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WHITEWALL: How did the idea for a specialty mobile phone come to you? You were at Nokia, as chief designer, when you came up with the idea. There you designed the interchanging plates, which was the ultimate in customization then. Do you see Vertu as a continuation in customization?

FRANK NUOVO: On a higher level. If you compare the world of phones then to the world of watches and accessories, there was a huge gap back then. Phones are technology objects but people are carrying them with them. I saw that it was developing as a fashion accessory, and in 1989 and 1991 people were saying, "Okay, Frank, back to your corner." For me it was obvious; others were caught up the technological side of the things. Your phone, I was predicting, was glued to you. You would not leave home without it. So if you were in sport mode, you would want something more attuned to running or biking, or for business, or out at the theater. I was one who had several watches that I would use depending on what I was doing.

By 1997 it was clear to me that we needed to not just develop a mass-market phone but take a whole culture shift and develop a company that from the inside out was truly following the same cultural path from an engineering and precision perspective. In 1998 we formed Vertu.

WW: The Ascent Ti incorporates leather and the



FRANK NUOVO

CHIEF DESIGNER OF VERTU BY KATY DONOGHUE

Pure collection uses ceramic, both staple luxury materials. Are there any other materials that you'd be interested in working with?

FN: Oh, yeah. What it comes down to is hybrids at this point; we know about the basics. There are some amazing things going on with nanotechnology. We're looking at new material combinations that improve on the performance and aesthetic of the phones that is not possible in the mass market because they are extraordinarily difficult to create. Yes, we've had diamonds because our customers pulled for it, but I spent four years without allowing a diamond onto a phone [laughs]. It's not about the most expensive phone – it's about the most beautifully made with the highest precision in terms of design.

WW: You've collaborated with Boucheron on a Vertu collection. Do you have any interest in reaching out to contemporary designers or artists for future projects?

FN: Very much so. I've reached out to a number of people. It's a difficult place to work. The materials you can use and how you apply various media have to be very robust because it's built to last and wear beautifully over time. The thing is it's still very difficult to do. I will in fact continue to promote that personally.

WW: When you left Nokia as chief designer in 2006 you said you wanted to pursue other product

design. What have you been working on?

FN: We have just launched some of my work partially done in Vertu, a Bluetooth headset, a memory stick, and a pen. I designed leather goods for Vertu. Beyond that I've been working independently. I took the first year out of Nokia to design my own personal studio on my property and to refocus on being a hands-on designer. These projects are very complementary because as a designer it keeps me fresh and excited about what's going on out there. I authored a design research lab at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, the Color, Materials, and Trends Exploration Laboratory. I worked hard to get funding from Nokia. It's where I went to school and nothing like this lab existed before.

WW: Really? Trends and color research seem so vital to industrial design.

FN: Yeah, it was like, "Why wasn't this here?"

WW: You grew up playing music, started playing professionally at 11 years old, in fact. You went to art and design school and make an effort to collaborate with artisans and craftsman. What's in your home?

FN: My wife and I both like a cross-section of classic and contemporary objects. I think of art not in the traditional terms of paintings and sculpture but as objects that are beautifully made. The art in



Vertu Ascent Ti Ferrari Limited Edition Nero.

my home is a collection of objects. What I look for is creative individuals who demonstrate a tremendous amount of craft and precision. It's an appreciation of a Folk level all the way up to the finest photography. The same with music – I like a crafted music experience.

WW: Last question. Are we talking on a Vertu right now?

FN: Yes we're talking on a Ferrari special edition.

WW: Is that your phone of choice or do you rotate between a few?

FN: Oh I rotate like crazy [laughs]. I'm always testing new phones. I always have a Vertu of some kind. It's important to walk the walk.