



LUCKY

STRIKE

HE HIT THE JACKPOT WITH THE BREAKOUT SUCCESS OF **MAD MEN**, BUT **JON HAMM** IS, WAS AND ALWAYS WILL BE CONTENT WITH HIS LIFE—THANK YOU VERY MUCH

BY **ROBERT ITO**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **RANDALL SLAVIN**

ON

HAMM IS SITTING—SLOUCHING, really—on the patio of the swanky Tower Bar on the Sunset Strip, and one button on his shirt is a hole below where it should be. As Don Draper, the nattily attired 1960s creative advertising director on AMC's *Mad Men*, Hamm has become the poster child for Brooks Brothers suits and the new-old, buttoned-down "masculine aesthetic," which makes his fashion slipup all the more endearing. Because, really, when was the last time you walked out the door with your shirt buttoned wrong? First grade?

It's a gorgeous day in Los Angeles, the late-afternoon

Last January, Hamm won the Golden Globe for Best Performance by an Actor in a TV Drama for his part on *Mad Men*. It was his first leading role, and he hit that sucker out of the park. To be fair, the part of Draper—a man's man with a secret past who's simultaneously juggling three women while selling Dick Nixon and Lucky Strikes to a grateful nation—was one seemingly dropped from the heavens. His come-from-nowhere victory prompted many who had never seen the show or heard of the 37-year-old actor to wonder, just who the hell is this Jon Hamm fellow? "I've been working and making a decent living for many, many years, doing just fine, kind of in the wings of this industry," he says. "It's one thing if you're Shia LaBeouf, who's 22,

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sun kissing the water on the pool and giving everything—including the bikini-clad sunbather not five yards away—an orangish glow. Hamm is drinking Maker's Mark on the rocks, gnawing on a swizzle stick between sips. He's chatting about, of all things, quantum physics, and how a grad student at Princeton came up with the theory of parallel universes and quantum shifts in the 1950s and was roundly mocked for his pains. It's a bit esoteric given the surroundings, but when Hamm talks about it, it seems like the fun stuff one would chat about with one's drinking buddies, not at all eggheaded or off-putting. Maybe it's the eager way he talks, all "mans" and "buddys" and "cools." Maybe it's his five-o'clock shadow, which makes him look less like the polished ad exec he plays on TV and more like a guy who watches a lot of TV. Maybe it's that errant button.

and people are like, 'He's brand-new! We just found him!' But for me, an older actor, people are like, 'Where the f--- have you been?'" he laughs. "I've been working, man! I've been doing all right."

If things have been all right for Hamm, it may be because he's always managed to find imaginative ways to make them so. Like Draper, who in the first episode pitches the toasty goodness of cigarettes, Hamm can sell like a fiend, and he's talked his way into jobs that weren't there, or weren't there for him. As a broke English major at the University of Missouri, Hamm convinced the director of a local day-care center to give him a job, even though (a) he had no teaching experience; (b) he wasn't an education major; and (c) he was a guy, unlike all the other >

PRODUCTION: LAH PRODUCTIONS; STYLING: EVET SANCHEZ FOR THE WALL GROUP; GROOMING: DIANA SCHMIDTKE FOR CELESTINE AGENCY; PREVIOUS SPREAD: SHIRT: PRADA; VEST: PAUL SMITH; PANTS: PRADA; THIS SPREAD: SUIT, SHIRT AND TIE: PRADA





“A YEAR AGO, HAMM PLAYED GOLF AT ONE OF GRIFFITH PARK’S PUBLIC COURSES. AND NOW? HE’S STILL THERE, ALBEIT WITH A NICER SET OF CLUBS.”

loved the character of Don Draper, with all his flaws and missteps and secrets. “There seems to be a trend in anti-heroes,” Hamm says. “Jack Bauer shooting somebody and then saving the world on *24*, or Tony Soprano whacking somebody because he didn’t like the way he was looking at his wife. We’re weirdly drawn to them, even though they make bad decisions. And I think the reason is: We all make bad decisions. We all mess up. Obviously, we don’t run around killing people—at least I don’t, and I hope you don’t, although we’ve only just met.”

Hamm looks down, noticing for the first time the plaid fabric bunching up around his sternum. “I’ve had my shirt buttoned the wrong way this entire time,” he says. “That’s so classy.” The funny thing is, Hamm *is* classy, although perhaps not in the ways one might expect, his charm more old-school Missouri than glad-handing L.A. During the course of our conversation, he checks on me more often than does the Tower Bar’s famously attentive staff. Are you hungry? Would you eat something if we ordered it? Are you too hot over there? Did you need another drink? He introduces me, by name, to the owner of the joint, for no discernible reason other than to be kind.

During our conversation, every question, no matter how goofy, is treated as seriously and thoughtfully as if we were discussing global warming on *Meet the Press*. Favorite movie? *Tootsie* (“Bill Murray, Dustin Hoffman, Teri Garr, all at the top of their game. It’s the perfect movie”). Death-row meal? A Double-Double from In-N-Out Burger, fries and a shake (“That would make me the happiest, on a day when you probably want to try to be happy”). Sporting event he’d >

instructors. After graduation, Hamm went back to his old high school and pitched himself again, telling his former acting teacher that he should let him take over a couple of classes there, instead of, say, hiring someone with credentials. Once again, he got the job.

“At the end of the [school] year, they wanted to renew my contract,” Hamm says, “but I was 24, 25, and I wanted to get out to L.A. to see if I could actually make a career of this. I didn’t want to be 40 and full of regrets. I’ve always had a healthy sense of self-confidence, so I was like, I’ll

just come out here and get a job. I’ve always been good at talking to people, and I’ll talk my way into something.” He pauses. “It didn’t happen.”

Hamm had the misfortune of coming to L.A. in 1995, when Hollywood, particularly TV, was in love with all things teen. “It was right when *Dawson’s Creek* was exploding, so if you were 18, people were throwing jobs at you. I was 25 and looked like I was about 30, so I was going in to read for things like Dawson’s dad.” Hamm gave himself five years to make it. While waiting for his big break, he waited

and bussed tables, tended bar, ate a lot of Top Ramen.

Three years in, Hamm started getting roles, including some small parts in big movies. A pilot in *Space Cowboys*. An Army officer in *We Were Soldiers*. Appearances on TV shows, from *Gilmore Girls* to *CSI: Miami*, followed. He auditioned for a lot of pilots, but none panned out.

Things were no easier with *Mad Men*. Hamm auditioned six times—“The number tends to grow the more I tell the story,” he says—finally landing the role after multiple tryouts and scene reads in both New York and Los Angeles. He

WEATER: JOHN VARVATOS; PANTS: PRADA; BELT: BERLUTI

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kill to see? His beloved St. Louis Blues in the Stanley Cup finals (“If I actually had to kill somebody, it would be for that. The Blues wouldn’t even have to win”). Three things he can’t do but wishes he could? Play professional baseball; fly (either Superman-style or in outer space); and attend his own funeral. With each answer comes a well-considered explanation, or a funny insight, or a quirky segue. When asked about the depraved yet strangely alluring world his character inhabits, it sparks a monologue on James Dean, the American Dream, Venn diagrams and how men tend to compartmentalize their lives and emotions. It’s fascinating stuff, but...what was the question again? “I don’t know where I was going with that,” Hamm says, “but I’m sure it was gonna be *awesome*.”

That’s also the word Hamm would use to describe his life—but, in his own estimation, it was pretty great even before *Mad Men* and the fame and money the show brought. He’s dated the same woman, actress Jennifer Westfeldt, for 10 years and alternates between respectful and moony to describe her: “She’s very focused, a doer...it doesn’t hurt that she’s superhot and superfunny and super-smart.” The couple shares a two-story Mediterranean-style home in Los Feliz, a stretch of L.A. sandwiched between Sunset Boulevard and the sprawling Griffith Park. House-hunting actors richer and more bloated tend to flee that area for points west—Malibu, Bel Air—but for Hamm and Westfeldt, Los Feliz is perfect: adjacent to the action, with plenty of restaurants, yet close enough to Griffith Park that they can get out of the city, in an afternoon, without really leaving it.

Hamm likes staying fit, but he’ll pass on gyms, with their juice bars and valet parking and \$2,500 initiation fees. “I don’t like standing in one place where other people are sweating,” he says. Give him a round of golf any day. “I try to get invited to country clubs,” he laughs, “but when that doesn’t work out, I’ll go up to Griffith Park and play.” So, a year ago, Hamm, the unknown Hamm, was up in Griffith Park at one of its three public courses, teeing off with the commoners. And now? Well, he’s still there, albeit with a nicer set of clubs.

How have things changed, how has *he* changed, after



Married With Issues: Hamm with TV wife January Jones on *Mad Men*.

the success of the show, after all the articles and accolades? Hamm views his current good fortune with a kind of disbelief, his lucky break so new that to talk about it too much might jinx it. There are the obvious benefits: a part in a big-budget action thriller, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, starring Keanu Reeves, due out in December. “I certainly don’t feel any different,” Hamm says, and he spends so long actually considering the question—Jeez, *am* I different?—that one believes him when he finally answers. “I think people tend to treat you a bit differently,” he says, “but I’m still the same guy.” Same guy, same girl, same dog—a “sweet mutt” named Cora who joins the couple on walks through their neighborhood.

Our interview nearly over, I ask Hamm if he knows where the bathroom is. Instead of pointing or giving me a few “hang a lefts,” he tells me he’ll go with me. Guys don’t typically make communal trips to the head for a number of reasons; celebrities even less so. That not one of those reasons came to Hamm’s mind says something about the guy. Who knows: in 10 years, he might be your typical Hollywood jerk—get me this, get me that. But for now, he’s just a guy from Missouri who doesn’t want another guy getting lost on his way to the men’s room. **A**

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Mad Men returns for Season 2 on Sunday, July 27, at 10 PM ET on AMC 254. And for this month’s best advertising films, turn to page L73 in the **AVAILABLE IN HD** Movies section.

LEFT: SHIRT: GUCCI; PANTS: GIORGIO ARMANI; SHOES: BARNEYS NEW YORK; TIE: BRIONI. RIGHT: COURTESY AMC