

TOUGH GUYS DO DANCE

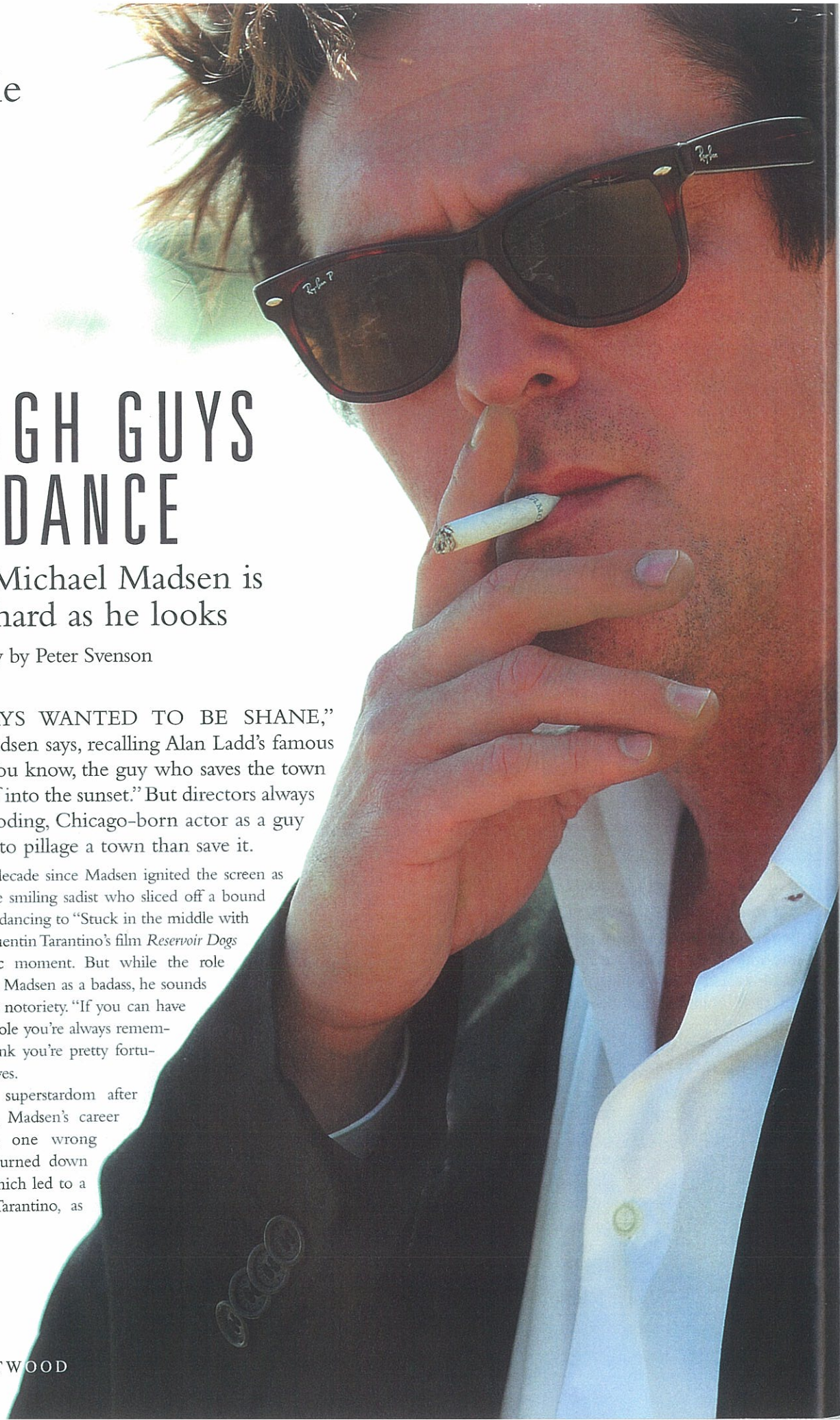
Actor Michael Madsen is not as hard as he looks

Photography by Peter Svenson

"I ALWAYS WANTED TO BE SHANE," Michael Madsen says, recalling Alan Ladd's famous Western. "You know, the guy who saves the town and rides off into the sunset." But directors always saw the brooding, Chicago-born actor as a guy more likely to pillage a town than save it.

It's been a decade since Madsen ignited the screen as Mr. Blonde, the smiling sadist who sliced off a bound cop's ear while dancing to "Stuck in the middle with you," giving Quentin Tarantino's film *Reservoir Dogs* its most iconic moment. But while the role helped typecast Madsen as a badass, he sounds grateful for the notoriety. "If you can have one definitive role you're always remembered for, I think you're pretty fortunate," he observes.

Poised for superstardom after *Reservoir Dogs*, Madsen's career derailed with one wrong decision: He turned down *Pulp Fiction*, which led to a fallout with Tarantino, as



Madsen, hoping to emulate his hero Shane, opted instead for *Wyatt Earp*. "I wanted to take a walk down to the OK Corral," Madsen laughs. "If I'd known how long a walk it was gonna be, I would've taken a cab."

After years in B-movie hell, Madsen finally reasserted himself with bad-boy roles in films like *Donnie Brasco*, *The Getaway*, and *Species*. But while the bad-boy image once extended to Madsen's off-screen life—a raucous past filled with bar brawls, car thefts, and motorcycle rides with the Hell's Angels—the actor has since melowered. Now a family man with a house in Malibu, he spends as much time as possible with his third wife, DeAnna, and his five sons. He's even published two introspective books of poems.

In fact, while Madsen's still a fan of Harleys and race cars, he takes a dim view of Hollywood's street-racing fixation. "I thought *The Fast and the Furious* was an irresponsible picture to make," he says.

Perhaps it's no accident that lately, good-guy roles are finding Madsen. As a detective who moves from the sidelines to the front line, he took a hero's turn in the recently-aired *44 Minutes: The True Story of the North*



Hollywood Shootout, the FX cable network's highest-rated movie ever. And this summer, Madsen teams with Ashton Kutcher in Miramax's *My Boss's Daughter*, a comedy, of all things, directed by David Zucker. "I get tired of being the hired gun, the killer," says Madsen. "It's a gas to break out of your usual style."

The actor has also patched up his differences with Tarantino, who cast him opposite Uma Thurman in the much-anticipated martial arts film, *Kill Bill*. Madsen describes it as "the best role I've had in ten years," adding that "Quentin and I have a symbiotic relationship." Madsen now hopes Tarantino will someday do a prequel about the Vega Brothers—Vic, played by Madsen in *Reservoir Dogs*, and Vincent, portrayed by John Travolta in *Pulp Fiction*.

With an admirer at *People* magazine nominating Madsen for Sexiest Man Alive, the actor may soon enter a new phase of stardom. "I should've been the sexiest man alive years ago," he says. "Maybe there's still hope for me." **B**

— Graham Flashner

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