

R H A P S O D Y

JANUARY 2015

CHRISTOPH WALTZ


STEALS THE SHOW

MOLLY SIMS *A MODEL TRAVELER*

FLY-FISHING AND FINE DINING **FLORIDA'S PARADISE COAST**

HOW **T. BOONE PICKENS** *STRUCK IT RICH*

UNITED 

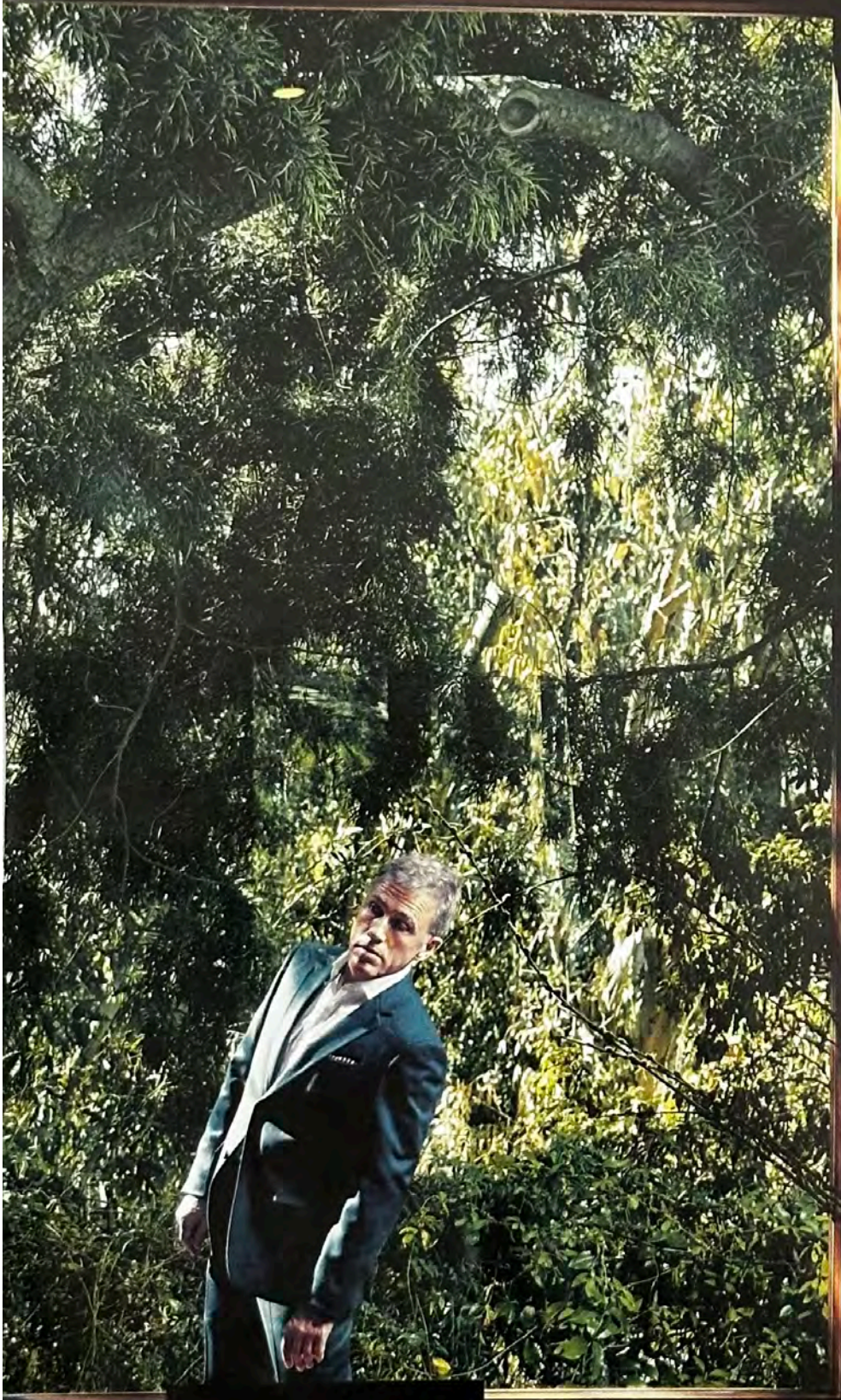
A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 



A TRUE ARTIST

*In the new film **Big Eyes**, Christoph Waltz plays one of history's most sensational art frauds. When it comes to his own career, however, the two-time Academy Award winner is the genuine article.*

By GREGG LAGAMBINA
Photography by KURT ISWARIENKO
Styling by EVET SANCHEZ



OPENING SPREAD

JOHN VARVATOS Blue wool suit, \$1,398
BRUNELLO CUCINELLI White button-up
dress shirt with spread collar, \$495

OPPOSITE PAGE

BARNEYS NEW YORK Charcoal top coat, \$795
BRUNELLO CUCINELLI Brown cotton khakis,
\$895; brown cap-toe shoes, \$795

DESPITE ITS global influence, Hollywood is a surprisingly small town. You often cross paths with the same people. Some of them are famous. Most of them not. Nearly all of them are employed in one way or another—celebrity profile writer, say—by the entertainment industrial complex. Angelina Jolie shopping at Whole Foods? Ben Affleck grabbing Starbucks? Live here long enough, you won't bat an eye. But every once in a while, the insularity of the place can still manage to astound.

This house, for instance.

Painted a deep red, overlooking valleys of eucalyptus trees and appointed with a gray stone swimming pool, it was chosen by *Rhapsody*, with the assistance of a leading Sotheby's International real estate agent, as a picturesque setting in which to photograph and interview two-time Academy Award-winning actor Christoph Waltz for this month's cover story. It was *not* chosen because it belongs to screenwriter Larry Karaszewski, whose impressive credits include the biographical films *Ed Wood*, *The People vs. Larry Flynt* and the newly released *Big Eyes*, which Waltz stars in and is here to promote. That's just coincidence. That's just Hollywood.

Dressed casually in a light gray short-sleeved shirt and dark gray chinos, out of the sleek suits he donned for the photo shoot, Waltz sits out back of the house at a picnic-style table, gesturing toward the pool.

"I like the color," he says. "The water is a good color. It's nice."

If not for his familiar Austrian accent, it's easy to imagine these words coming from the character Waltz plays in *Big Eyes*, Walter Keane, a fame-hungry American con man who, in the 1950s, took credit for eerily gorgeous paintings of exaggeratedly wide-eyed children done by his


wife, Margaret, became a national celebrity and amassed a fortune that he would ultimately squander. Certainly Walter Keane, who passed away in 2000, wasn't without his own attributes. As a businessman, he is sometimes credited—as he does so himself in the film—with ushering in the era of art reproduction, before Andy Warhol elevated the idea into a chic movement. And in this way he is similar to the complex personas Waltz typically inhabits: the erudite and brutal Nazi in *Inglourious Basterds* that earned him his first Oscar; the noble slavery-era bounty hunter in *Django Unchained* that netted him his second little gold man; the concerned but preoccupied parent in the black comedy *Carnage*; and, it's to be expected, the archvillain in the next James Bond film. But *Big Eyes*, directed by Tim Burton, presents perhaps the greatest challenge—and, in turn, the most significant achievement, one that scored him a Best Actor Golden Globe nomination just as this issue was going to press—of Waltz's already illustrious career, for it calls on him to act the part of a man whose own life was an act.

Unlike Walter Keane, Waltz isn't much for self-promotion or revealing his motivations.

"You can ask me anything you want about my character, and I won't answer," he says matter-of-factly, but without a hint of rudeness. "I've never talked about characters. Why would I do that? It's like talking about what you write. You read it. Why would I talk about what I do? Watch it. That's what you do. I'm giving you something to watch. I'm not giving you an opinion about what to watch, because I'd be shooting myself in the foot."

Waltz is just as reticent to discuss the equally outstanding performance of his co-star, Amy Adams, who plays Margaret Keane. "Amy is a rare bird, absolutely," he says. "That's why I'm so full of praise, not about her—who am I to praise her? I would never be that presumptuous." And he stops there. >





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What Waltz *will* discuss—what he will excitedly and animatedly hold forth on for the majority of our hour-long conversation—is the concept of storytelling. Stories seem to him an entity outside of human experience, and they are what drive him to live—really, to live life fully.

“Drama is one way of telling a story,” he says. “You make the story immediately experienceable by personifying. Only then, all the actor business comes into play. But the important thing is the story and what it is that you want to tell and why you want to tell it. The actor assists, in a way—facilitates, mediates—in that specific form of storytelling. But it’s the story. I personally think being a storyteller with an audience that big—or at least a potential audience like we have in movies and television—gives you an enormous amount of responsibility. It puts the onus on you to live up to that responsibility. I really think we as actors are not always fully aware of that. We think it’s all about self-expression and what *we* want to do. I don’t think so.”

But how has the purpose of stories changed in our technology-obsessed, instant-gratification-craving, attention-span-shortened world? Are stories still relevant or even necessary? What about a recent poll of teenagers in which, when asked what they wanted to be, most offered not a profession but simply responded, “famous”? What place do stories have in a world where everyone simply wants to watch themselves?

Waltz sits quietly thinking for a moment. Operatic music floats up from some window in the plant-rich valley below, as if we’re in rural Italy and not the hills just above metropolitan Los Angeles.

“I actually lament, to a degree, and certainly regret that a lot of youngsters don’t want to expose themselves to stories,” he says. “They don’t want to *be* stories. They want to be the *result* of a very specific story. But that’s a

logical consequence of the commodification of literally every aspect of our lives. We are knowingly and schemingly spared, or rather deprived, of stories in order to be susceptible to the results, because the results can be manipulated. Stories take their course.”

Yes, a talk with Christoph Waltz is just as fascinating and cerebral as you’d expect. He continues: “In my view, that makes responsible storytelling even more important than before. To actually open a little gap, if possible—without wanting to be overambitious—a little window to the world. Maybe there are human destinies and fates to be learned from. Maybe there is something we haven’t considered that has escaped our attention, or our scope of interest. Our scope of interest is getting more limited from day to day. We don’t see half of what our parents have seen of the world. We *consume* more of it, but that doesn’t mean we’ve seen it and internalized it. That’s why you see people not *looking* at the ‘Mona Lisa’ but *taking pictures* of it. You know, selfies and all of the absurd and grotesque little devices to make selfie-taking more interesting.”

Then he shrugs.

“The ‘Mona Lisa’ is not even such a great painting,” he says.

But what of Margaret Keane’s work, that which for so many years was thought to be the product of her late ex-husband? Is Waltz an admirer?

As usual, he won’t offer much direct insight. Instead, and quite fittingly, he tells a story: Upon their first meeting at Margaret Keane’s home in northern California, the artist—now in her late 80s—invited Waltz to select one of her paintings as a gift.

“The painting I chose was a scary painting,” Waltz says. “It was actually scary. Pretty atypical. I responded to it *because* it is atypical. Margaret looked at me and smiled and said, ‘I actually expected you to pick that one.’” ☉

PREVIOUS PAGE

DRIES VAN NOTEN Cotton double-breasted suit jacket, \$1,115;
Paisley-print spread-collar button-up shirt, \$390;
cotton trousers, \$620

OPPOSITE PAGE

JOHN VARVATOS Black and white Nailhead suit jacket, \$1,498;
Black and white Nailhead trousers, \$698

THE LOCATION

To learn more about this home and others like it in the greater Los Angeles area, contact Patricia Ruben of Sotheby’s International, patriciaruben.com

