

CASTRO BERNARD

1969

*C. Felesége, Barabás Terezi, magyar anyó*

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By **ROGER LANGLEY**

A pain in the back started Bernard Castro on his way to becoming a multimillionaire.

Back in 1931, Castro was struggling to open a complicated, fold-out sofa-bed and he strained his back while doing it. Then and there he vowed that he would someday make a convertible bed so simple and easy to use that a child could open it. And he did.

Today Castro's back is healthier and so is his bankbook. Out of that frustrating experience came the idea for Castro's Convertibles, the fold-out furniture now used by thousands of families.

"At the time I was annoyed when I strained my back. But looking back it was really the best thing that happened to me," said Castro, 65, in an exclusive interview in his 25-room, Tudor-style mansion in Lloyd Harbor, N.Y., overlooking Long Island Sound. He's come a long way from the dingy New York tenement where he once lived.

When Castro was 15, he and his father arrived in the U.S. from Italy, flat broke.

Castro related: "My father never seemed to be able to make a success of his business life and we were a poor family. My father and I came to the U.S. in 1919 to try our luck here. We arrived with only the clothes we wore and one suitcase between us and no money.

"A year later my mother and younger brother came over. We lived in a tiny apartment in New York's poverty-ridden lower East Side. We ate cheap food and wore old clothes. There never seemed to be any money for new ones. Our apartment cost us \$25 a month and we had to share the bathroom with other tenants.

**RAGS TO  
RICHES**

"My father got a job in a cigar factory, but he never made much money. I couldn't go to school because I had to help support the family. I got a job for \$8 a week in a travel agency and studied English in night school.

"Then I got a job as an apprentice upholsterer for \$10 a week — a big \$2 raise for me. I worked hard at learning the business and soon I was up to \$18 a week."

After learning English, Castro enrolled in the N.Y. School of Independent Arts and began studying interior designing and decorating at night. Soon he became foreman of the upholstery shop.

"I was working hard both day and night," Castro said. "The fellows at work used to laugh at me because I never went out dancing or partying. But I knew I was going to come out on top in the end. I knew that if I kept working at it, one day I would be a millionaire.

"When I was 19, I offered to supervise my boss' business for free if I could use the building for an interior decorating and drapery shop. He agreed and I borrowed \$300 from the bank to buy equipment and materials.

"It was an up and down business. Sometimes I made a lot of money and sometimes not.

"One day in 1931 I went to see a client about some interior decorating. I tried to open the convertible bed they had and it was such a cumbersome and old-fashioned mechanism that I hurt my back. That night I started on the plans to make a simpler one.

"I worked out a design, using plastic parts instead of metal, which made

the whole operation much easier. And I decided to go into making convertible sofas. I borrowed \$1,000 from the bank and managed to get credit from suppliers.

"I opened a smart showroom in midtown Manhattan. Within a couple of months I was \$4,000 in debt. I was worried and downhearted, but I kept plugging."

Gradually the business began to build up. Within a few years Castro was out of debt but his easy-to-move and easy-to-open sofas still hadn't caught on the way he had hoped.

In 1934 he met Theresa Barabas, a farm girl from a small town in Pennsylvania, who had moved to New York to get a job. Three years later they were married. Mrs. Castro said, "It was love at first sight."

They had two children, a daughter, Bernadette, and a son, Bernard Jr.

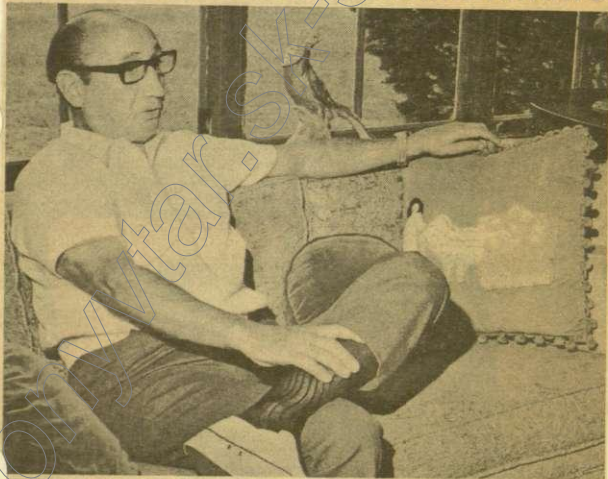
For 17 years, Castro made a living from his convertible furniture but he was never able to get the volume business he thought the products deserved.

"We had a patented design which made the movement of the convert-

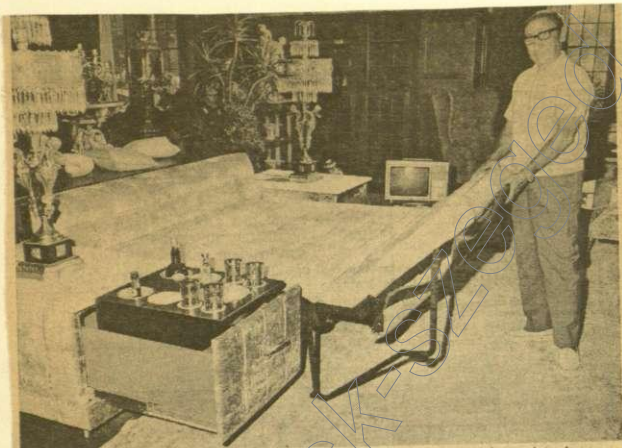


# Converts \$8-a-Week Job Into Folding-Bed Fortune

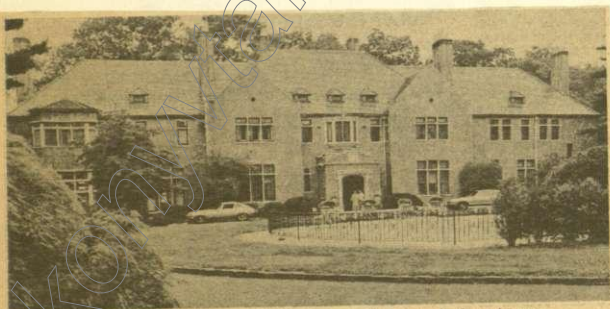
*... Bernard Castro's Convertible  
Sofa Made Him a Multimillionaire*



**SITTING PRETTY:** Castro holds pillow embroidered with TV-commercial scene that rocketed him to financial success.



**EASY-OPENING SOFA**, like one Bernard Castro unfolds in his luxurious home, opened the door to millions for upholsterer-inventor.



**MANSSION** in Lloyd Harbor, N.Y., is one of Castro's four homes.



ibles ridiculously easy, but the idea had not really caught on with the public," Castro said. "I needed something to promote this idea and in 1948 I decided to have a television commercial made using Bernadette, my 4-year-old daughter, to demonstrate the ease of the operation.

"After about two months of TV advertising, the result was just about nil. The commercials were costing me \$100 each, which was more than I could afford at the time. I was about to cancel the contract when suddenly the commercials clicked and sales began to rocket.

"Another thing which helped us was the shortage of living space in the New York area. In small apartment people had to keep beds in their main room. No one wanted a regular bed but a smart-looking sofa which converted into a bed was just the thing.

"I was still making the furniture in the back room of the New York showroom. By 1950 the demand was so large that I had to open another factory in New Hyde Park on Long Island. And I had to open up a half a dozen showrooms in the New York area.

"Now we have six factories and 56 showrooms. We have over 200 different designs and are selling thousands of them each year. We also have a line designed for yachts."

Today the family makes its home on the Long Island estate which is an exact copy of Panfield Hall, in Essex, England. Living there with Mr. and Mrs. Castro are Bernadette, her husband, David Austin, and their daughter, Terry Ann, 19 months.

Bernadette is now 25, but she is still pictured on the huge Castro sign over the main New York showroom, as the child millions of people got to know through TV commercials.

Bernard Jr., 21, and his wife Julie, also live on the family estate. Both the son and son-in-law work for the Castro firm.

The Castro family also has a 3,200-acre cattle ranch in Ocala, Fla., a house in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., a Manhattan apartment and a 93-foot yacht, often used as a floating showroom for convertible furniture.

Castro said he spends most of his time with his business. "I'm going to run this business for a long time yet because I enjoy it," he said.

"When I started out I knew I was going to be wealthy and overcome the poverty of my youth because I was determined to do it.

"My advice to a young man just starting out is to work and study as hard as you can. You've got to give up something for success. It's no good thinking you can swing around town evenings and still be in any condition the next morning to fight your way to the top. You have to make a choice. I chose hard work and success and I've never been sorry."

