

M AZINE

'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 STYLIST Jane Taylor-Hayhurst PHOTOGRAPHS Jason Hetherington



I truck up for my interview with Matt Smith with no spring in my step and very little hope in my heart, on the grounds that 1) young actors can be extremely boring (I often have more interesting conversations with my accountant, and he just shouts at me), 2) I am no great fan of *Doctor Who*, then or now (how many times can

the world be saved?), and 3) I'm old and tired, and, these days, would generally prefer to be at home, pottering. But? Readers, it goes swimmingly. For why? Probably, because he is 1) adorable, 2) entirely engaging, and 3) he charms my little socks off. I'm won over, smitten, and although I'm not saving his girlfriend, the model Daisy Lowe, should watch out – don't be ridiculous – I think we could be pen pals, if he'd have it, and she didn't mind too much.

We meet in Central London, at the offices of the people who handle *Doctor Who*'s PR. He is 20 minutes late – some Time Lord, huh? – but a flurry of apologies when he does finally arrive, which is nice, as many young people today lack good manners, or so I find.

He says he was at a read-through for 'the tenth episode of the new *Doctor Who* series, and then his cab got caught in traffic on Shaftesbury Avenue. "Sorry, sorry, sorry," he repeats. "Sorry."

He is 28 and physically the most beguiling fellow, with skinny, ribbon limbs that seem to whip round suddenly and surprise him, hair quiffed like a Disney prince, and a face that is sort of dishy but also has quite a *Beano*-esque quality going on. Mostly, his face is described as "interesting" and when I ask him what he thinks that means, he says, "It means I'm not handsome enough to be called handsome because, if I were handsome, they'd say, 'Oh, isn't he handsome.' It means I'm on the cusp. It means: he could be handsome, but he's not quite, therefore he is interesting."

I tell him that he is interesting, but dishily interesting. He says, "Well, that is very kind of you. And my mother would agree." I note a big scar running along his hairline. Crikey. I say, what happened there? He replies that he cracked his head open as a kid at nursery. "I was very clumsy – am very clumsy – and there was a piratey thing and I basically fell underneath it and, boof, 24 stitches. That's my earliest memory."

And what's your earliest memory when it comes to performing, or seeing a performance? "My sister was a dancer," he says, "and I remember being very reluctant to traipse round the country, watching her, and there is one pantomime that sticks out the most, in which she played a dinosaur. I had to go to see it like 14 times and my best friend, Alex, and I sat up in the gods and used to get through a big pack of fruit gums." Did

PREVIOUS SPREAD

Suit, shirt and shoes, all Dunhill (0845 4880779); **socks**, Happy Socks (happysocks.com); **umbrella, gloves and bow tie**, all Gieves & Hawkes (020-7434 2001)

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Blazer, polo shirt and tuxedo waistcoat, all James Small (020-7426 9888); **trousers**, Vivienne Westwood (020-7439 1109); **socks**, Happy Socks; **shoes**, Dunhill; **pocket square and umbrella**, both Gieves & Hawkes; **belt**, Mulberry (020-7491 3900)

OPPOSITE

Suit, Gieves & Hawkes; **shirt and bowler hat**, Paul Smith (0800 0234006); **tie**, Turnbull & Asser (020-7808 3000); **rings**, Matt's own

'I'm not handsome enough to be called handsome'

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 sense he is a nifty 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 say 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 anoraky thing he bought in San Francisco. The hood 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 hoods now." Are your fans a big bother? Not at all, he says. "It's fine. You try to give them some time – and then run."

Although his career didn't happen suddenly – he's never been out of work – the fame thing did. What's it like to go from zero to being on the cover of *Radio Times* practically overnight? He has obviously had the time, energy and brain power to deconstruct 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 proudest. "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 54 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. Boxers." 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 bats 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 Keats, 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!'



OPPOSITE

Three-piece suit, Paul Smith (0800 0234006); **shirt**, Lyle & Scott Heritage (lyleandscott.com); **socks**, Happy Socks (happysocks.com); **brogues**, Trickers (020-7330 6395); **bow tie**, Gieves & Hawkes (020-7434 2001)

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Suit, Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons at Browns (020-7514 0000); **shirt**, Penfield (penfieldusa.com); **shoes**, Rupert Sanderson (rupertsanderson.com); **trilby**, Costume National (020-7351 3873); **bow tie**, Drakes at Present (020-7033 0500); **pocket handkerchief**, Dunhill (0845 4580779); **belt**, Mulberry (020-7491 3900)

Grooming: **Cow Tanaka** at Punishment LTD using **Paul Mitchell**
Stylist's assistant: **Charlie Lambros**

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 out 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 to do this play, so 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."

Smith and girlfriend
Daisy Lowe, last year



'I was just given the title of the next Christmas special and it blew my mind'

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 Eccles'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." Yes, 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 Matt, 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 shtoom. 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 alters. "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