‘I’M NOT HANDSOME. I’M ON THE CUSP’
How to get dressed, by Matt Smith

Caitlin Moran
Guess what my nickname is

Sathnam Sanghera
The secret life of a corner shop

INSIDE THE HOUSE OF ALESSI

LISA ARMSTRONG PICKS THE BEST SUMMER FROCK
DOCTOR WHO
DOES SAVILE ROW

What happened when we asked Matt Smith, the eleventh
Time Lord, to model Hermès, Vivienne Westwood and Gieves
& Hawkes? He regenerated as a very 21st-century dandy

INTERVIEW Deborah Ross, STYLIT Anne Taylor-Hayward PHOTOGRAPHS Jason Herberington
I'm not handsome enough to be called handsome

PREVIOUS SPREAD

Suit, shirt and shoes, all Gucci (0171-408 9979); socks, Happy Socks (happysocks.com); umbrella, gloves and bow tie, all Gieves & Hawkes (020-7654 2000)

THIS PAGE

Blazer, polo shirt and trousers, all James Sedgwick (020-7229 5952); trousers, Vivienne Westwood (020-7439 8551); socks, Happy Socks (happysocks.com); pocket square and umbrella, both Gieves & Hawkes, Hadden Hall, Whiteley's (020-7491 3900)

OPPOSITE

Suit, Gieves & Hawkes; shirt and bow tie, both Paul Smith (020-7229 5952) and Asquith (020-769 3000); ring, Marti, 020-7229 5952

The Times Magazine
you fight over the black ones?" "Yes. Always. And the reds. Then all that would be left were the lemon crescents and you'd think life should be better than a lemon crescent." Life should be better than a lemon crescent. Are you beginning to see why I fell for him now?

I saw he was a natty dresser, so ask him if he is. He says yes. He says his favourite place to shop, when money is no object, is Dover Street Market in London. I see that place is so stylish just the name makes me come over all faint. "No, no, it's cool," he protests. Today, he is wearing jeans ("Levi's"). brown boots ("Russell & Bromley") and a T-shirt ("from my favourite shop, Acne"). His coat is a second-hand, hooded anorak thing he bought in San Francisco. The food is important. When I ask him to compare and contrast his life pre-fame and his life now, he says, "I wear a lot of hoodies now." Are you a fans a big bother? Not at all, he says. "It's fine. You try to give them same time -- and then run."

Although his career didn't happen suddenly -- he's never been out of work -- the fame thing did. What it bleed is from zero to being on the cover of Radio Times practically overnight. He has obviously had the time, energy and brain power to reconstruct this, and says:

"The thing is now, with young actors, that one of the most immediate, apparent and definable ways to measure your success is to be on the cover of something, but actually it's not a measure of success at all. It's just something to facilitate whatever show you are in. It's all about the part." And your most surreal moment, as a famous person? He says he can't think what that might be, but does know his proud. "I was in this bakery in Primrose Hill with my girlfriend and Alan Bennett was in there and he said hello to me. To me! And he's the best. Isn't he? The coolest dude I was so proud!" He goes all bouncy with happiness, limbs whipping themselves around. It's what my dog does when I say, "Walkies." It's sensationally endearing.

Anyway, the part of the Doctor, and what a part it is. He is the eleventh doctor in what is now the longest running sci-fi series on TV, which audiences don't just watch, but love, and which has been sold to 144 countries. And as for the DVD and merchandising sales, they are legion. What, I ask, is the weirdest merchandise you have ever encountered?

"Pants." Doctor Who pants! With your face on! "Yeah. Men's or women's?" "Men's. Boring." That's a bit creepy, isn't it? He thinks it probably is but, on a brighter note, "I suppose they are interesting pants with an interesting face on them. What do you think people mean by "interesting"? He often hates my questions back, not aggressively, but out of curiosity. I don't know, I say, but I wouldn't be worried. I add, heaven forbid I should argue with Kents, but a thing of perfect beauty probably gets...

'I was in this bakery and Alan Bennett said hello. He's the best. The coolest dude!'
dull after a while, and I would actually prefer to look at Michael Gambon's face, say, rather than Brad Pitt's. He laughs and says Michael Gambon was in the last Christmas special, and is one of his idols, along with the late Pete Postlethwaite, Vincent Cassel and Daniel Day-Lewis. He then says, "Steven [Moffat, currently Doctor Who's lead writer and executive producer] has just given me the title of the next Christmas special and it blew my mind." Tell me, I say, and I promise to keep it to myself, unless I can't, in which case I will leak like a sieve. "No," he says firmly. Go on. I urge. "No," he repeats. He is not an idiot, alas.

He was never meant to be an actor.
He was meant to be a professional footballer.
His father was a professional footballer (for Notts County), his grandfather was a professional footballer (ditto), "and although there was no pressure on me, I wanted to be one because football is what I enjoyed."

He had played for Northampton Town, Nottingham Forest and Leicester City's youth teams when, at 16, he injured his back. Despite a year of physical therapy, he never regained his form or his enthusiasm. He was, he says, "absolutely devastated" at the time, but now? He's not thankful, exactly, but he does think it was character building.

"To lose something that is dear to you at a young age is a great lesson," he says. "And maybe it was meant to be." Do you think, I ask, that if all had gone according to plan, you'd have enjoyed the life of a top footballer? WAGs, a gated house in Cheshire, a Ferrari in the drive, that sort of thing? Actually, it sounds pretty good, no? He says, "I mean this with the greatest respect to footballers, but as an actor you do get to explore more pockets of the world, it's more varied and it's something I can do when I'm older, hopefully." And when you started acting, did you think, if I play my cards right, I will one day end up on pants? "No. No. No. Absolutely not. That's not what we aim for in life, is it? But this job affords you so many mad and strange experiences, and it's thrilling for that reason."

It was his school drama teacher.
Mr Hardingham, who put him on to acting, nagged him into acting. Why? What did he see in you? "He'd been trying to cast me in plays for a couple of years and I said I'd turn up, but then didn't, because I was a footballer and all my mates thought it was naff. I don't know what it was. He just took a punt on me. And he rang my mum and said, 'Look, I really want Matt do to this play, please, please encourage him.' So I did Twelve Angry Men and then he cast me in The Pirates of Penzance, as the Pirate King, and I sang, which wasn't pretty. I owe him because he showed a lot of faith in me."

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Smith went on to study drama and creative writing at the University of East Anglia and is extremely well read. His favourite book is The Master and Margarita by Mikhail Bulgakov, although he also loves J.D. Salinger and Raymond Carver, and is passionate about poetry. "I love it because it's quick and accessible and something you can keep coming back to, like a song." He is mad for Carol Ann Duffy, he says, and would one day like to play Ted Hughes. Have you, I ask, written poetry yourself? He said he did, as part of his degree, "but it was bad, so bad." Can you remember any lines? "I can remember I wrote one poem about the War of the Roses, and one about a man called Cyril who lived on his own and ran a petrol station, and one about time. It was all very... pontifical. Is that a word?" It is now, duck. Why not?

After university, he had parts on TV and on stage before he auditioned for Doctor Who, having never watched an episode, ever. "I'd noticed it and was aware of it, but I was never a Whovian." Where were you when you heard you'd got the role? "I can remember exactly. I was in Aldgate, walking out of an audition, and I rang my dad; he just sort of laughed." He then got down to some serious Doctor Who viewing. "I watched from Chris Eccleston's tenure through to the end of David Tennant's, and fell in love with it. And then I went back further and fell in love with it even more. It's like anything, I suppose; the more you invest in it, the more interesting it becomes." He is, I can see, a brilliant Doctor or, as Steven Moffat has put it. "He's fantastically engaging; a cool young guy and an old fogey at the same time."

Does he fear being typecast? "What, with this interesting face?" And if you could time-travel backwards, say, where would you go? I think I'd quite like to hang out with Early Man, for example. His answer is much sweeter. "I'd quite like to see my mum and dad meet. My dad was in Nottingham, on his own one night, and had a few drinks in a bar when he saw this girl and said to himself, 'OK, if this girl doesn't dance with me, I'm going home.' And he went up and asked her and she did dance with him, and here I am. Also, I'd quite like to have been there when England won the World Cup."

Obviously, I try to get at his private life, if only because I am nosy and prurient in that way, but, quite wisely, he stays mostly stshh. Where did you meet Daisy? "America," he says. Is being in love the "glamorous hell" that Carol Ann Duffy says it is? "That would be telling," he says. Are the two of you papped wherever you go? "If you go to places where there are paparazzi, yes, but if you don't, then no." Is it right you live in Highgate, North London, as I've read? "No." Crouch End? "No, although I think there is a good lamp shop there, and I need a lamp." Can you cook? "I've just started, actually. I did roast chicken yesterday, the whole shebang, although under Daisy's tutorage, I have to confess. And I made a cake for afters." What kind of cake? I love cake. "A chocolate chip cake with vanilla icing. We also had garlic mushy peas. Doesn't sound great, but they were." I'm available to dine round yours any time, I tell him. Just give me the nod. "Well," he says. "There you are."

Sadly, our time is up, and I have to go. It's been a lovely hour, and I've had fun. Aside from anything else, Matt Smith is so excited to be where he's at, it's a joy. As I leave - with a spring in my step and renewed hope in my heart - I give him a hug which, I admit, surprises him rather, but that's just the way it goes sometimes. Life should always be better than a lemon crescent? I think I might get the tattoo. I shall tell him that, when I write.

The new series of Doctor Who begins on BBC One at Easter.