

SCENE STEALERS | BROOKS BARNES

# Trying to Find His Groove?

With three marriages behind him, the 82-year-old media mogul Rupert Murdoch is once again available, and the single women in Los Angeles have begun to take notice.

LOS ANGELES — Last Monday, two well-coiffed ladies of a certain age (50s, with work) sat down for a predinner drink at the Sunset Tower Hotel. I was at the next table, doing what any good reporter does when his companion is late: eavesdropping.

They chitchatted about the normal stuff (holiday shopping is exhausting, simply exhausting) and eventually turned to the topic of men. “You know, Rupert Murdoch is back on the market,” one woman said. “You should go for him.”

I almost choked on a cocktail peanut. Rupert Murdoch: sexiest man alive?

The Sunset Tower ladies giggled, too. But I started to wonder: Just what does Mr. Murdoch, 82, plan to do for companionship now that a divorce from his third wife, Wendi Deng, 45, has been finalized? Ms. Deng got to stay in the \$44 million Manhattan triplex. Does that mean Mr. Murdoch may decamp to California, where he recently bought the \$28.8 million Moraga Vineyards estate in the Bel Air hills?

With the ink barely dry on the divorce, which was completed in New York on Nov. 20, a couple of Mr. Murdoch’s confidants responded to my phoning around in a predictably chilly fashion. He is not seeing anyone, they insisted. He has no interest in romance at the moment — that juicy USA Today tidbit about his masseuse, who is actually an osteopath, is hogwash. Click.

Julie Henderson, chief communications officer for 21st Century Fox, one of the two media companies of which Mr. Murdoch is chairman, had no comment for this column. The same for Steven Rubenstein, an outside P.R. adviser to Mr. Murdoch.

The notion of Mr. Murdoch as a romantic prize is not far-fetched. Sure, his Austral-

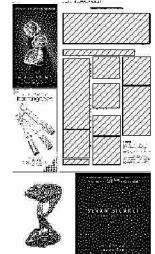
ian mumble makes him (extremely) hard to understand. Yes, he’s a workaholic with feisty adult children. He is also the world’s most powerful media mogul, with wealth estimated at \$13 billion.

And if you think elderly men can’t attract dates, consider Sumner Redstone, 90. I last saw him on Nov. 2 at an outdoor cocktail party before a Los Angeles County Museum of Art gala, where he was propped on a sofa under a heat lamp; three young women (late 30s?) were fawning over him. Fawning *and* cooing.

As it turns out, Hollywood has multiple theories about what Mr. Murdoch will do next — perhaps not with whom, exactly, but where. He is clearly excited about his new Los Angeles winery, which comes with a 7,500-square-foot home and lavender gardens. A few entertainment executives also noted in a conspiratorial whisper that the fifth floor of the executive building on the Fox lot here is being remodeled: a sure signal that Mr. Murdoch will be spending more time in it, no?

People close to Mr. Murdoch burst those bubbles: He will likely remain as New York-centered as ever, they say, especially while the two daughters from his marriage to Ms. Deng are still young. The mogul is currently circling a new marquee apartment in New York, according to a person who saw him socially last week, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to maintain the relationship.

For now, Moraga Vineyards remains occupied by its former owner, Thomas V. Jones, the long-retired chief executive of the Northrop Corporation. And the renovations at the Fox building have nothing to do with making Mr. Murdoch’s office more comfy; the fifth-floor executive offices are



being made smaller, to squeeze in more people.

Still, Mr. Murdoch may be interested in finding a new companion sooner than later. Age has clearly been on his mind. "Can we all live to 120 or more? Probably not, but our children for sure," he tweeted last month, referencing a Wall Street Journal article on genetics. And a new female friend may help give his image a boost following widespread speculation about Ms. Deng's romantic entanglements.

Ms. Deng — best remembered for slapping a comedian who tried to throw a pie at Mr. Murdoch at a court hearing — has been linked so frequently to Tony Blair (although notably not much by Mr. Murdoch's tabloids), that a representative for the former British prime minister was forced to publicly address it. "If you are asking if they are having an affair, the answer is no," The Hollywood Reporter quoted a Blair spokesman as saying. A lawyer for Ms. Deng did not respond to emailed requests for comment.

Mr. Murdoch, with three marriages now behind him, seems to need a little advice in the dating department. So I made a few calls on his behalf.

Patti Stanger, the star of Bravo's "Millionaire Matchmaker," which is based on her mate-finding service in California, was eager to help. "Most billionaires are control freaks, at least by my experience," she

said. "And, with three divorces, he seems to be doing something wrong. I would need to figure out what that is and break him." Like a horse, apparently.

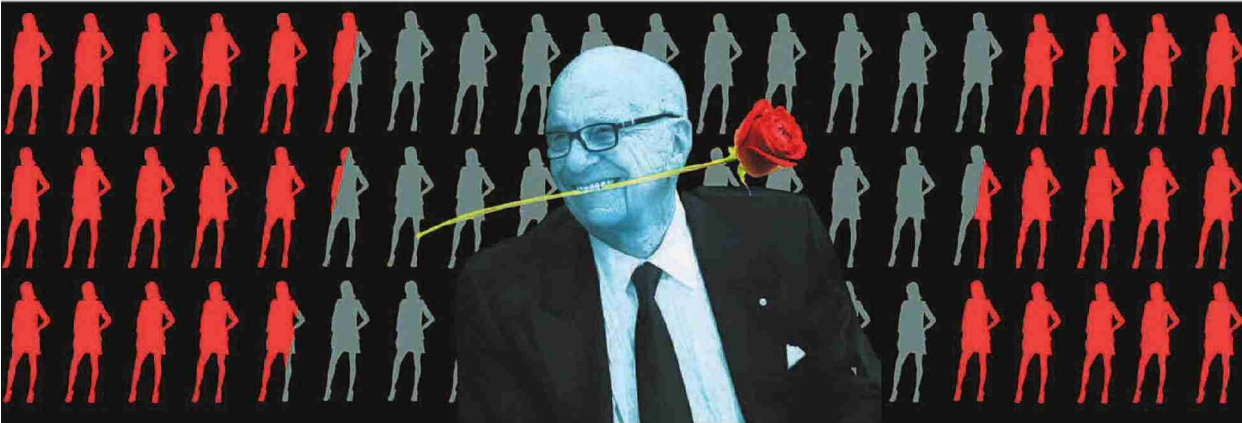
Her advice? Avoid gifts of cash, credit cards, condos or cars — the Four C's. "Those are gifts for a wife, not a girlfriend," Ms. Stanger said. Mr. Murdoch, at least early on, should avoid going on dates to places that may bring up bad memories of Ms. Deng. (Mental note, interested ladies of Los Angeles: Skip the House of Pies.)

Ken Solin, a dating columnist for AARP's online magazine, warned Mr. Murdoch to resist trying to make himself appear younger by deploying 50 shades of gray — dyeing his hair various tinges of brown, black and auburn. Mr. Murdoch does have a poor track record in this department: "Rupert Murdoch Debuts New Hair," intoned a Huffington Post headline in 2010.

"There's nothing sillier," said Mr. Solin, who is also a dating coach and the author of the books "Act Like a Man" and "You Gotta Have Heart." "Don't try to be something you're not. Don't start wearing jackets with your shirt hanging out.

"And no tight jeans."

**BROOKS BARNES** is a reporter in the Los Angeles bureau of The New York Times. Scene Stealers appears monthly.



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