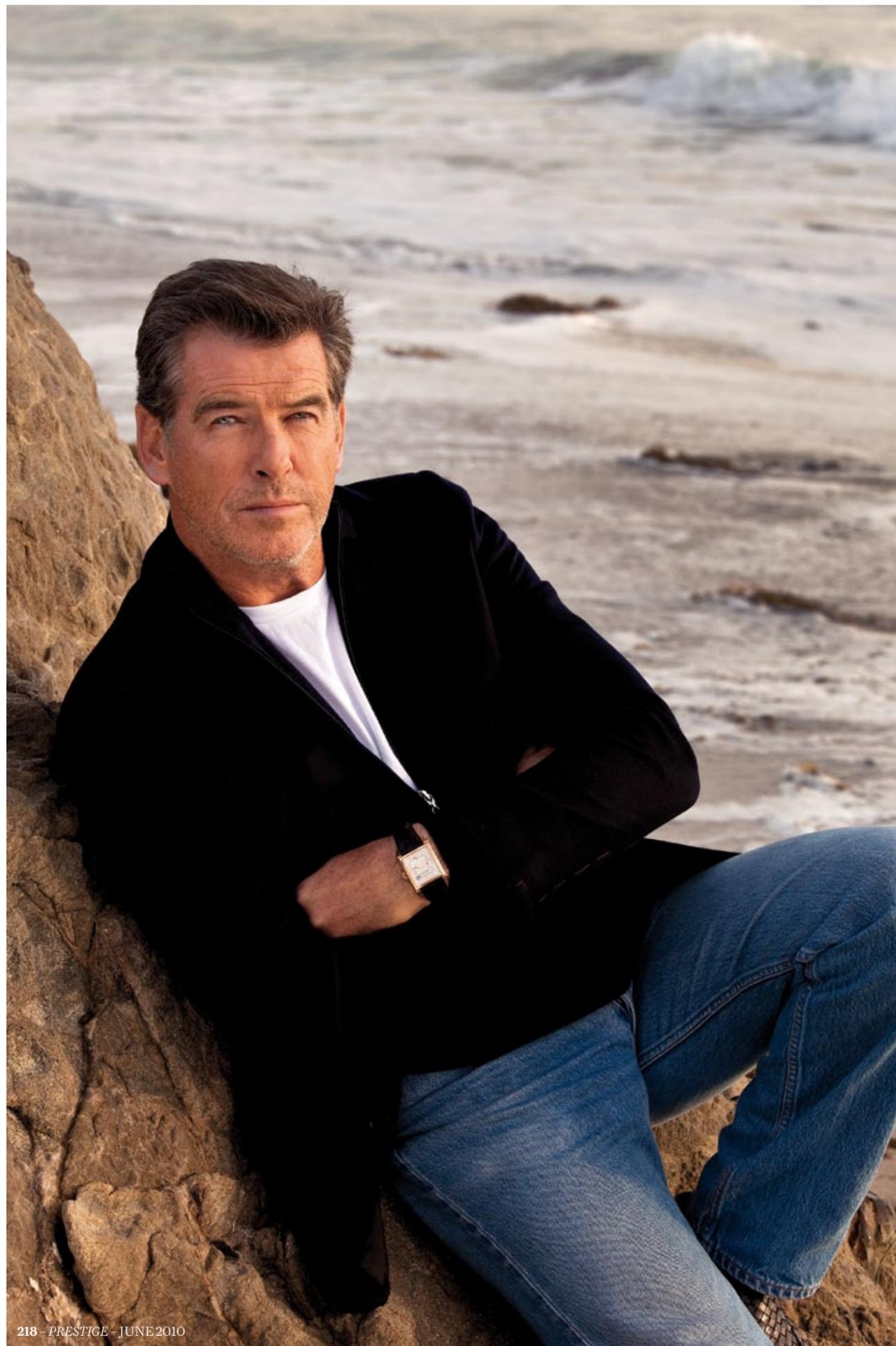


MR NATURAL

*PIERCE BROSNAN exudes the comfortable
air of a man whose life is spent doing what he loves,
writes MATHEW SCOTT*

PHOTOGRAPHY / GREG GORMAN
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IERCE BROSNAN BELIEVES that in order for an actor to create a character from scratch, he first needs to start picking apart pieces of himself. Thus the acting profession, he says, involves taking yourself through an almost constant process of reinvention.

And with that in mind, it's little wonder that Brosnan fell in love with the art.

The actor - whom I catch up with on his return to his latest film set in Michigan after celebrating his 57th birthday back home in California - began life in the quiet fields of Navan, in County Meath, Ireland. But his life has been all about change ever since.

First, as a boy, he swapped Ireland for London so he could be with his single-parent mother, who had travelled in search of work during Brosnan's formative years. And then it was London for Los Angeles when he took a gamble on his career, believing he had what it took to succeed in Hollywood - despite arriving there with next to no money to support himself.

The move paid rich dividends. From international small-screen success playing the suave lead in television's *Remington Steele*, Brosnan soon became Bond - James Bond, cinematic history's iconic secret agent - through four films in the franchise and the resulting billions in box office takings.

He channelled that success into his own production company and, with Bond safely in the background, his career has undergone something of a renaissance over the past 12 months. These days he seems delightfully free of the shackles often clamped on major stars by the big studios, and his work is all the better for it.

From his turn as a scandal-plagued ex-politician in the Roman Polanski thriller *The Ghost Writer*, to hamming it up for the kids in *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, Brosnan seems to be revelling in life.

Much of that has to do with his home by the sea in Malibu, a sanctuary shared with his wife Keely and the five children who make up their family. And it also has to do with the passion he retains for his profession - a passion first sparked when he happened upon London's Oval House Theatre while still in his teens.

WATCH: GIRARD-PERREGAUX
VINTAGE 1945 SMALL SECONDS

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How did you celebrate your 57th?

I went home to Malibu. I saw James Taylor with Carole King at the Hollywood Bowl and walked along the beach and watched *Robin Hood* and ate great food and hung out with my wife and children. Had a great time away from everything.

What’s the film you’re working on in Michigan?

I’m doing a movie here called *Salvation Boulevard*; it’s with Greg Kinnear again. I play a megachurch preacher who’s building this church on a hill. Ed Harris plays the atheist, and Jennifer Connelly and Marisa Tomei are there as well. It’s from a Larry Beinhart book, the guy who wrote *Wag the Dog*.

And it’s been a busy year so far, with three productions already released.

There’s work to be done, you know. When your back is up against the wall with the economy that we’re in and the kind of mild paralysis that Hollywood is in with making movies, how to make movies and how to get money to make movies, you just have to be the most nimble and creative and courageous. There’s certainly not a lot of money to be made these days outside of the blockbusters.

Is there a specific process you go through when searching for—and choosing—your roles?

It’s pretty simple. It’s the same way I’ve always done and that’s to read scripts. Read and read. I told my agents a few years ago that we have to pay attention and not just wait for the phone to ring. We have to look at my career as a working actor, as someone who likes to work and who wants to work and apply himself and grow. That’s essential to me as an artist. They listened and consequently we’ve found some good pieces along the way.

How hard was it to shake off the Bond tuxedo?

Well, it wasn’t hard necessarily in terms of the fact I had my own production company – Irish Dreamtime – which allowed me to go off and make films like *The Matador*. If I hadn’t had my own company, nobody else would have offered me that role. If Harvey Weinstein were doing it I would have been the last person he thought of, even though he ended up buying the film. So I was able to find work – and to find challenging work.

So after three decades, the buzz for the movie industry is still there?

Well, it’s a very fertile and potent time for me. I haven’t changed. I’m still as excited and expectant and as turned on by being an actor and by working in films. It’s my life and it’s what I do. There’s a growth there and a progression, and a maturity – and that lends itself to leading me on. As I say, there’s work there to be done and I feel like I’m just beginning in some respects. Because when you’re starting to define yourself as a young actor, sometimes it takes time. Sometimes people get it straight away, for others it takes many years to find their place; to find the comfort and creativity to play that certain character.

Were you someone who struggled when your career began?

I’ve been very lucky. I’ve worked all my life. When I discovered I wanted to be an actor I found a certain sanctuary and excitement in that. I was able to find the right people to be with. So I was prepared when the door opened for me.

And was that when you landed the role in Remington Steele?

I went to America and really put myself on the line. I told my bank manager back in Wimbledon that I already had a job in Hollywood when I didn’t have a job. I got £2,000 and hopped on a Freddie Laker [a low-cost airline] and came to Hollywood,





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and got lucky. I got a job called *Remington Steele* and I never looked back after that. I just stayed in America, I became an American citizen, and it gave me my life.

It was a bit all over the world. As a young man how did you deal with all the attention?

Happily! Why not? I loved it and I still do love it. It allows one to travel through doors and down hallways, and see things that normally you just wouldn’t see. I revelled in my success because I’d worked hard for it. I don’t hold it tightly – it’s good, I enjoy it and I share it with friends and family, and I try to do things with it that are meaningful. But yes, I took to success like a duck to water.

You’ve been an ardent environmentalist, focusing particularly on issues to do with the sea. Why is that?

I’ve lived in Malibu for a long time now and the ocean has always drawn me to it. As a boy growing up in Ireland there was a great fascination for it – not that I lived by it. But when we went on trips with my aunts and my uncles we would go to Galway, we would go to the seaside. And the seaside was just this magical place to me, growing up in the heartland of southern Ireland.

So how did your actual involvement come about?

When I got to America I just gravitated to the ocean, and fell in love with the ocean around Malibu and the coast of California. Ted Danson is an old friend, someone who was working on TV at the same time as me when I started. He was on *Cheers* when I was in *Remington*, and this wonderful man decided to protect the ocean. He was the one who fought for Santa Monica Bay, and so I would join him at various occasions, and it was at one of those events that I met my wife [Keely]. And once you put your toe in the water in terms of the protection of the oceans, or the

rainforests or wildlife, there’s no going back.

How much of your time is dedicated to this work?

It’s a lifetime of work, the preservation and conservation of our Earth. And if you love the Earth, you enjoy clean water and fresh air and beautiful countryside – as I do. And I think everybody does, so it’s worth fighting for. And one fight leads to another; it’s just a constant battle.

Are you seeing attitudes changing with regard to environmental issues?

I think there’s a great awareness now. I think this generation has seen where past generations – my generation – have gone wrong. My children are very conscious of doing good work for the Earth. And the ultimate is that the ABC of environmental work is being taught in schools. I think that’s what every school curriculum should have. We’re multiplying at a ferocious rate and the Earth is small. As you can see in Hong Kong, it just gets eaten up by concrete.

You touched on your life in Ireland earlier, but you moved to London while still a child. How was that experience?

It was exhilarating. When I left Ireland it was one of the great days of my life. I was 11 years of age – August 12, 1964. The day [James Bond author] Ian Fleming died, although, of course, I didn’t know that until many years later. So that’s a footnote if you believe in destiny.

And you were on your own?

I was there with a little cardboard suitcase, short trousers, knitted V-neck sweater with a plastic bow tie. And a crew cut. I had my cardboard suitcase full of socks and nothing. A bottle of holy water in one hand and rosary beads in the other, I was sent off by an uncle in the company of a priest who was supposed to

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look after me, but just dodged away. So off I went to meet my mother on this glorious sunny morning and it was a new life and a new beginning.

But London, for a young boy, must have left your head spinning.

I was very naive, very rural. I grew up by a beautiful river in Ireland and here I was in the great metropolis of London. It was pretty fierce in some ways. I went to a large comprehensive school full of volatile kids. It was the first time I met prejudice – I was the token Irishman, the Paddy. But I think to come up against the brittle edge of that made me the actor that I am; it gave me an edge. It involved a lot of running, of course, and also a lot of humour. I learned pretty quickly to use those.

Does acting allow you to explore aspects of yourself when you help create characters?

Oh, absolutely. There's no question about that. You're constantly constructing and destroying yourself in some small way. Not that my work is that deeply transformative – or not even that deep, maybe! But it has allowed, over the years, self-exploration. And it's been my sanctuary and my salvation. And it all started with walking into the Oval House Theatre on a winter's night and seeing something that to me was just electric.

Who were the actors at that stage that you admired?

Well, initially, it was Clint Eastwood and Steve McQueen in the films. They were a huge influence on me. And on TV there was *The Saint*, which was great. I used to try to comb my hair like Simon Templar – so some things don't change. Actually, Roger Moore was the only actor I ever got an autograph from – I queued up in Battersea Park and got his autograph. I don't know again if that meant there was some mystical destiny there with Bond, but there you go. I suppose I was always going to be an actor.

Does the amount of attention celebrities get these days bother you? You seem to have fared relatively well in that regard.

Well it's almost pornographic, the attention people get. It's like a cannibalisation of our society. These reality shows we have, with no dignity. I don't think it helps the generation coming through. But there's money to be had from it all, so there you go. It won't end. But I'm lucky in that I've kept to myself, tucked myself away with a simple life.

How was the experience of working with Roman Polanski on The Ghost Writer?

You have the drama of the man's life and then the drama of the work we were using, even where we were shooting. It just resonated all round. Working with Polanski was like a walk back in time – he's one of the great directors. It was exhilarating working on the film from start to finish.

And the rewards you get from making films today are the same as when you started out?

For me the exhilarating thing is just making films and being able to provide for my family. I watch the premiere and never again. It's shocking to see yourself. You have the imagination of your performance in your head and then you see the way it comes out. Not nice.

What do you think people – and filmmakers – see in you? Is that something you've thought about, or is it better not to ask?

Film is a magic medium. Making a movie and when it works – there really is nothing like it. I've tried to stand back and look at what I've done from arm's length. I think there's a progression and growth of talent there, and I think I can look back and see a handful of films that I'm very proud of. Plus there's a progress and maturity, and a consistency of worth there. Always move forwards – that's the key. 📺

