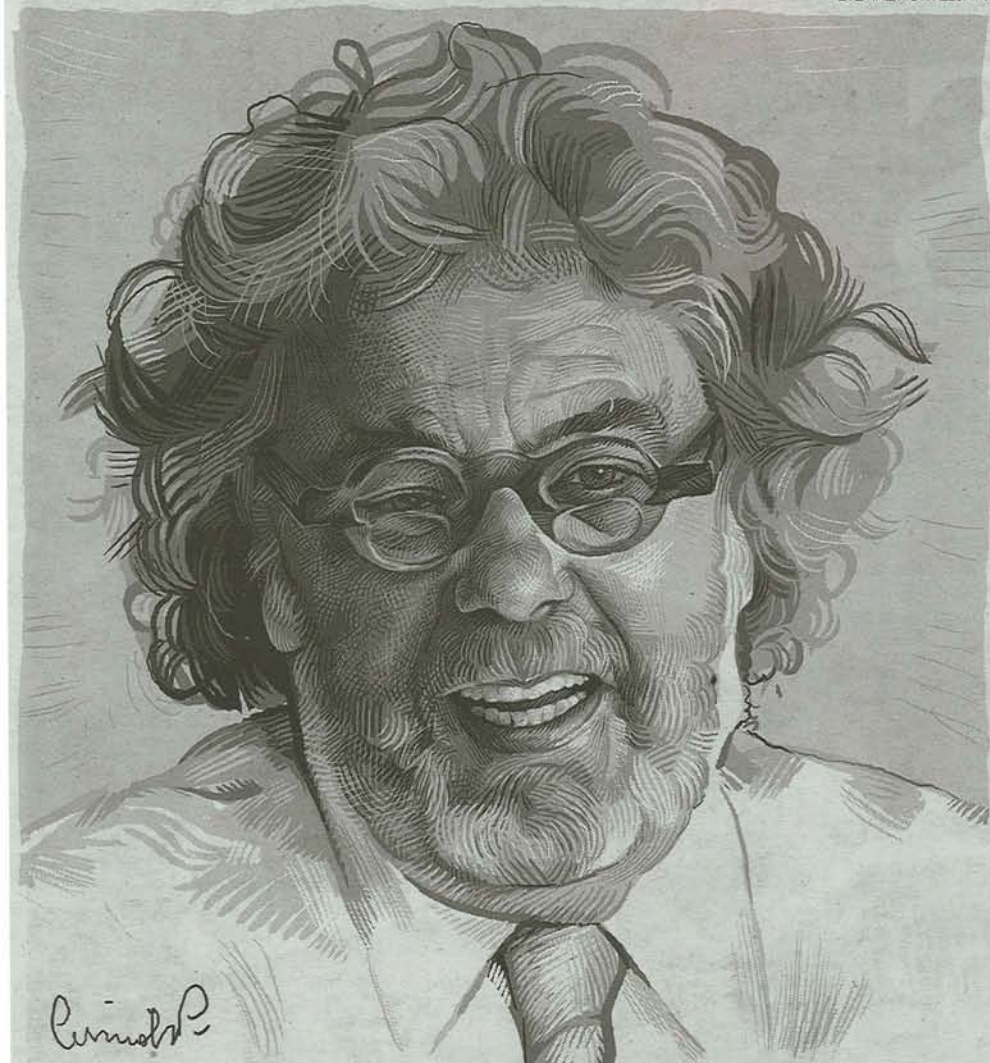


theface The poetic publisher

FELIX DENNIS

EYEVINE PIOTR LESNIAK



If the developers who want to build 6,000 eco-homes near Felix Dennis's country mansion had studied his career, they would have realised that underestimating him can be unwise. He began building his publishing empire after a judge in 1971 said he was "very much less intelligent" than the other founders of *Oz* magazine with whom he had stood trial for breaching obscenity laws. The Dennis publishing empire is now estimated to be worth £720 million, which is, by any stretch, a pretty impressive riposte to m'learned friend.

Dennis, 60, is not your conventional captain of industry, and his eco-credentials could hardly be better: when he dies, he's leaving most of his money to a charity that he established which aims to create the biggest new broadleaf forest in Britain for

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500 years. Expelled from school at 15, he worked as a gravedigger and window dresser before sending a letter to the founder of *Oz* — a 1960s counter-culture magazine — saying he liked it, but thought it could be improved. After *Oz* wound up, he founded his own publishing company in 1973.

"I'd publish anything," he said of his start-up business strategy, "just as long as I thought there was a crust in it for me." So

while his stable features such household names as *Maxim*, *The Week* and *Stuff*, there have also been publications on posters, martial arts, hi-fis, computers and Starsky and Hutch. *Soft and Desktop Publishing Monthly* was among those that failed to catch the public imagination. Dennis, meanwhile, acts as chairman of the company, "so now I still get the money and I can go in the offices a few times a year, shout a bit, tell them what to do and go home. They then completely ignore me and we go on as normal".

This has also allowed him time to spend his money in pleasingly unascetic ways: he has five homes around the world, has admitted to drug use in the past, likes smoking, curries and drinking good French wine, and cheerfully predicts that he is "extremely unlikely" to make three score years and ten. He's also possibly the only high-flying businessman who is also a best-selling poet: having started to read poetry "to get laid", he began writing it himself after a serious illness led doctors to warn him off work.

"Girls at the time seemed very impressed if you could quote a line or two [of poetry]," he said of his early career as a seducer, "so I started learning whole verses by heart."

Yet although he has a female companion, he has never married. He would have liked to, he once said, but "I can't bear the thought that I'd have to coincide, make an effort. People say it's never too late. How wrong they are."

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