

"We have a lot of that in Israel now—bunkers."

"With my bunkers I don't want people to fear anything. Just to see that the mind can become a bunker sometimes."

"Are you more of an artist or a mechanic?"

"I am both, but mostly an artist."

"Did the rabbi just pass by here?" a man in a red baseball cap asked at the reception desk.

The bunker on the Hebrew Home's lawn was made of willow, and the whole structure looked simultaneously defensive and vulnerable and warlike and homemade and, somehow, sweet. In its gun-slit window is a mirror. Across the broad river, the New Jersey bank rises steep and thickly wooded, with little sign of habitation. A wilderness sun sets behind it. Farther along the lawn, beyond the bunker, is a pleasant gazebo with chairs and a sofa. It offers a good view of the river, and the soothing rhythms of the trains clicking by on tracks just below the bluff, out of sight. A plaque in the gazebo says that it was built in memory of Ida Abramowitz, who came to America from Europe, raised a family, and lived from 1830 to 1938.

—Ian Frazier

BLASTOFF DEPT. SPACE MOGUL



We've learned a lot recently about what the richest one per cent look like to those below them on the income ladder; we know less about what they look like to themselves. Fortunately, Richard Branson, the highly personable British kazillionaire—who is the head of the Virgin empire, and is the two-hundred-and-fifty-fourth-wealthiest person on earth, according to *Forbes*—was in town recently, and was willing to speak on that topic. He said that great wealth carries great responsibility, and that the Occupy Wall Street movement should serve as "a very necessary wakeup call" to rich business leaders. He described the resentment of the protesters as "understandable," and added, "I think

it's an admirable movement, it's a peaceful movement. The only thing that's not been peaceful is the way the police in some states have dealt with it, which I think is absolutely wrong."

Branson was wearing jeans, a dark sports coat, and a nice-looking white-on-white striped shirt. For a car ride to a television studio, he graciously called dibs on the car's minimally padded rear middle seat, so that his four almost infinitely less wealthy companions could ride in comfort, and with seat belts. He was in New York mainly to promote his latest book, "Screw Business as Usual"—a title whose first word, he said, had caused trouble in London the week before. "I was on the BBC, and they told me I could say it only once. So, after I'd used up my one 'screw,' the person who was interviewing me kept calling the book 'Business as Usual.'"

Before the drive to the television studio, Branson had used the S-word without incident at the American Museum of Natural History, where he had stopped for a quick tour of the exhibit "Beyond Planet Earth: The Future of Space Exploration." One of Branson's many companies, Virgin Galactic, has built its own spaceship, and a large model of it was hanging from the ceiling. The company expects to begin taking non-astronauts into space a year from now. (Tickets are two hundred thousand dollars, or two million Virgin Atlantic frequent-flier miles, for a three-hour trip.) Among the four hundred and seventy-five people who hold reservations already are Branson himself, his two adult children, and the English theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking, who trained for his voyage by taking a zero-gravity airplane flight in 2007, thereby becoming the first quadriplegic to experience weightlessness. A student who had come to the museum specifically to meet Branson asked him what had inspired him to get involved in such adventures, and he characterized his general attitude as "Screw it, let's do it"—a response that caused no obvious discomfort in anyone present.

The student was part of a group, most of them girls, from the Columbia Secondary School for Math, Science & Engineering. This was their second visit to the space exhibit—they'd come a week earlier to meet some NASA astronauts—and when Branson asked, "So you're all going to go up into space one day?" they

all said they were. Virgin Galactic's first voyages will be modest, with a maximum altitude of just sixty miles or so, or about as far from Earth as Cape Canaveral is from Walt Disney World. But Branson expects the voyages to go higher eventually, and to last as long as a couple of weeks. He told the students, "In the first year or two, I'll have more people going



Richard Branson

into space than in the fifty-year history of space travel. And I think that by the time you've grown up, hopefully, the price will have got down to the level where you'll be able to afford to go." The students wanted their picture taken with Branson, and he suggested that they all climb over a barrier and pose beneath the model of his spaceship. Someone said, "I don't think you can go in there," but Branson laughed and said, "Let's break the rule. When someone says you can't do it—that's what you have to do."

Branson dreams of going down as well as up. Another of his many companies is building a small submarine to explore the deepest parts of the ocean. "No one's been able to build a craft to withstand that pressure, so we're hopeful we've managed to do it," he said. "I'm going down on one of the trips, to the Puerto Rico Trench, and it will take about seven hours, heading down in this dark abyss, not knowing what you're going to find at the bottom. It will be full of Spanish galleons—I'll just see all this gold scattered around." He laughed. "But how will I get it?"

—David Owen