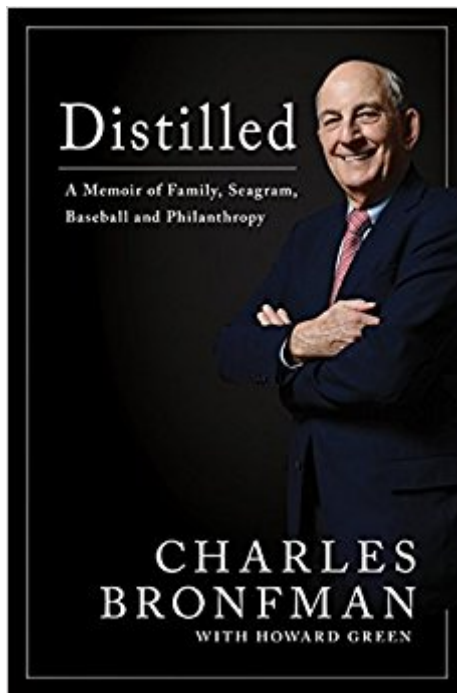




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Distilled: Distilled A Memoir Of Family, Seagram, Baseball, And Philanthropy



Synopsis

While much has been written about his father, Sam, a titan of industry, there is no public record of Charles Bronfman's thoughts on his own life, family, career and his significant accomplishments in sport and philanthropy. *Distilled* does just that, chronicling key events in the life of the heir to one of Canada's great fortunes. Born in 1931 to the fabulously wealthy Bronfmans, Charles grew up in a 20-room mansion with many staff. Via their control of the distilling giant Seagram, the Bronfman family dominated the liquor business with brands such as Crown Royal, V.O. and Chivas Regal. By the 1980s, Seagram was also the biggest shareholder of DuPont and by the 1990s, the family's wealth was in the billions, culminating in the \$35-billion sale of Seagram to France's Vivendi, which turned into a financial and family disaster. In *Distilled*, Charles reflects on all of it--his relationship with his parents, his brother Edgar, working in the family business, landing Canada's first big league baseball franchise (the Montreal Expos), leading a philanthropic life by promoting Canadian identity through Heritage Minutes and supporting Israel through countless innovative initiatives including the globally respected Birthright Israel--and to how the Bronfman family splintered over the sale of Seagram.

Book Information

Hardcover: 368 pages

Publisher: HarperCollins Publishers (May 2, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 144345396X

ISBN-13: 978-1443453967

Product Dimensions: 1.2 x 6.5 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #727,142 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #116 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Canadian #372 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Philanthropy & Charity #457 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Sports & Outdoors > Baseball

Customer Reviews

"Candid, engaging and at times poignant." (Maclean's)
"Detailed and surprisingly candid." (Montreal Gazette)
"An inspiring and unusually candid memoir . . . a well-written, easy-to-read tell-all." (Winnipeg Free Press)
"A magical and

magnetic story of how one extraordinary man optimistically and tenaciously navigated his values and vision triumphantly through business, philanthropy, education, and the public interest without ever losing his sense of compassion--or balance. A true original. And a great read!

• (The Honourable Rosalie Silberman Abella, Supreme Court of Canada)

• "I have known Charles Bronfman for fifty years. During that period he has shown great strengths as a visionary business leader, an innovative philanthropist and as a passionate Canadian who made a major contribution to the unity and prosperity of our country . . . a fascinating book.

• (The Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, former prime minister of Canada)

• "Charles Bronfman is a rare combination of generosity and determination. A lover of Zion and a beloved leader of his people. Above all, he is a real friend--in wintry days, and in the blossoming spring.

• (Shimon Peres, former president and prime minister of Israel and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize)

• "Charles Bronfman was a great statesman and leader with remarkable vision during his tenure as a Major League Baseball owner. . . . He brought not only wisdom but integrity to our sport . . . Distilled is compelling and absolutely fascinating to read.

• (Allan H. (Bud) Selig, Commissioner Emeritus, Major League Baseball)

• "Charles Bronfman is a passionate advocate of Canada and the Canadian identity He has defined what it truly means to be a philanthropist in Canada. His story serves as inspiration to us all.

• (Suzanne Fortier, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, McGill University)

While much has been written about Charles Bronfman's father, Sam, a titan of industry, there is no public record of Charles's thoughts on his own life, family, career, and significant accomplishments in sport and philanthropy. *Distilled* chronicles the key events in the life of an heir to one of Canada's great fortunes. Charles Bronfman grew up surrounded by luxury, in a twenty-room mansion with a large staff. Via the family's control of the distilling giant Seagram, the Bronfmans dominated the liquor business, with brands such as Crown Royal, V.O., and Chivas Regal. By the 1980s, Seagram was also the biggest shareholder of DuPont, and by the 1990s, the family's wealth was in the billions, culminating in the \$35-billion sale of Seagram to France's Vivendi, which led to financial and family disaster. In *Distilled*, Charles reflects on all of it—his relationship with his parents and his brother, Edgar; working in the family business; landing Canada's first big-league baseball franchise (the Montreal Expos); leading a philanthropic life by promoting Canadian identity through Heritage Minutes and supporting Israel through such innovative initiatives as the globally respected Birth-right Israel; and how the Bronfman family splintered over the sale of Seagram.

Eighty-five year old Charles Bronfman of the Canadian family which owned Seagram has written a memoir about his life. It's not an autobiography, per se, but consists more of musings about his life, family, charitable, and business enterprises. The book, "Distilled: A Memoir of Family, Seagram, Baseball, and Philanthropy", covers the four main parts of Bronfman's life. As the youngest child of four, and the second son, Charles Bronfman seemed almost like an after-thought in the Bronfman family. His older brother, Edgar, was the anointed successor to his father, Samuel, who built the fabled Seagram company. Edgar was a high-flyer in personal ways, too, and I think it's pretty clear to the reader that a life-long animosity existed between the two brothers. That animosity waxed and waned in the passing years, but Charles pretty clearly blames Edgar and Edgar, Jr for the bad business deals that Seagram and the family made in the 1990's that closed down the company in 2000. He also points out his own passivity in not stepping in to stop the deals. But the loss of his company, and a rather steep decline in personal wealth didn't affect Charles' philanthropy, which includes charities and foundations in his native Canada, Israel, and the United States. Married four times; divorced twice, widowed once, with the fourth marriage still holding, Charles seems not to have been an easy man to either be or stay married to. His longest-lasting marriage - so far, anyway - was to his second wife, Andy, who was killed by a car while out walking the dog one morning. Even as he talks about his intense mourning, he also mentions that things between the two hadn't been so great in the past couple of years. She's had cancer... But Charles Bronfman has led an interesting life, both in public and private. I think he was reasonably open - after all, who can be completely open off the psychoanalyst's couch? - and the book is well-put together by his co-author, Howard Green.

I thoroughly enjoyed Distilled about the life of Charles Bronfman, youngest son of Sam Bronfman, entrepreneur and founder of the Canadian Seagrams Company and source of the family fortune. Distilled is not really about the booze business per se although that's part of the story. Largely missing is how Sam made the family fortune from hard work and timely elimination of US competitors during that 15-year mistake--US Prohibition. Dad understood the business top to bottom: "Distilling whisky is a business for patient people. Distilling is a science; blending is an art." Distilled is a personal and intimate story of the life of Charles. I was drawn to the story by Charles' candor and frankness about family dysfunction and struggles and conflicts, investments gone very badly, need for love and affection withheld, and a lifetime to become one's own person of accomplishment independent of dad and siblings. Charles reveals through story-telling that

he's more a people person versus his hands-on and decisive older brother Edgar Sr who made hard decisions quickly and void of emotion. One Edgar quote is a thinly veiled criticism of Charles: "it is easier to be tougher if you don't know the people." The book is told chronologically: Childhood in aristocratic splendor in then Canada's wealthiest Jewish family surrounded by the servant class from Montreal--French speaking "White Negros." The French it turns out were the Servant Class.* Roles in the family business--Seagram--and taking a backseat to firstborn older brother and heir-apparent Edgar. At its zenith, Seagrams accounted for 1 in 3 drinks sold in the USA.* Investment decisions gone bad and Charles remaining silent in the interest of family harmony when he could see the train wreck ahead. Seagrams was at one time DuPont's largest shareholder and was collecting over \$100mm in dividends per year|but this bored the family. Really. This resulted in the ill-timed \$9 billion investment in MCA and other media companies. That started the steady collapse of the family fortune. The family gave up the booze and energy businesses for Hollywood where the product sometimes lasts only for weeks.* Charles co-founded Historica, producers of a series of television shorts on Canadian history* Breaking out about age 38 to bring baseball to Montreal--majority owner of the Montreal Expos for about 22 years. Eventually sold the team* A lifetime of philanthropy, building ties with Israel, and his proudest accomplishment: He and politically opposite Michael Steinhardt co-founded Taglit Birthright, a program which provides a free, educational travel experience to Israel for young Jewish adults.Charles does not disguise that he's a political Leftist though that is a small part of the story.While hardly on a starvation diet today with a personal net worth of about \$2 Billion, the story could be renamed "from shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves in three generations". Family holdings went from \$8 Billion to \$3 Billion today.I came away realizing that family issues are all the same everywhere, though wealth and business interests complicate everything. I also vow never to invest in a public company run by a family where blood supersedes all else.

Well done. Liked Charles's candor. He called a spade a spade.

If you're considering this book to discover any untold stories about the rise of the Seagram liquor empire and their sustained dominance in that industry, you will be disappointed. This is about growing up rich, demanding father and inter-family jealousies.The early arrival of the Bronfman's is noteworthy.

Explains how the third generation (Edgar Jr.) screwed up one of the greatest companies.

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