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Alvin D Hall:
"You get
to know the
smell of
money"

The giggling charmer who wants to teach us all to make lots of money

He's risen from an impoverished, fatherless family to become known as The Professor of Wall Street — and now the irrepressible Alvin D Hall is starting his own BBC TV series. **JODY TRESSIDER** meets the Eddie Murphy of the financial world

FOR God's sake, Woody Allen once memorably advised, "don't invest money with any brokerage firm in which one of the partners is named Frenchy."

What does one make, then, of one Alvin D Hall, a prodigiously silver-tongued, dazzlingly charming, black American financial guru — affectionately nicknamed

The Professor of Wall Street — who will introduce himself to British TV viewers this week? From a helicopter choppering noisily over the capital, he kicks off his TV series with the following glee-filled paean to Mammon: "My name is Alvin Hall — Alvin D Hall — and I'm here to show you how to make even more money from the money that you already have. What do I know? Well,

I train the people who have one thing on their minds — money. You know, when you're in the business you get to know the smell of money, and I can smell it right now from down there. That's the City of London..."

I know this is how the new BBC2 series Alvin Hall's Guide to Successful Investing begins because Alvin Hall has just proudly recited

the opening script to me from memory while sprawling elegantly, shoeless in dark silk socks, a snow-white tunic top and baggy black pants, on a designer leather armchair in the front room of his Madison Avenue apartment in Manhattan.

Alvin is 44, looks a vibrant 24, and is endlessly compared, by the stockbroking students he teaches to pass

Wall Street's fiendishly stringent National Association of Securities Dealers exams, with Hollywood's Eddie Murphy.

Alvin boasts a Murphysque pencil moustache, film-star handsomeness, an infectiously fruity, high-pitched giggle and anarchic sense of humour. He is Wall Street's sole African-American owner of a financial training firm, teaching stocks, bonds, securities and the intricacies of the new European markets to both new stock-market players and old boys in need of refresher courses. He is also the author of the 1993 beginners' guide to trading, and instant stock-market classic, *Getting Started in Stocks*.

There is serious modern art — mainly contemporary New York photography and sculpture — in every corner of his plus five-roomed apartment. It is a much-loved treasure trove which is rotated from Alvin's 129-piece fine art storage collection every four months or so by a professional picture hanger.

IHAD been admiring some photographs illuminated by two bare bulbs with their flexes dangling down the wall — a daringly minimalist lighting touch I decided, until Alvin explained, with an explosive Murphysque giggle at my embarrassment, that the

twin bare bulbs are themselves a pricey piece of conceptual art apparently defining the trials of love. "When I see something I *have* to buy I feel nauseous and faint, tears come to my eyes in a gallery ... those light bulbs cost \$15,000 — isn't that outrageous?" he grins.

Indeed, yes Alvin, but hardly less so than your life story. The eldest of seven children from a dirt-poor fatherless family in the Florida panhandle, Alvin attended a blacks-only school before desegregation in 1968 ("It was called Shadeville, if you can believe that. The other local black school was called Buckhorn. 'Buck' in the south being a derogatory term for a large black male," he adds dryly. We both wince.)

His mentor and confidante was, initially, his maternal grandmother, Rosa Lee, who died last year, aged 87, and who was the one who instructed her precociously bright, intense, skinny and studiously solitary grandson that "you are all you will ever have, so protect what you have". With the support of a string of school and college mentors — "people," Alvin says frankly, "who were there when things got rough, whom I could turn to, and who would embrace me and say 'it's OK, you'll figure out a way to get through'". He got through: two arts degrees, a myriad of jobs in publicity and communica-

tions and teaching English until establishing his own Wall Street training firm seven years ago.

Now one of the very few black faces at the top of the New York stock market, Alvin is an evangelist in the cause of luring the man — or woman — on the street into the fun of international investment. His BBC2 show is intended to demonstrate to a Lottery-addled Britain that patience, a modest cash outlay — basically no more than you can afford to lose, he warns — and simple homework are the keys to making a financial killing in shares.

YET he is also personally aware of the public's distrust of share dealing and dislike of financial institutions. His grandmother — when diagnosed with cancer in the late 1970s — finally revealed to Alvin the secret of her supposedly pneumatic bosom. She had worn falsies, stuffed with cash from her late husband's life insurance policy, in response to the bank crash of 1929. "People feared banks the way people fear the stock market now. I understand that fear. If you are risk-averse, don't go to the stock market. But if you want to take a little risk, the return *will* be attractive to you in the long run," says Alvin.

By the way, though it's probably a bit late for a tip, Alvin has made a personal killing in shares. Some firm he took a fancy to years ago. Called Microsoft.

● *Alvin Hall's Guide to Successful Investing* is on BBC2 at 7.30pm tomorrow

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