

Mihnea C. Moldoveanu, 39

Entrepreneur carves niches in two worlds

by ALLISON DUNFIELD

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- Founder and chief technical officer, Redline Communications Group Inc., Markham, Ont.; Associate professor and director, Desautels Centre for Integrative Thinking, Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto

Since he was a child, Romanian-born professor Mihnea Moldoveanu has sought to examine the world and its great thinkers. But success came to him as the founder of technology company Redline Communications and the director of the Desautels Centre for Integrative Thinking because he isn't content to simply think and examine — action must follow.

"It's a bit different and strange because I've done this concurrently," he says of his dual career as a businessman and teacher.

"Usually people do something entrepreneurial and then they go into academia, or they are in academia and then they go out and do something entrepreneurial. But I like to do things, and I like to think about things at the same time, so it didn't really work for me to do one at a time."

He says the crux of the Desautels centre, part of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto, is to encourage students to learn an innovative, integrative way to process information. The method taps into the thinking patterns of leaders in fields such as engineering, medicine and design, and applies them to business.

He finds the process highly rewarding. "I don't know of any program in the world in which students are trained in this and allowed to practice these skills."

His own life has been a series of trying out various ways of thinking. In 1980, his family fled to Canada from the political turmoil of Romania and began to develop a life in Toronto. Early on, he thought his path was set — as a classical pianist.

But by age 16, he realized he didn't want to spend hours a day practising. He finished all of his Grade 13 classes in Grade 12; boredom drove him to complete high school early.

He was accepted at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1986 and graduated with bachelor's and master's degrees in mechanical engineering in 1992. However,

he still felt unsettled and took graduate classes in a variety of topics, including French literature.

After several false starts on PhDs in areas such as biomechanics and plasma physics, he was accepted to Harvard Business School's doctorate program and graduated with his doctor of business administration in 1997. Later, he did a post-doc fellowship at Harvard's graduate school of business.

While working on his DBA in 1994, he had become interested in digital processing and landed a \$270,000 Canadian government industrial research grant. That allowed him, in 1995, to launch Hefaistos Inc., a high-tech company in Markham, Ont., which built a digital subscriber-line modem running on standard digital signal processors. And he began commuting to Markham every two weeks from Boston.

In 1999, he moved to Toronto and sold Hefaistos for a \$20-million profit to private investors, right before the Internet boom began to dissolve.

That same year, he jumped back into the fray, creating another tech company, Redline, which focuses on wireless broadband equipment, wireless-based stations, as well as handsets and customer equipment. He continues to be involved as chief technical officer.

After a fateful 1999 meeting with Roger Martin, dean of Rotman, at which the two began developing the Desautels centre, he says he now feels like a "kid in a candy store," able to spend his "17-hour days" in both academia and the business world.

And Mr. Moldoveanu, who has been married for six years to Violeta Luca, recently published a book, *The Future of the MBA: Designing the Thinker of the Future*, which he hopes will become a sort of blueprint for business school management teams. "I'm looking forward to integrative thinking becoming a movement across business academia."

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