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BUSINESS JET TRAVELER

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA

on directing *The Godfather*,
how he chose his business jet
and the movie he still
hopes to make

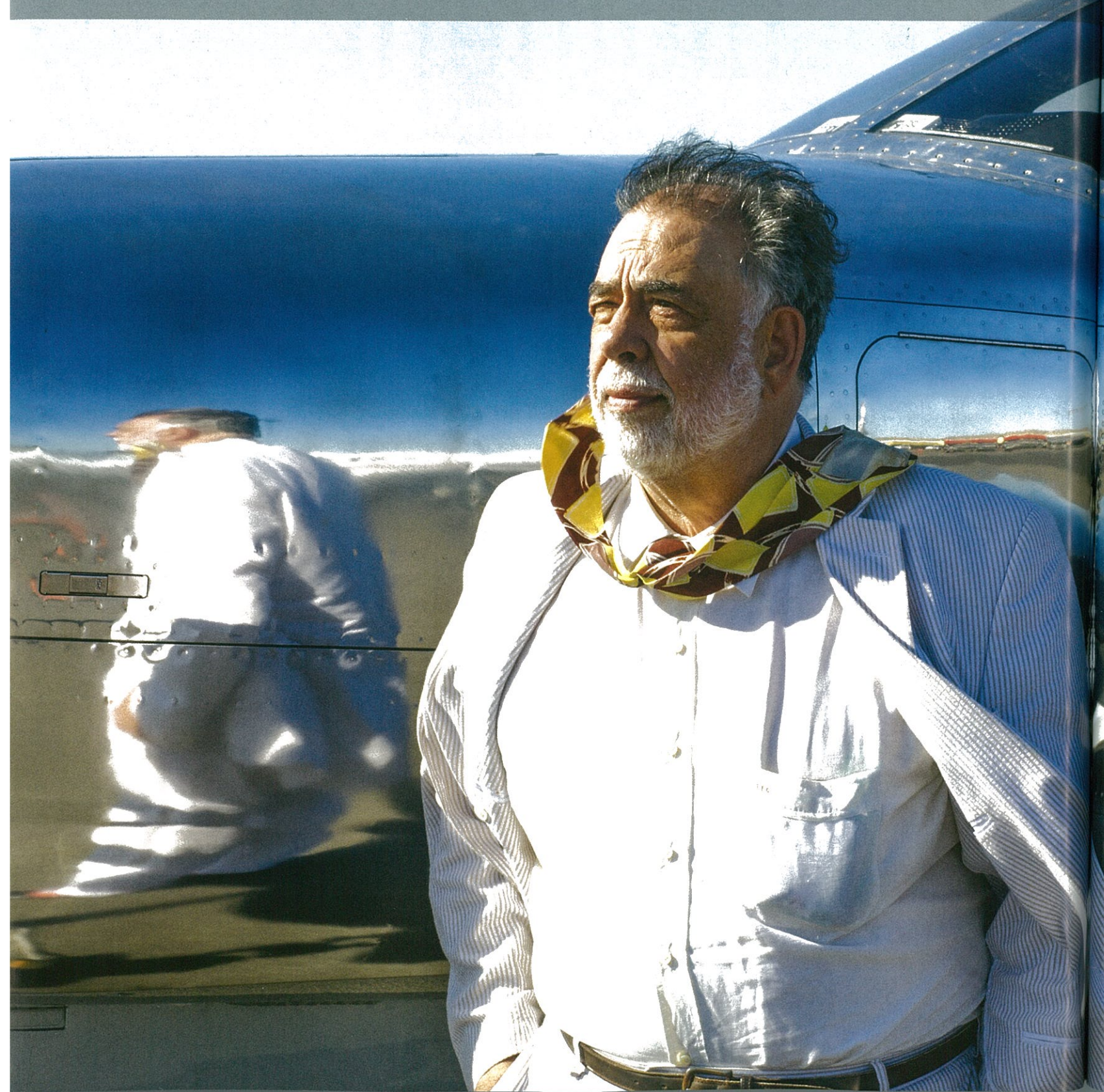
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FRANCIS FORD



COPPOLA



The acclaimed
director talks about
filmmaking and flying.

by Margie Goldsmith

Five-time Academy Award winner Francis Ford Coppola is one of the world's most innovative and influential filmmakers. *The Godfather*, which he made while in his early 30s, has been ranked second only to *Citizen Kane* on the American Film Institute's list of the greatest American movies. Also high on the list are his *Apocalypse Now* and *The Godfather Part II*. (See box on page 23.)

Born in 1939, Coppola spent his childhood in Queens, New York, where he was bedridden with polio. He used the time to create theatrical productions with puppets and, by age 15, to make 8mm home movies. After high school, he received a degree from Hofstra University and went to UCLA's School of Theater, Film

Coppola uses his
Daher-Socata TBM 850 for
flights within California.

and Television to make his first low-budget cult classic, *Dementia 13*.

In 1969, along with George Lucas, Coppola created a production company, American Zoetrope, which was an early adopter of digital filmmaking. The studio has garnered 68 Academy Award nominations and won 15 Oscars.

Coppola travels the world on his Dassault Falcon 7X business jet, and not only to make films: he owns luxury resorts in Belize, Guatemala, Argentina and southern Italy, where his grandfather was born. He also owns cafés and a literary magazine and, for 35 years, has produced wine at his Napa Valley estate, including his bestselling Inglenook Chablis. When asked why he has undertaken so many diverse projects, he replies, "It's all entertainment."

CHAD KEIG

What did your father encourage you to do with your life?

My father wanted me to be an engineer because I always got an A in science even though I failed every [other] subject in school.

Who was your first mentor?

My brother, five years older, now passed, was a major influence. He gave me books to read and taught me things. If he was going to be a novelist, I thought I could become a playwright. Whatever he wanted to be, that's what I wanted to be, too. He was better at everything: extremely handsome, a super lady's man, popular, and good at school.

You attended 23 schools before graduating from high school. How did that happen and how did all the moving around affect you?

No one knows why my father kept moving. I later thought he was speculating on houses because he'd buy a home and then we'd sell it and move. I didn't have time to make friends at school so I was very involved with my older brother and younger sister. It made us a very tight little family unit.

Besides your brother, who encouraged you?

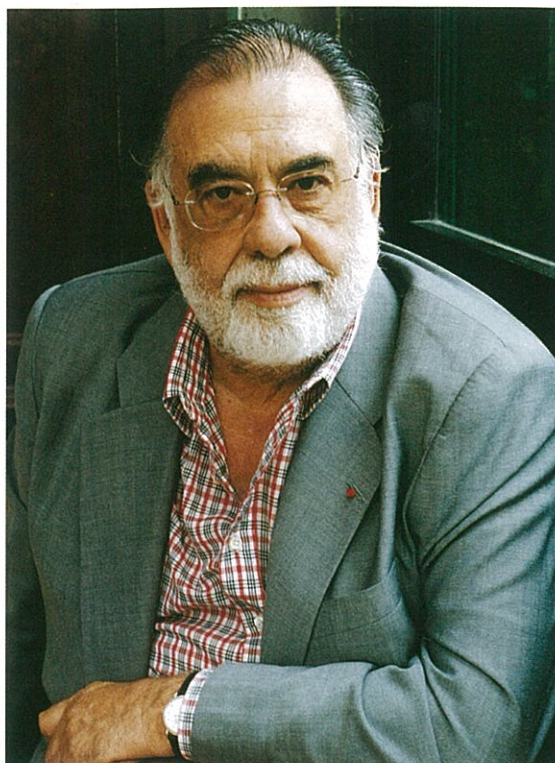
At UCLA, a wonderful directing teacher, Dorothy Arzner. Soon after, I became an assistant for producer Roger Corman. It was a fabulous opportunity to learn low-budget production.

What was the most important thing Corman taught you?

There can't be any waste in filmmaking. You have to sharpen your pencil to a fine point and learn how to always save money.

Corman let you direct your first feature in 1963, *Dementia 13*. How did that come about?

Whenever Roger made a film for a company, he'd also personally finance a smaller picture, taking advantage of the available equipment and crew. I gave him a couple of scenes to read in Europe, and on the strength of that he gave me \$20,000 and suggested I go to Ireland to find English-speaking actors. There, I met an English producer and sold him the English rights for another \$20,000, so I had \$40,000 to spend on my first movie.



SOPIA COPPOLA

In 1969 you decided that the studio system had stifled your vision. What were you hoping for when you created Zoetrope?

I wanted to make more personal art films like the French New Wave and the great Italian directors such as Fellini and Antonioni, movies with more personal artistic expression rather than Hollywood pictures. We founded Zoetrope to try to be more independent.

Robert Evans [head of production at Paramount Pictures at the time] said you didn't want to direct *The Godfather*.

I thought the novel was sort of sleazy and didn't want to direct it because while parts of [the book] had the story of the family and the Mafia, a big percentage was much more salacious material. A third of it is about a character, Lucy Mancini, who had to have an operation on her private anatomy. I got the job partly because movies about the Mafia had been unsuccessful and they liked the performances I'd gotten when I made *The Rain People*. They thought they had an Italian-American director who could get good performances and take heat from the Italian

"When I pass away, I'll have nothing I wish I'd done. I did everything I wanted to do."

FASTFACTS

NAME: Francis Ford Coppola

BIRTHDATE: April 7, 1939 (age 75)

OCCUPATION: Filmmaker (see box on page 23). Also, wine producer and resort owner.

EDUCATION: B.A., Hofstra University, 1960, M.F.A., UCLA, 1967

PERSONAL: Lives in Rutherford, California. Married to Eleanor Coppola since 1963. Enjoys cooking, reading, travel. Three children: Gian-Carlo (born 1963, died 1986) Roman (born 1965), Sofia (born 1971), all film directors.

Skipping the paint shop

Today, few airplanes fly "naked." Francis Ford Coppola's TBM is one that does.

by Mark Phelps

As I walked through the BJT production department the other day, I was a little taken aback by some of the photos I saw of this issue's cover subject. Filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola was standing in front of a bare-aluminum airplane, which at first I assumed had to be some sort of restored vintage classic. I was surprised to hear it was his very own Daher-Socata TBM 850, a decidedly modern, sophisticated turboprop single. Yes, the airplane's exterior had painted trim elements in shades of gray and black that made for a compellingly tasteful design. But most of the TBM's sheet metal was completely bare.

I started to put the pieces together, remembering that I had seen the airplane at the National Business Aviation Association convention last year. But I had assumed then that it was a special company-owned display model, not meant for day-to-day flying. With the exception of some restored World War II-era and retro-vintage light models owned by collectors, no one flies unpainted aircraft anymore, right?

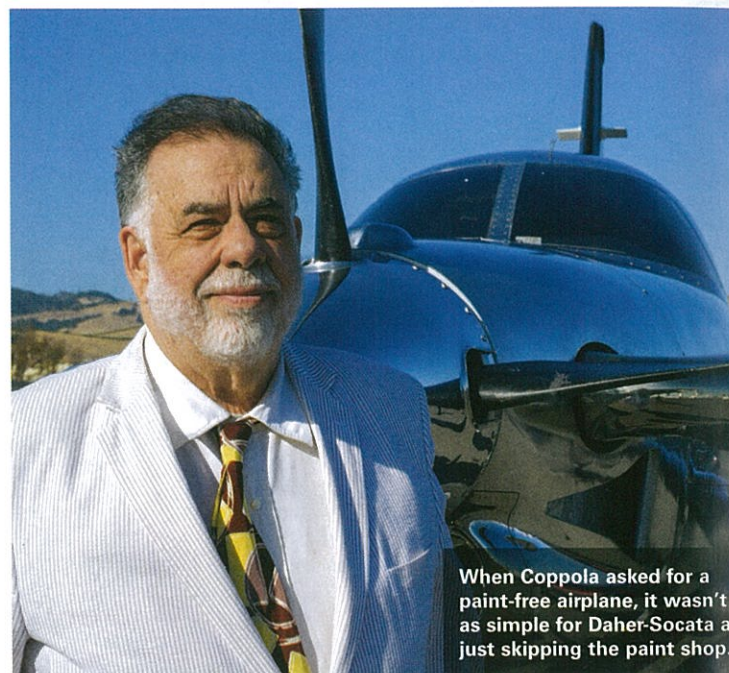
Apparently, wrong.

Granted, Coppola's TBM is an anomaly among current aircraft, nearly all of which are painted. And in the early era of flight, airplanes were also painted or, more accurately, "doped." Almost all early

aircraft, starting with the Wright Flyer, used fabric covering, at least on their wings. The fabric was applied by stretching it as tightly as possible over the structure, then painting on layer after layer of a clear lacquer concoction known as "dope" to make it shrink. The airplanes' fuselages were covered in the same way. And since the dope stain looked ugly, pigment was added to provide a paint-like appearance.

But when manufacturers started building all-metal airplanes, the need for coating was eliminated. So most early metal aircraft, like early humans, went naked. Since they used aluminum, which is much less susceptible to rust than steel, these airplanes were not particularly vulnerable to the elements. Over time, however, corrosion did become an issue, particularly in coastal areas where the air had a high salt content. And keeping all that aluminum shiny was a lot of work. So painted airplanes became the norm.

For decades, one exception to that rule was American Airlines. Its aircraft were, literally, shining examples of traditionalist décor. Starting with its fleet of Douglas DC-3s in the 1930s, American kept its airliners in bare polished aluminum, with the classic art-deco blue



When Coppola asked for a paint-free airplane, it wasn't as simple for Daher-Socata as just skipping the paint shop.

and orange accent striping melding into the American eagle logo.

When Coppola asked for a paint-free airplane, it wasn't as simple for Daher-Socata as just skipping the paint shop. The manufacturer wasn't going to release an unpainted aircraft before carrying out a long test process to explore all the implications of operating it in today's environment. And once the company was certain there would be no unintended consequences, it had to invest more than 250 man-hours to strip green

undercoat paint from Coppola's airplane, since today's aircraft is assembled with much of the green anti-corrosion paint already applied. Then came the long process of adding polishing compounds to bring out the aluminum's luster and protect its structural integrity.

One positive aspect of the project is that Coppola's TBM is 1,000 pounds lighter without a coat of paint. That's enough to make room for at least a couple of cases of the filmmaker's favorite wines. **E**

Mark Phelps (mphelps@bjtonline.com) is a managing editor at BJT sister publication *Aviation International News*.