmuseum. It gets us exposure and sometimes a restoration or a vitrine.’ On to the dining room, whose table is set for 40. Then the armory, which has several guns with wide barrels flaring out at the end that William thinks were for scaring off poachers—shoot-

born and spent his first 11 years. His father was a butcher. We rent it to the Dvorák Society for one crown”—there are about 20 crowns in a dollar—“a year.” Dvorák is the Czechs’ greatest cultural hero, although maybe Václav Havel would give him a run for his money now.

“The art collection is the biggest part,” William explains. “It needs a home, and that’s the main reason for restoring these castles. Their main attraction is what is in them.” He shows me the rooms he rents for conferences and weddings. The great Knight’s Hall has the original monumental fireplace. More great art decks the walls.

William is so flat-out all the time that he doesn’t even know it’s Friday, the end of most people’s workweek. “I have a little problem with the workaholic thing,” he tells me as we drive back to Prague. “I can’t turn it off.” He and Sandra don’t so-

cialize much, not only because they don’t have the time and are so wiped out by the end of the day but because they prefer to spend the evening with their three children. Every night from 9 to 9:45 they all read together.

This is a strenuous and definitely rather Kafka-esque heroic narrative, being a public prince who isn’t really a prince and who has all this priceless stuff that is actually worthless. Playing the gracious host to all these anonymous tourists walking in and out of your palaces—there is almost an element of aristo-kitsch about it. But William seems to relish it. “I enjoy seeing the enjoyment other people get. It’s very gratifying,” he says. This is his service to the public, keeping Bohemia’s glorious past alive, introducing it to people from all over the world, and re-inventing it in a way that speaks to Czechs, who lost their cultural

and moral compass under Communism. That’s how he is helping the rebirth of the Czech nation. William, I realize, is a guy who is patriotic and has noblesse oblige, the sense of stewardship that true aristocrats are supposed to have. As Havel, who himself got back his grandfather’s Lucerna Palace, one of the most valuable pieces of real estate in downtown Prague, writes in his memoir *To the Castle and Back*, “To this day some people shake their heads because a chateau that used to house a nursing school was returned to a count who had come back from God knows where. But . . . it has turned out that the aristocracy—who have in their blood a centuries-old tradition of stewardship of family property and regard for the future generations of owners—are incomparably better and more sensitive at maintaining their family estates than the state or other public institutions were.” □