



ashton kutcher
by andrew goldman photograph by tom munro



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the punk-turned-family-man in action

Clothing by Giorgio Armani.
Hat, his own.



IS IT POSSIBLE THAT THE EARNEST, SOFT-SPOKEN ASHTON KUTCHER SITTING BEFORE ME on the chocolate-brown ultrasuede sofa could really be the same actor who became famous for the kinds of roles that required him to shove pills into an owl's anus?

True, he may look like the gangly, six-foot-three-inch rascal who, with *Punk'd*, bestowed to the world footage of Salma Hayek being accused of clogging a restaurant toilet with a gigantic turd. His hair (shaggy, partially obscuring his ears) and few days of whisker growth (spotty, uneven) bolster that adolescent vibe. But there's a studied maturity about this guy in the buffed Ferragamo slip-ons, sitting in the spacious Hollywood office of his production company, Catalyst Films. His French-blue shirt hangs untucked over a pair of loose-legged jeans, but only the top button is open—a signature of modesty in this town. On the coffee table, where the *Perfect 10s* ought to be, there is a fussily stacked pile of *Wallpapers*. He offers an earnest discourse about an as-yet-untitled pilot he has coproduced for Fox, which will employ *Punk'd*-like tactics not for pure anarchic fun but rather to scare at-risk teenagers into taking a responsible path. “Why is a kid throwing piercings all over his face?” he wonders, sounding very *Oprah*-expert-like. “Because it's your mask. It's your armor. Why are you putting on armor? Because you don't feel safe with what's inside you.”

When his wife rings his cell phone, just to share an early-afternoon “I love you,” it's cause for a family-values homily. “When your wife calls, you have to take it, no matter what you're doing,” he explains. So which Ashton Kutcher—the lovable old spaz or the new circumspect family guy—wore the heavier suit of armor?

And then, just when you recognize that disconsolate feeling you have when your college bong-hit buddy fishes around in his wallet for pictures of

Kutcher points down to the narrow space between the sofa and the coffee table. He's gyrating now, his voice bellowing in full Kelso squeak, his body squished up against the invisible crowd. “In this area! Like, fucking fighting! Like gouging other bitches out of the way! And then you go, ‘All right, we're going back to blah blah blah,’ and then you're moving as a mass through the club, and you pick up about 15 or 20 more along the way. Now you've gotten into a car with, like, four select girls and you're at the new space, and you just start certain things up. It was so ego-fulfilling. It was retarded.”

AND THEN, RIGHT IN THE MIDST OF ALL THAT RETARDATION, HE MET DEMI MOORE AT White Lotus, a trendy Hollywood club. It's a story that requires him to get up again. An old friend, the cheesecake model and actress Sara Foster, made the introduction. He had no idea who she was. “I knew who Demi Moore was, but I didn't recognize the woman I was looking at as *Demi Moore*. I have to tell you, my celebrity cue is really shitty. Owen Wilson was there too that night. I recognized him. I was like, that's Owen Wilson. Look how cool his hair is.” Still, how can anyone in America—let alone a Hollywood actor who was in his masturbation prime when *Striptease* was out—not recognize Demi . . . Fucking . . . Moore? “Honestly,” he says finally, “I was, like, jocking some other girl that night. My focus was with hooking up with somebody else.”

These days, the 28-year-old Kutcher has a sweet setup in the Hollywood Hills, in the house he shares with Moore and her daughters. There's the room with the 60-inch plasma and the three smaller TVs off to the side so he and his friends can do the Elvis thing, watching four football games at once. A full-time chef whips up whatever Kutcher feels like, and she prints up menus whenever dinner guests come by. He's particularly proud of that wet bar he had installed in the enormous walk-in closet off his and Demi's bedroom,

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE BRUCE WILLIS COORDINATING OUTFITS WITH DEMI, BUT ASHTON DOES JUST

his kids, a new topic comes up: the night he first laid eyes on his wife. Suddenly, the Ashton Kutcher of yore takes over. He jumps up, Cruise-like, onto the couch and starts pumping his fist in the air, which is the only way he can adequately conjure up the state of being Ashton Kutcher out in a club just before he crossed paths with Demi Moore.

At that moment, three years ago, Kutcher had established himself as a breakout cast member of *That '70s Show*. *Punk'd* was MTV's biggest program. He was taking *The Butterfly Effect* to Sundance. He was about to get a *Rolling Stone* cover. His new friend Puffy claimed to be reconstituting the Rat Pack; Kutcher would play Dino to Puffy's Frank. And he and his girlfriend Brittany Murphy were history. So, after three years of keeping his nose clean in steady relationships, he had some shit to work out of his system.

Most of his girls had blond hair and displayed a pliancy in his big Iowa farmer's hands that almost alarms him now. “I mean, some of the things that you read about with the Rat Pack, we were doing that!” he says, big brown eyes ablaze. It's impossible to fully describe the debauchery that his pronunciation of the word *that* suggests. *That* conjures a sea of bare tits bobbing in a hot tub. *That* sounds like a chorus of gymnasts, flight attendants, waitresses, and models all exhaling his name in unison. And, because Kutcher himself seems so agog at the quantity of flesh bestowed upon him, it's impossible to resent him for trying as much of *that* as he could handle.

And it's the memory of *that* that impels him to mount that couch at 2 o'clock on a workday. “It's like this,” he says, pumping his legs and bobbing his head to an inaudible beat. “You're in the club. You've got a bottle of vodka. You're standing up on the couches. You've got your right-hand man Puffy standing there. You've got Danny and Wilmer and all of our guys hanging out, and the fucking girls are fighting to see who's going to be behind the table here.”

where he often sits on the sofa getting an early-evening buzz on, with one eye on the game, while Demi gets dressed to go out. He's logged a lot of hours in that closet, vetting his wife's ensembles. At first he fumbled the play whenever Demi asked him, “How does this look?” When he replied, “It looks fantastic,” Demi would respond, “Well, I hate it.” Now each time his opinion is requested—and he is asked each time—he has learned to say, “‘How do you feel in it?’ That is the most important thing. Because if she feels good, you're going to have a good night. If she doesn't, you're not.”

It's hard to imagine Bruce Willis tolerating this ritual. It's also hard to imagine Bruce Willis coordinating his outfit with his wife's, as when Kutcher and Moore were photographed at Sundance in matching shearling coats. “I'll go, ‘So you're wearing brown?’” Kutcher says. “Then I know I've got to either go for a brown or khaki suit. You could go navy, too. If she's wearing black, you just wear black. Matching is not her job. It's yours. You're the purse.”

So, considering the shock of transition, he would naturally experience occasional yearnings for his old life as a boulevardier—right? “Not at all,” he says. “The joy I've found working on a thriving company and working on a thriving family have been so exponentially greater than the instant shock you get from that stuff. Family life, marriage, work—it's good, man.” Kutcher has adjusted to married life quite well; if he happens to be a little whipped, he is happily so, without shame. There are, of course, small adjustments: Demi refuses to set foot in Red Lobster, a favored eatery of his bachelorhood. Kutcher has learned to enjoy pedicure dates. Flying in a private jet, he's found, isn't so crappy. But allowances have to be made in any marriage. He's gotten heavily involved in Moore's beloved Kabbalah; she has learned to tolerate football.

Kutcher, who cites Daisy Duke as his sexual ideal, took a while to warm to the idea of Demi Moore. “I liked *GI Jane*, but I didn't think she was *hot* as

GI Jane,” he says. “She was never my cup of tea.” So he was as surprised as anyone by his reaction to Moore—a month after he hadn’t recognized her in Hollywood—when Sara Foster brought her along to his suite at the Four Seasons in New York the week he was hosting *Saturday Night Live*. Kutcher happened to overhear Moore talking on her phone, wishing a tender good night to her daughters. “It was the most beautiful thing I’ve ever heard,” he says. “So when we went to dinner I organized it so she was sitting across from me. And then she said something at the dinner table that was, like, so fucking profound that at that point, I didn’t have a choice.” They went back to her apartment and stayed up all night. By bilateral agreement, he says, there was no sex that night.

His friends were shocked. “When he said he thought there was a possibility, the first thing out of my mouth was, ‘You’re fucking on crack,’” says Danny Masterson, his friend and *That ’70s Show* costar. “‘There’s no way in hell that Demi Moore is going to hang out with you.’” Moore put that notion to rest when she moved into Kutcher’s five-bedroom Beverly Hills spread. She brought along her two dogs and her three daughters from her marriage to Willis.

Though his buddy T.J. Jefferson, who’s been bunking with him for years, got to keep his room, the framed posters from Kutcher’s movies did not remain in the hallway. His furniture was sent into exile in his office. The girls who would ring Kutcher’s doorbell late at night looking for a pool party got the picture when Demi began answering the door (and screaming, “There’s no fucking party here!”). Even the tabloids—theorizing that the Kutcher-Moore union was a publicity ploy concocted by a TV star trying to make the move into film and an aging starlet on the comeback trail—reluctantly had to accept them as a real couple. They focused instead on whether Moore was carrying Kutcher’s baby. She wasn’t, but the pair hasn’t ruled out the future possibility. “They

who is preparing a film version of Richard Clarke’s memoir, *Against All Enemies*, with Sean Penn reported to be playing the former counterterrorism chief. Kutcher was asking about the role of Clarke’s second-in-command—a role he knows he’s unlikely to get. Landing the lead in *Elizabethtown* a few years ago signaled a major career reinvention, but director Cameron Crowe decided in rehearsals to replace him with Orlando Bloom.

Kutcher radiates such a disarming mix of humility and sweetness that you truly do root for his big breakout, even if you think most of his movies, well, kind of blow. So it’s heartwarming to hear real optimism in his voice after he mentions that he had driven out to Pasadena with his wife the night before to watch a test screening of *The Guardian*, in which he gets top billing alongside Kevin Costner. Kutcher plays a cocky Coast Guard enlistee who, after clashing with Costner’s grizzled superior officer, performs third-act heroics at sea. Costner, who attests that Kutcher is “totally believable” in the role, had brought to the same screening an older film-editor friend who professed to not really “get” Kutcher. “If I hadn’t known him, and I just saw this movie,” Costner’s friend told him, “I would have said, ‘Hollywood just found a new leading man.’” And it was certainly encouraging to Kutcher that the audience of 250 civilians checked many more “would highly recommend this movie” boxes on the cards than for any other movie he’d done. But even more encouraging was what audience members didn’t say. Hidden in the back of the theater, Kutcher braced himself to hear that he’d stunk up a perfectly good Disney movie. But nobody said so.

ABOUT A WEEK LATER, KUTCHER CALLS FROM HIS WIFE’S 40-ACRE RANCH IN HAILEY, IDAHO, on the tail end of the Fourth of July holiday. The night before, over a friendly game of Uno with Bruce Willis, who was in town to spend the long weekend

THAT: “IF SHE WEARS BLACK, SO DO YOU. MATCHING ISN’T HER JOB. IT’S YOURS. YOU’RE THE PURSE.”

look like fucking idiots now, don’t they?” Kutcher says wryly. “If I had a kid for every time they said we were having one, we’d have 20 by now.”

KUTCHER HAS NEVER LACKED CONFIDENCE WITH WOMEN, OR THE CERTAINTY THAT HE would be in a position to date famous ones. In high school, in the basement of his mom and stepdad’s farmhouse back in Homestead, Iowa (population 103), he bet his friend Ryan a thousand bucks that he would one day go out on a date with Jennifer Aniston. (A few years ago, he almost did. Long story.) That swagger didn’t extend to his career. To pay his tuition at the University of Iowa, he swept up Cheerio dust in the General Mills factory where his dad worked, but after his first year he dropped out to model. Well-paid but unfulfilled, he went to Los Angeles, with virtually no acting experience. His first day in town, he landed the role of Kelso on *That ’70s Show*.

By the middle of Season One, when the studio audience queued up for autographs, Kutcher’s line was always the longest. “It was turning into Beatlemania, and Ashton was Paul,” cocreator Terry Turner says. Still, Kutcher was perpetually racked with anxiety about getting canned and at one point became convinced that his stand-in was going to replace him. He watched the other cast members—Topher Grace, in particular—with jealousy, imagining they possessed the natural gift he never would. He created *Punk’d* out of a paralyzing fear that after *That ’70s Show* he’d never be hired again.

He got work—a lot, in fact—but he’d always wanted to be like Brad Pitt or Leonardo DiCaprio, not the Dude, *Where’s My Car?* guy directors only called when they needed someone to play a borderline-retarded stoner. Now, six years after declaring his intention to become a “more serious actor,” he’s still angling to reposition himself. This very morning, Kutcher had an exploratory breakfast meeting that his agents had set up with *Crash* director Paul Haggis,

with the Kutchers and the girls, Kutcher brought up something that had been gnawing at him since he’d seen *Superman Returns*. “How the fuck was Superman lifting up that kryptonite island?” he asked his wife’s ex-husband. Willis concurred that it made no sense.

Once, Kutcher had actually been pursued for the Superman role, but he bowed out of the running. The producers wanted to tie him up for three pictures, and they weren’t offering him enough money to risk his being forever associated with the role. He’d screen-tested in the suit, and it just didn’t feel right. His legs looked freakishly long in Spandex; the suit’s lack of pockets unnerved him. Plus, there was a larger issue to consider. “Could anybody fucking take me seriously as Superman?” he asks, a rueful shadow cropping up behind the Kelso exuberance. “Let’s be honest about that.”

Discussing his reviews, Kutcher lowers his voice, as if pondering the barbs. “If I want to get into this wallowing, self-doubt moment, I’ll read how shitty they think I am,” he says. “I don’t necessarily think all the critics are wrong. They’re watching the same movie I’m making. I don’t think I’m that good. And they don’t think I’m that good. So I’m not pulling that feeling out of my ass. They’re just backing up that feeling that I already have about myself.”

Just then, Moore, in the background, begins belting out a hammy chorus of “What’s New Pussycat?” “Woah . . . woah . . . woah,” she sings in mock sympathy. It’s apparently not the first time she’s heard this lament from her young husband. Sometimes it hurts to grow up, especially when you have to do it on the fly. And sometimes just having another person who loves you enough to pierce your armor can allow you to be comfortable with that chaos burbling inside. “Shut up, baby,” Kutcher says, giggling. And over his wife’s wailing voice, he presses on. “I try my hardest,” he says. “I think I’m getting better.” ■