

Peter Pocklington was shocked when artwork and other possessions—even a bust of Pocklington himself—were seized from his California condo





## The last stand of Peter Puck

In 2002, former Oilers owner Peter Pocklington moved to California, leaving bailouts and ill will in his wake. To Canadians, he disappeared. For unwitting new partners in the U.S., a golden entrepreneur seemed to have swept into town

**BY BRENT JANG**

**PHOTOGRAPH BY JUSTIN FANTL**



**O**utside the exclusive condo, two “foo dog” sculptures protected the front door. The symbols of good fortune and wisdom are known in Asia for guarding the gates of heaven. But they couldn’t halt what was about to transpire on a sweltering July day in Indian Wells, a resort town in the California desert. Three U.S. marshals waited patiently at the third-floor entrance, expecting Peter Pocklington to answer the door.

But Pocklington was in the shower. His wife, Eva, and a maid heard the knocking and went to see why anyone would bother them at 10:30 a.m. during a heat wave. Shown some documents, the women let the marshals walk into the expansive condo. It overlooked a private 18-hole golf course—just one of the accoutrements of the Vintage Club, a gated community where the Pocklingtons rubbed shoulders with the likes of Bill Gates.

Emerging wet-haired, the 66-year-old Pocklington was handed a copy of a court order that allowed the marshals to seize valuable artwork from the condo. Minutes later, one of the marshals motioned to others to come inside. Naomi Balcombe and four people supporting her quest for justice marched in. If Pocklington wasn’t going to make good on the purchase of Balcombe’s company, she, thanks to the court order, would be reimbursed another way—with his prized possessions. Six specialty movers followed her.

For Balcombe, a 34-year-old entrepreneur, the raid was a dream come true. “I had to pinch myself,” she remembered later. For Pocklington, it was a day of reckoning. He’d used the trappings of wealth and his high-profile past in Canada to impress potential business partners in the United States. But Balcombe and others who had been seduced, and then disappointed, were now turning against him. Even the Alberta government was after him about some unfinished business.

Balcombe heard an angry Pocklington talking loudly on the phone, informing his lawyer about the raid. Neatly arranged in a row on a wall behind Pocklington’s ornate desk were five Andy Warhol prints of Mick Jagger. On the floor beneath the desk, there was a life-sized bronze head of Pocklington himself. Before the day was over, the movers packed and crated 56 works of art, including the Warhols, the bust and the impotent foo dogs.

This was only the first of three raids that would turn Pocklington’s world upside down. When it was over, much of the condo was as bare as Whoville in the wake of the Grinch. Pocklington has refused to let the dramatic events defeat him, countering that the art and most other goods were unfairly taken because they belong not to him but to Eva. “They took everything that they could get their hands on, and it’ll all come back,” he says with trademark defiance during one in a series of short interviews. “In the U.S., in some cases, it’s a bit of a police state. It’s sickening. California seems the worst in the country. They have so many lawyers per square inch, and they’re all just trolling. It’s sad.”

Balcombe’s bold move opened the gates for dozens of other creditors. “Mr. Pocklington has been successful dodging creditors throughout the world and is extremely sophisticated in this regard,” lawyers for Balcombe argued in U.S. District Court in the application to seize assets. “He is comfortable deceiving people and ignoring the law.” Pocklington, however, denies any wrongdoing. None of the allegations has been proven in court.

**P**eter Hugh Pocklington slipped off Canadians’ radar screen in 2000, when he left Edmonton, seemingly reduced to nothing—stripped of his assets by angry creditors, and with little to show for having owned the

National Hockey League’s Edmonton Oilers. Yet the hard-nosed entrepreneur, born and raised in London, Ontario, once controlled a sprawling business empire.

A Grade 12 dropout, Pocklington started out as a car salesman in Southern Ontario. In 1971, 30 years old, he arrived in Edmonton and opened a Ford dealership. He soon used his profit from car sales to diversify into other interests, including financial services, real estate and the Oilers. He signed Wayne Gretzky in 1978 in a deal with Vancouver businessman Nelson Skalbania. Gretzky was then a skinny 17-year-old, but his prodigious skills were already dazzling hockey fans across Canada. The Oilers, in the World Hockey Association at the time, joined the NHL one year later.

The ’80s were the prime of the man who became known as Peter Puck. But if the decade showed how business success can open doors leading as far as the highest office in the country, it also revealed the downside of being in the public eye.

In the spring of 1982, during an intruder’s botched attempt to kidnap Eva, Pocklington was taken hostage at gunpoint for 11 hours in his mansion in Edmonton. He suffered a wound from a police bullet during the incident. Eva managed to escape unscathed, and two servants were released unharmed.

Pocklington endured a particularly turbulent year in 1983, first because the federal Department of Insurance placed his Fidelity Trust Co. on probation. Fidelity, which boasted former U.S. president Gerald Ford as a special consultant, was ailing because of bad real estate loans. The company’s ultimate collapse resulted in the federal government’s

Canada Deposit Insurance Corp.'s bailing out depositors to the tune of \$359 million.

In the summer, Pocklington ran for the federal Progressive Conservative leadership. The arriviste faced long odds against a field of party heavyweights, all of whom were comparative moderates. In statements made prior to the campaign and in its wake, Pocklington made clear his contempt for the civil service ("rules, regulations and bureaucratic control"), Crown corporations (an "abomination"), the Liberals ("a socialist party"), the press ("80% socialist") and organized labour ("scrap the unions").

Pocklington ran on a platform that emphasized a flat tax of 20%, a proposal that would lighten the tax burden on the rich. Pocklington and future finance minister Michael Wilson withdrew after the first ballot, both throwing their support to Brian Mulroney, the eventual winner. But during the campaign, Wilson had clashed with the maverick from Edmonton. "I'm fighting against a Pocklington who says, 'I'm going to fire the whole civil service,'" Wilson complained.

Finally, the year showed the public one more layer to Pocklington besides controversial businessman and aspiring politician—new-age enthusiast. In the fall, a Supreme Court of Ontario jury dismissed a \$7-million claim against Pocklington by a psychic, Rita Burns, who alleged that he had failed to pay for advice on personal and business issues. "There have been a lot of snickers already, but the people I care about will understand," Pocklington said. He once told an interviewer that he leaves his body for nocturnal trips to foreign locales like the Pyramids. Although he would later explain that those remarks were exaggerated, he was steadfast in his belief in destiny.

As the decade progressed, Pocklington collected enemies like kids collect hockey cards. In 1986, two years after the Oilers won their first Stanley Cup, Pocklington brought in replacement workers during an ugly strike at his Gainers Inc. meat-packing plant in Edmonton. Union leaders never forgave him for the use of strikebreakers.

The six-month strike was a turning point for the industry, placing pressure on Canadian producers to narrow the wage gap between its workers and lower-paid ones in the United States. The strike also led to a boycott from which the company couldn't recover. (After three ownership changes, Maple Leaf Foods decided to close the meat packer for good amid a strike in 1997.)

Then came the infamous trade on Aug. 9, 1988. Pocklington will forever be vilified by Oilers fans as the man who sold Gretzky to the Los Angeles Kings for \$18 million. It turned out to be the beginning of the end for



Until it was seized, Pocklington conducted business from an ornate desk in his condo

Pocklington's grip over the Oilers.

Over the next 10 years, even as his corporate debts steadily grew, the Pocklingtons avidly pursued their hobbies as collectors. Eva favoured Buddhas, designer handbags, jewellery and Inuit carvings, while her husband accumulated art, Cuban cigars and wine. Some 40 Renoir sketches covered the walls of their home, while Pocklington's office was graced by the Group of Seven.

The fine fabric of Pocklington's life began unravelling in 1998, when Alberta Treasury Branches, a savings institution owned by the province, forced Pocklington to sell the Oilers, alleging that \$100 million in loans to Pocklington had gone awry. The next year, he placed his main holding company, Pocklington Financial Corp., into bankruptcy, clearing the way for creditors to pick away at his crumbling empire. Other holdings that slipped away included a Triple-A baseball team in Edmonton and Canbra Foods Ltd., a margarine company based in Lethbridge. Alberta Treasury Branches seized Canbra and sold it for \$64 million. Pocklington was also forced to relinquish his private jet, the Group of Seven paintings and even his \$750,000 wine collection.

Pocklington performed good works, too, helping to organize charity golf tournaments and backing fundraising dinners for Junior Achievement, a group teaching teens about business. But he left Edmonton without accolades for his charitable work or for bringing five Stanley Cup championships to the city. Instead, critics labelled him as Peter Porker. Gainers, his hog-slaughtering operation, cost the Alberta government \$209 million in bailout expenses. This pattern of acquisition, financial trouble, and legal fallout would later become familiar to U.S. creditors.

After three decades in Edmonton, the Pocklingtons moved to a Toronto condo, where they resided for two years. In 2002, they settled year-round in their winter getaway in Indian Wells.

Pocklington started charming Naomi Balcombe over the phone in early 2005. In May of that year, she found herself sitting in his condo, poring over his purchase offer for her firm, Ageless Foundation Inc., a manufacturer and distributor of nutritional supplements such as amino acids, plant extracts and vitamins. She had launched Ageless in her home state of Florida in her early 20s, after graduating in biology from Florida Atlantic University in 1997.

Balcombe's breath was taken away by the California condo, inside and out. The retractable ceiling seemed to bring the blue sky right into the room. The condo's contents were themselves overwhelming to the eye—a brimming mash-up of art gallery and souvenir shop.

Pocklington went for a workout with his personal trainer to give Balcombe time to read his preliminary takeover offer. She was impressed. What's more, Pocklington was also in the midst of acquiring control of a larger firm in her sector. Founded in 1926, Naturade Inc. sold soy-based protein foods and arthritis pain products, bringing in \$14 million in 2004. (All currency is in U.S. dollars from here on in, except as noted.)

The Pocklingtons asked Balcombe to join them for dinner. The wine flowed, and Balcombe felt she was in on a terrific business deal. In closing the transaction in August, Pocklington gave his personal guarantee on a promissory note from Naturade.

But the sale of Ageless quickly soured: Pocklington wouldn't pay. Balcombe, having witnessed his wealth, refused to believe he couldn't come up with the money. She filed suit against Pocklington and one of his holding companies in late 2005. Sixteen months later, a Miami judge awarded her \$806,475.

Although the judgment had been relatively speedy, Balcombe's case did not move ahead quickly. But in the spring of 2008, Balcombe got a call from California entrepreneur Donald Courtney, who said he'd come across her name in legal filings. Courtney wanted to see if he could gather ammunition to help his friend, Toru Kamatari, who was also sparring with Pocklington.

Kamatari founded Sonartec Inc., a maker of high-end golf clubs, in 1999 and built it up for nearly eight years, even garnering an endorsement for the company's clubs from pro golfer Nick Price. Like Balcombe, Kamatari found himself at Pocklington's condo, awestruck as he considered a purchase offer in late 2006. Kamatari was smitten by tales of Pocklington's colourful career as an entrepreneur back in Canada, capped by a two-decade stretch as owner of the Oilers. The Vintage Club address by itself blew Kamatari away. "I was on his balcony, and he pointed in the direction of Bill Gates's house. I saw the pictures of Gerald Ford and the Bushes. Pocklington drove a nice BMW. I trusted him."

The Japanese-born Kamatari, 44, has regretted the meeting ever since. He filed a breach-of-contract lawsuit in February, 2008, alleging Pocklington didn't live up to his end of a deal to acquire Sonartec. Kamatari has despaired so much that he can't even enjoy a round of the game that was his passion: Pocklington not only didn't pay him for Sonartec, but it fell apart on his watch. The firm had \$4.5 million in revenue in 2006, but within a year of taking control, Pocklington set the wheels in motion to place it into Chapter 7 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code—in other words, destined for liquidation rather than attempted resuscitation (which Chapter 11 provides for). Kamatari is now listed in U.S. Bankruptcy Court as one of 110 Sonartec creditors who are owed a total of \$4 million by Pocklington and his corporate entities. Kamatari and a business partner from Japan, Hidetsugu Koyama, claim that they are each owed more than \$1 million. "Toru's life dream disappeared when he lost Sonartec," his friend Courtney says.

By the time he called Balcombe, Courtney had noticed common threads in three other disputes with Pocklington besides his friend Kamatari's. As with Sonartec, Pocklington had been accused in court documents of having fraudulently gained control of firms, and of then having misappropriated assets and dodged creditors. Apart from Balcombe's company, the other cases were Naturade and another golf

equipment firm, GolfGear International Inc. In 2007 in Nevada, Pocklington placed GolfGear into Chapter 7; the company's unsecured creditors are allegedly owed more than \$1 million. As for Naturade, Pocklington ended up losing it to Redux Holdings Inc. in a messy legal dispute that left Naturade in bankruptcy protection for nearly 15 months, finally emerging in November, 2007.

After their conversation, Courtney introduced Kamatari's California lawyers to Balcombe. "Don was the orchestra leader," Balcombe says. "He put Toru and me together, and then we worked with the lawyers." Kamatari's lawsuit against Pocklington has stalled. But Kamatari's lawyers took on Balcombe's case separately, and successfully had her \$806,475 Florida court judgment registered in California in July, 2008. In a pleasant surprise for Balcombe, a U.S. District judge in California then granted a court

order to seize dozens of Pocklington's prized assets, allowing her lawyers to take temporary custody of the belongings.

A posse of creditors took note. Apart from more than \$2 million owed on mortgages from Palm Desert National Bank and Washington Mutual Inc., Pocklington allegedly owes money on a BMW auto lease (\$73,000) and revolving lines of credit at Bank of America (\$18,634) and Citibank (\$7,800).

Balcombe names one of Pocklington's holding companies, Bahamas-based Quincy Investments Corp., as a defendant in her lawsuit, but Quincy was dissolved in mid-2007. A new Bahamian entity, Dempsey Investments Corp., acquired Quincy's assets. Pocklington submits that he was being

altruistic in creating Dempsey, an entity that is overseen by trustees for the benefit of 50 charities and his 12 grandchildren. (Pocklington and Eva have one son from their marriage, as well as three and two children, respectively, from their first marriages.) Pocklington emphasizes in court filings that "I do not control, manage or derive a benefit from Dempsey Investment Corp. and all control of this entity is handled by the trustees of the trust, of which I am not a trustee or beneficiary." He denies that Quincy and Dempsey have ever been "my alter egos."

Balcombe's lawyers aren't swayed, alleging in court filings that Pocklington "is a professional con man who bilks people and entities, and then uses offshore (Bahamian) entities to hide the assets taken."

"Peter's Laws of Business" include "If you can't win, change the rules! If you can't change the rules, ignore them!"



Pocklington counters that he got sold a bill of goods by Balcombe's Ageless, saying bitterly that "the high hopes for her company when we bought it turned out to be half of what we expected it to be. Welcome to the U.S." As for Kamatari's company, Pocklington says, "I'm not interested in fighting lawsuits with people who have no interest in settling anything. It's just mean-spirited."

Kamatari thinks back to how he was influenced by Pocklington's own "authorized website," which portrays him as civic-minded, serving on the board of directors of the Betty Ford Center, providers of drug and alcohol rehabilitation services. On the site, Pocklington also expresses his admiration for entrepreneurs, proclaiming that "small businesses are what made America great and will continue to make America great." Pocklington wrote that "businesses fail for a number of reasons, including under-capitalization, no vision by the owner/founder, lack of product and not spending 48 hours a day on making it successful. Business is tough! You have to be dedicated."

**t**he sprawling, intensely private Vintage Club is a vacation home to billionaires such as Philip Anschutz, Roger Penske and Cargill MacMillan Jr. The Vintage made headlines in 2000 for having reprimanded Bill Gates for wearing a T-shirt on a practice tee, attire deemed too casual under club rules. If the place is a bit formal, residents appreciate how security staff protect the entrance like a border crossing. Outsiders who drive along the grand paving-stone entrance can view two cascading waterfalls, but are turned away from the community.

A California process server discovered just how hard it can be to get in. Acting on behalf of yet another aggrieved company, Protein Ingredient Technologies Inc., the server made a dozen unsuccessful attempts to contact Pocklington in the summer of 2006. Vintage security rejected a request from the process server to stake out the condo. Protein claims that it suffered \$221,206 in damages after Pocklington failed to live up to a distribution deal. After Pocklington didn't pay Protein as he had pledged to do in a settlement agreement, a California judge awarded the company a \$50,000 judgment against him in 2007.

In the summer of 2008, after doggedly clearing legal hurdles and persuading Vintage Club security of the validity of her court order, Balcombe could hardly believe that she was finally at Pocklington's doorstep. After walking in, she saw the place anew. It was a sort of time capsule of selec-



Having bested Pocklington, Naomi Balcombe stands to get only a fraction of the raids' proceeds

tively preserved memories, staged to impress visitors like herself. Dozens of framed photographs arrayed on ornate furniture told a tale of an entrepreneur who once associated with a who's who of the sports, political and entertainment worlds. In one photo, Gretzky is the proud Oilers captain giving Pocklington a hug. In another, superstar tenor Luciano Pavarotti puts his arm around a beaming Pocklington. Former U.S. presidents

George H. W. Bush and Gerald Ford pose with Pocklington on a golf course. No fewer than five former U.S. presidents and first ladies beam from autographed photos.

When Balcombe showed up, neither Pocklington nor his wife recognized her at first. Pocklington could do nothing to prevent the seizure. So he tried to keep his emotions in check, even playing a game of solitaire on his computer at one point. Looking back, he reflects, "That's the way life is—you deal with it and carry on." Pocklington has threatened that he will seek a \$5-million judgment, alleging that the goods were seized wrongfully.

The 56 items taken in the first raid included an estimated \$1 million in paintings, sculptures and other art. In the two additional seizures that followed over the next two weeks, authorities carted off another 190 items. The haul was polyglot: two hockey sticks autographed by Gretzky, numerous Buddha statues, Inuit soapstone carvings, two sculptures by French artist Antoniucci Volti, Christofle silverware, pieces of the Berlin Wall, a set of Rosenthal white china plates, a cannon round fired in the 21-gun salute at President Ford's funeral in 2007.

To the Pocklingtons, it seemed as if nothing was safe from the

authorities—not even their safe. During the second raid, a locksmith spent 30 minutes removing the safe’s door. The movers also went through the condo’s garage, taking a motorized golf cart and a set of high-end golf clubs from Pocklington’s storage unit. “I know that he was angry,” Balcombe says. “When the movers were loading the golf cart, he started cursing and freaking out.” The agitated entrepreneur managed to retrieve a handful of his Cohiba Cuban cigars from the golf cart, “and then stomped off,” she adds.

The movers even rifled through Eva’s walk-in closet, seizing a long list of luxury possessions. Hermès purses. A collection of Louis Vuitton bags and notebooks. Yves Saint Laurent evening gowns. Chanel shoes. “The bags and purses alone could be worth a lot,” Balcombe says.

But her right to take them is being contested. Eva’s lawyers say in filings in U.S. District Court that the vast majority of assets seized belong to her. They state that Eva has her own property trust, and allege that Balcombe and her lawyers acted “carelessly, recklessly” by seizing the possessions. Balcombe’s lawyers counter that under California law, assets claimed by Eva are either jointly owned with Pocklington or simply owned by him. But Eva, 66, is wondering in particular why her closet was targeted. In court filings, her lawyers emphasize the “nature of many of the items seized, which included women’s evening gowns, women’s shoes, women’s handbags and lifelong heirlooms gifted to Eva Pocklington by her family, which heralded from the Canadian Arctic.” (Eva was raised in Yellowknife.) “Unless they’re saying Peter Pocklington is a cross-dresser, I don’t think a handbag is the personal property of a man,” Pocklington’s lawyer, Michael Lusby, says. “There’s no way that you can reasonably assume that her evening dresses were his property.”

For years, Pocklington has lived by guidelines dubbed “Peter’s Laws of Business” on his website, including, “If you can’t win, change the rules! If you can’t change the rules, ignore them!” Lusby agrees that it’s a dog-eat-dog world when it comes to doing deals, whether big or small. “Hard business deals rest essentially on taking advantage of somebody. You buy something because you feel it’s worth more than what somebody else is selling it for.” Lusby notes that Balcombe and Kamatari signed deals, knowing what they were getting into: “We aren’t talking about consumers and little old ladies. We’re talking about sophisticated businesspeople who understand the risks.”

Days after the third and final raid, Pocklington declared personal bankruptcy. In U.S. Bankruptcy Court, Pocklington’s personal liabilities are listed at \$19.7 million. In his declaration, Pocklington claimed that his net worth totalled just \$2,900: \$200 in his wallet, a \$500 watch, a \$500 set of golf clubs, \$300 of clothing and shoes, \$450 in appliances and furnishings, \$450 worth of personal goods seized and \$500 worth of memorabilia, trophies and art. But lawyers for Balcombe argue in U.S. District Court that Pocklington is far from a pauper—that he has vastly understated his personal assets in California and is also hiding money in the Bahamas. They wonder what happened to his valuable hockey memorabilia, notably five Stanley Cup rings.

The bankruptcy was, of course, a red flag to creditors. They want the seized assets to be sold to the highest bidder, so they can recover at least a portion of what they are owed. “Peter Pocklington has systematically looted several companies and willfully breached his contractual promises to both the plaintiff/judgment creditor here and several other companies and entities, including the government of Alberta,” wrote Balcombe’s lawyers.

Having bailed out Gainers and absorbed bad loans to the Oilers and other Pocklington businesses, the Alberta government was not unhappy to see Pocklington leave the province. As for the losses, he was considered a cold case. But lately the government has picked up the trail. Belying the notion that Pocklington had few assets when he left the province, a multitude of valuables were moved to California from Edmonton. Indeed, an estimated three-quarters of the condo’s contents were moved down from Canada.

Alberta is trying to recover \$12 million (Canadian) from Pocklington for defaulting on loans to Gainers. In Alberta Court of Queen’s Bench in 2007, a judge granted an order to award the government’s original claim of \$2 million (Canadian), plus \$10 million (Canadian) in accumulated interest over the years.

Pocklington dismisses Alberta’s efforts. “Oh boy, I don’t know where to start on that crock of crap,” he says. “You can’t win in an Alberta court anyway, if you’re me.” He questions the validity of Alberta’s base claim of \$2 million, and also, “How the hell do you get to that much interest? It’s just ridiculous. Life is too short to continue this kind of quarrel.” He also argues that he never received the \$2 million in the first place, saying the funds were paid to Gainers as part of the strike settlement. “No

good deed goes unpunished.”

But the quarrel has since grown bigger. In late November, Balcombe joined forces with Kamatari and the Alberta government to file a bombshell complaint against Pocklington in U.S. Bankruptcy Court. Their lawyers allege that Pocklington listed his net worth at \$20 million in obtaining a life insurance policy within the past five years, a far cry from his claim of having \$2,900 to his name. The lawyers also allege that Pocklington receives \$50,000 a month through Dempsey, the Bahamian holding company that he claims not to benefit from.

“Pocklington has been able to hide funds coming into his possession from various fraudulent schemes, and simultaneously wire funds to Mrs. Pocklington on a monthly basis in sufficient sums to support his lavish lifestyle,” according to the filing, which asks the court to deny Pocklington’s application to have his personal debts discharged. The complaint also requests that the court deny his separate moves to be discharged as a debtor to Ageless, Sonartec and the Alberta government. “Pocklington not only siphons the assets

Pocklington is working on new deals. “But I’m so sick and tired of dealing with the American court system. It’s just crazy”



of companies he fraudulently acquires into the offshore entities, as well as any monies he raises from investors in these companies, but he also uses them to fund a lavish lifestyle, while avoiding taxes and judgments.” Adding to the pressure, the Nevada bankruptcy trustee in the GolfGear dispute has asked the court to reject Pocklington’s moves to have his GolfGear debts discharged.

Balcombe realizes that there will likely be many more months of legal manoeuvring by creditors to obtain their share of the spoils from the raids. She began her lawsuit against Pocklington in a quest to recoup the money that she lost in selling Ageless. Now, the legal process is out of her hands. She has resigned herself to seeing only a small portion of any proceeds, but hopes to see Pocklington get his just deserts. “I was basically conned by Peter, but I’m a private person. I don’t want to get any more involved in his world,” she says.

**P**ocklington’s Vintage Club condo now sits empty, but doesn’t appear to have much equity value. There’s a \$1.3-million mortgage on it with Washington Mutual, the failed savings and loan giant that was sold last fall to JP Morgan Chase. There are also two other mortgages listed in court, held by Palm Desert National Bank, totalling nearly \$1.1 million.

In early 2008, Pocklington listed the condo for sale for \$2.35 million. Facing the sharp downturn in California’s real estate market, the unit remained unsold through late 2008. According to lending documents, Pocklington’s mortgage obligations to Washington Mutual alone are \$7,109 a month, but he hasn’t made a payment since August. Washington Mutual, a secured creditor, said in a court filing that a suggested relisting price for the condo could be \$1.295 million—a price chop of 45%.

Pocklington has been a Vintage member since 1990. He originally bought the condo that year, gifted it in Alberta to Eva in 1996, registered that change in California in 1998, and then transferred it again to various corporations over the years, the latest owner being Dempsey Investments Corp., according to mortgage documents.

The Pocklingtons vacated last fall, deciding instead to rent half of a bungalow duplex in nearby Palm Desert. Their new address, Lakes Country Club, doesn’t have the cachet of the Vintage, but it nonetheless offers a private setting on a 27-hole golf course, with 24-hour security patrolling the entrance gate. The disparity is better captured by golf fees: While the Vintage commands \$350,000 in initiation fees and \$28,200 in annual dues, the Lakes charges \$10,000 and \$4,920.

How long the couple intend to live at the Lakes is unclear. Pocklington says that he misses “the civility” of Canada, but on his website, he makes his allegiance clear. “I love the United States, and I fully intend to become a United States citizen. I like the wide-open attitude of Americans. Americans generally praise success.” Just how Pocklington can declare himself a success at this point is unclear. His personal bankruptcy filing is scheduled to go to court in February. He’s also dealing with the liquidation case of Sonartec.

Pocklington has his own version of events, though he doesn’t wish to go into detail. He says he will tell the behind-the-scenes story about his past business dealings in Canada, including the Oilers and the Gainers controversy, in a book that he’s co-writing with an Edmonton journalist. Pocklington doesn’t view Balcombe as the victim; rather, it’s he who has been wronged.

Indeed, Pocklington is unfazed by all his troubles, saying his legal squabbles are “quite frankly, nobody’s business. This is all bullshit. They can say whatever the hell they want and I really don’t care.” He says he isn’t ready to give up his passion for business, even though the legal battles are wearing on him. “I’m in the middle of three more things. But I am so sick and tired with dealing with the American court system. It’s just crazy.” Asked about whether it’s tempting to spend more time golfing, he replies: “Not interested in that.”

Pocklington, who’s now 67, is trying to keep things in perspective. Having hundreds of familiar and valuable possessions seized isn’t driving him to distraction, he insists.

“I don’t want to get involved in the public again. You never win. It’s ‘he said, you said.’ I don’t really give a shit what people say any more. I really don’t care. You can write whatever the hell you want. Thirty or 40 years from now, who gives a shit,” he says. “With all the shit that I’ve been through in my life, I don’t really mind. I’m not a bitter person. People who are bitter end up having heart attacks. That’s why I’m healthy at my age. I don’t internalize things.”

