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MARCH 2006

JEREMY PIVEN

STORY JOHN F. MEILS
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After years of supporting parts, this acting vet is finally getting the props he deserves—and not just on the screen. Thanks to his confident style, he's also known as one of the best-dressed guys in Tinseltown

Jeremy Piven initially comes off as the opposite of Ari Gold, the lacerating, hyperbolic snake charmer of a Hollywood agent he plays on HBO's hit show *Entourage*. Yet somewhere inside the 40-year-old actor, Gold is forever seething, waiting his turn. "When I take off that [Ari] suit and get into my own gear, I'm just me," says Piven. "But when someone yells 'Action!', I'll rip your head off. Don't ever bring a butter knife to a tank fight because I will *kill* you!" Piven's intensity isn't reserved for the camera, though. He takes his style seriously, especially when it intersects with work. After more than 50 film and TV roles, including memorable performances in *Old School* and the cult classic *PCU*, the Golden Globe nominee is starring in *Smoking Aces*, the new Joe Carnahan film about a Vegas performer who rats out the mob. He took time off from shooting to drop some knowledge on *Cargo* about his effortless look, how clothes make the character, and his leap into leading-man territory.

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A full-page photograph of a man with a beard and mustache, wearing a dark, pinstriped three-piece suit. He is holding a thin, white, flexible hoop that arches over his head and extends down to the floor. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a warm, golden-brown color with a subtle grid pattern. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the suit and the man's features.

Dolce & Gabbana wool-blend suit, \$2,150, select Dolce & Gabbana stores; 877-70-DGUSA for store info. **Bottega Veneta** cotton polo, \$210, 877-362-1715, select Bottega Veneta stores. **Best of Class by Robert Talbott** silk pocket square, \$65, select Robert Talbott stores; 800-747-8778 for store info. **Sergio Rossi** leather shoes, \$565, Sergio Rossi, NYC, 212-956-3303.

You've been in the acting game for a while, but now you're blowing up. That's gotta feel good.

I feel like I've been apprenticing for this job my whole life. I love acting and respect it, and I think that's why things have materialized for me. I would always take tiny roles just to be around people whose work amazed me. You have to work with what's available, and the only things for me all these years were smaller roles. The leads were all taken. The mortals are left to tear at the scraps. And that's what you do—but if you make a meal of them, you learn and grow. If you don't do that, and just complain about not getting the great roles, I don't have any time for you.

Rumor has it that you donned a full-on power suit for the *Entourage* audition. How do clothes help your acting?

If you let them, clothes will dictate how you move through space and how you hold yourself, which is helpful for an actor. When *Old School* first came up, the director couldn't see me as the nerdy dean, but I knew if my pants were a little too tight and my hair was in a side part, I could be that guy. So I hunted down the right glasses and "wrong" sweater vest, and I auditioned in character.

Do you get a say in Ari's threads?

At the get-go, there was mention of a yellow power tie, and I just thought, *Not on my watch*. That'd be great if I was stripped to the waist and chugging from a pony keg, but not if I'm running the city. These [Hollywood] agents know major labels—we're not talking about frat boys with blinders on—so I wanted to be as authentic as possible.

How does it feel to be getting a rep as one of Hollywood's most stylish guys?

I wear stuff that I'm comfortable in and that looks good on me. I either take to it or I don't. It's that simple. There's no method to my madness. I'm not trying to be the boat that makes the fashion wake for people to fucking ski behind.

So clothes are more about attitude?

Yes. If you're comfortable with yourself and your life, you could look good in a tunic. Or, you could be in the crispest Dolce suit, but if you're a self-consumed, insecure freak who operates from jealousy, there won't be very much that's interesting about you.

When you're not tearing someone a new one on *Entourage*, what do you wear?

True Religion jeans and vintage tees that are nicely worn in are my thing, and I love boots, especially work boots.

But I also love to get dressed up in cool, clean stuff. I'm a little wider up top, so for formal looks I need a slim fit around my torso—otherwise, I get lost in a suit. Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci, Ted Baker—those designers work best for my body type.

What won't you be caught dead in?

I'm not the guy who'll wear cowboy boots or tuck a *Cosby Show* sweater into acid-washed jeans.

What items will never be purged from your wardrobe?

Somehow my high school football jersey has never left my closet. I don't know why. I think I'm still going to suit up one day. And my shell-top Adidas with the thick laces, they'd be hard to throw out.

“ I'm not trying to be the boat that makes the fashion wake for people to f---ing ski behind. ”

Where do you shop?

In L.A., Lisa Kline Men, James Perse, Ted Baker. In New York, Theory, John Varvatos, Gucci.

Who are your style gods?

I don't think I've ever seen a picture of Steve McQueen where he didn't look cool. The same is true with Paul Newman—he just always makes it happen. The hip-hop artist Common is another one. He pulls off really high-difficulty stuff, like corduroys and Burberry sweaters. Actually, I recently went to the trouble of hunting down his stylist, Dawn Haynes, and we've been working together.

What does Dawn the stylist do for you?

She takes whatever game I have and puts it through the roof. For the American Music Awards, she had me in this vintage cream-colored vest, a burgundy suit, and a brown polka-dot tie—and it just worked.

Any wisdom you can share with the style-impaired single guy?

First, I think it's important for guys to talk to girls. Take a girl who you have a big fat crush on, or who you think has great taste, and run some things by her. There's no better collaboration than between a man and a woman. No matter how interesting or funny you are, if you've got the wrong shoes on, it could be game-off. If you're thinking about tucking your pants into some croc-skin cowboy boots, I don't think it's going to happen.

Speaking of the ladies, what do you think looks sexiest on them?

A woman could be draped in a shower curtain, but if she's in her body and knows how to walk, nothing is sexier. She could be wearing Jimmy Choo shoes and have a Stella McCartney skirt papered to her thighs, but for me, it's really how she moves through space.

You turned 40 this year. Any monumental freak-outs to report?

I don't believe because I turned 40 that I have to stop wearing what I wear and feeling how I feel. People may think I dress young, but I dress how I feel. And our stereotypes for age don't hold true anymore. People are doing their thing longer. Chris Chelios, who I bought my house from in Malibu, is a

43-year-old defenseman for the Detroit Red Wings fighting 19-year-olds and breaking their noses. That's like your father kicking your ass.

A house in Malibu! That's huge. When did you make the leap?

It was when I started *Entourage*. And here's why you'd want to buy a house from a pro hockey player: They always have a bar with a built-in icemaker. Everybody wins. But I did change almost everything else. Chris has a family of four and I'm an army of one, so I sanded the floors, knocked down walls, opened it up a bit. I flipped it into a Zen-beach-cowboy-bachelor vibe. I have a Tibetan swing on my patio that I love. It's where I sit and meditate while looking out at the ocean.

As a self-described "drum slut," hitting the skins is probably also relaxing.

Would you run if Bono needed you? If Bono called, I would drop everything. It's done. I know every one of U2's songs, and Larry Mullen, Jr., their drummer, is one of my heroes. I would absolutely hit the road with them. I'd haul speakers. But if I had to retire from acting, I can't even imagine what I'd do with myself. It would freak me out to the core. So, to walk away and play the kit behind U2, by all means, but I'd have to get back on stage as an actor at some point.

What advice would you give to those looking to make it in Hollywood?

You can't mope, you can't complain. Nobody cares, man. You're the only one that can make it happen. End of story. **C**

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