

ZAC

Photographer BENWELLER Fashion Editor
ANTHONY UNWIN Interview MATT MUELLER

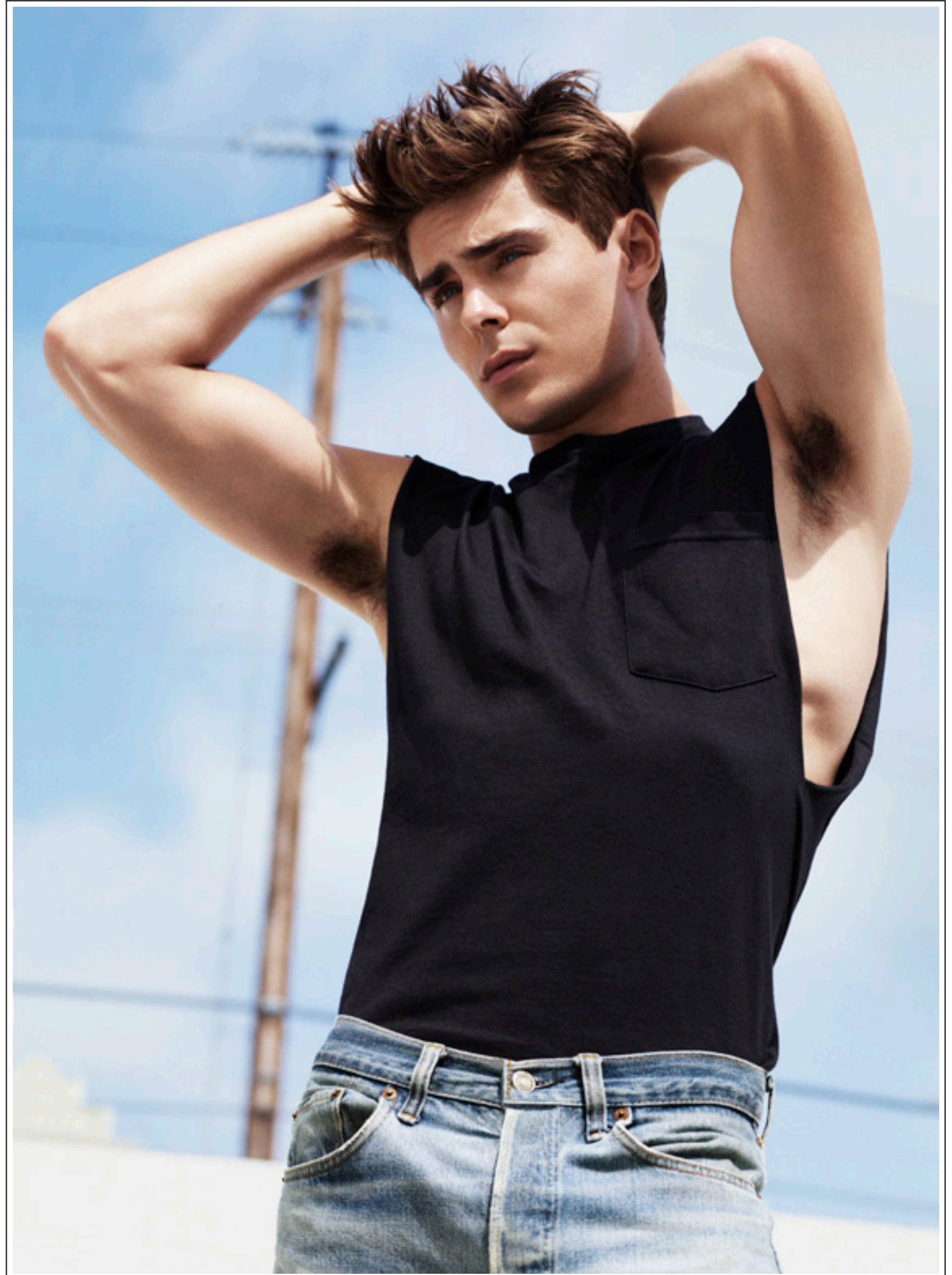
EFRON

**THE TRANSITION FROM TEEN PIN-UP TO SERIOUS
ACTOR HAS BEEN THE PITFALL OF MANY.
WITH SERIOUS ROLES AHEAD AND THE CREATION
OF HIS OWN PRODUCTION COMPANY, ZAC EFRON
IS LOOKING TO PROVE HE HAS WHAT IT TAKES
TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY**

Strolling into LA's Sunset Tower Hotel to meet Zac Efron, I find him napping at the side of the pool with a towel covering his face. "Hey man," he says, waking when I get close. "You have to forgive me – I was totally passed out there." No sweat, I say. Technically you had another 10 minutes until our interview so I interrupted you. He laughs... "I don't know what woke me up – I just felt your presence."

We move inside to a quiet sofa. On first impressions, Efron's pale blue eyes zing with a startling intensity, his sculpted quiff is a work of art, his complexion lightly tanned and clear. He insists his outfit (dark T-shirt, jeans that sit halfway down his hips over white briefs, pale brown shoe-boots), is evidence he's made an effort today: "Otherwise I'd just be in board shorts and sandals." The whole package screams robust self-confidence and youthful vigour, even when he lifts up his T-shirt to show me the small scar on his abdomen left by his emergency appendectomy in 2008. Clearly a very well brought-up man, Zac Efron is unfailingly polite and charming. He charm-bombs the Sunset Tower staff, asking our waitress her name when she's going off duty so he can tell her personally, "Josephine, thank you very much." He's courteous to me when I get his back up over a *High School Musical* line of questioning... "Is this piece about *Charlie St. Cloud* or *High School Musical*?" he pipes, jolting from laid-back repose to vaguely irritated hunch – it's the only moment Efron

Black sleeveless T-shirt by HANES, jeans by LEVI'S



displays any sense of discomfort – and he instantly feels guilty for it. “Sorry – excuse me, sorry. It’s fine – I’d just rather not dwell on it too much...” What becomes clear during the interview is that as keen as Efron may be to eschew associations with Troy [his *HSM* character], the two of them are without doubt peas in a pod, linked at the hip in their refreshing wholesomeness... Now 22, Efron is trying to move his career on from the squeaky-clean *High School Musical* trilogy, and who can blame him? The transition from teen supernova to adult actor is fraught with peril, and most perish along the way. Efron knows it and the post-*HSM* steps he’s taken have been classy and clever but also small and careful: wide-eyed rube in Richard Linklater’s *Me And Orson Welles*, pensive Gen-Xer in a high-schooler body in the age-switch comedy *17 Again* and now the spiritual tear-jerker *Charlie St. Cloud*, in which Efron ups his ante as another super-jock, albeit one tortured by the death of his younger brother. Thus far, he’s sticking closely to what he refers to as “my wheelhouse”, while also proving that he has acting chops to match his heartthrob charisma.

Charlie St. Cloud looks to be an emotional tale about death and family. What was the process for you getting that role?

This is the most classically I’ve ever been introduced to a project in terms of reading a script, connecting with the material and then pursuing it. I met with Marc Platt at Universal, talked about how passionate I was about the material and really got the project going from there. Having a little brother growing up, the story about these brothers is very powerful to me. My brother is 18 now, but growing up we had such a complicated relationship. I mean, it’s awesome having a brother but we were very competitive. And now that I’ve been living in LA doing what I call ‘the grind’, I haven’t been able to see much of him. We’ve sort of been drawn apart...

Is that changing now?

Yeah, ever since Dylan turned 17, he’s become a real person to me. He’s a cool kid. He’s funny and smart and he’s taking care of himself – I’m very proud of him. So we’ve been able to reconnect and now when we hang out, we have a lot more in common than I ever thought we would. I just took him to Hawaii and we had the greatest time. We went hiking, got lost in the jungle, did some cliff-jumping...

Is he interested in following you into the profession?

He’s keeping his options open but I don’t think he wants to pursue acting. He’s too talented in too many other areas to waste his time on this. [Grins]

Is Charlie St. Cloud the most dramatic role you’ve played?

It is more dramatic than most of the projects I’ve done in the past but it still follows the same beliefs and has the same sort of feel to it. It’s about living your life to the fullest and being able to move on. I love the idea that when loved ones pass [on], they’re still with you, they’re still guiding you. That’s what I truly believe – I feel it. And the story’s really about that: that love transcends all and family transcends all – even death. It’s very uplifting.

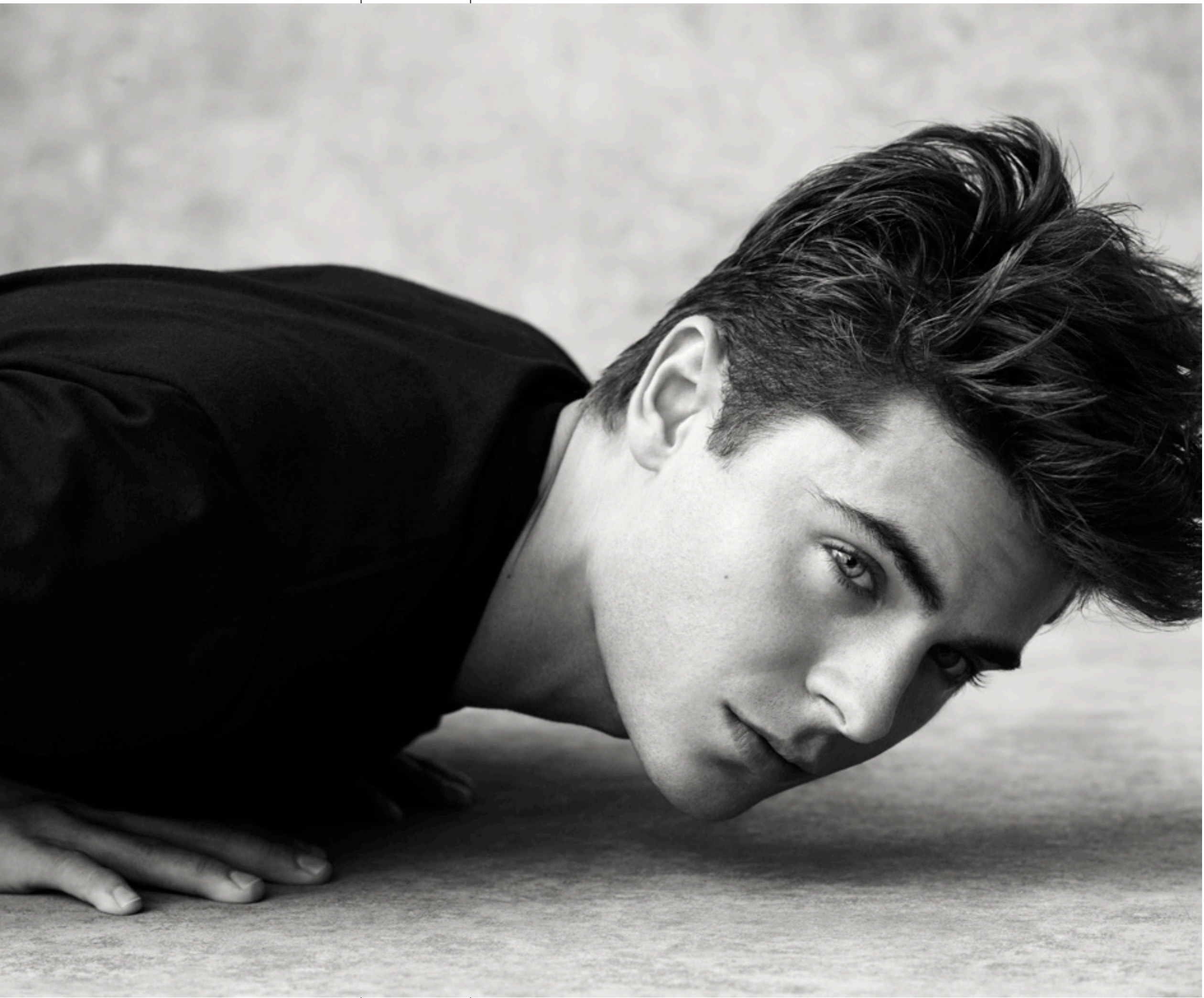
So did you drop out of the Footloose remake so you could do Charlie St. Cloud?

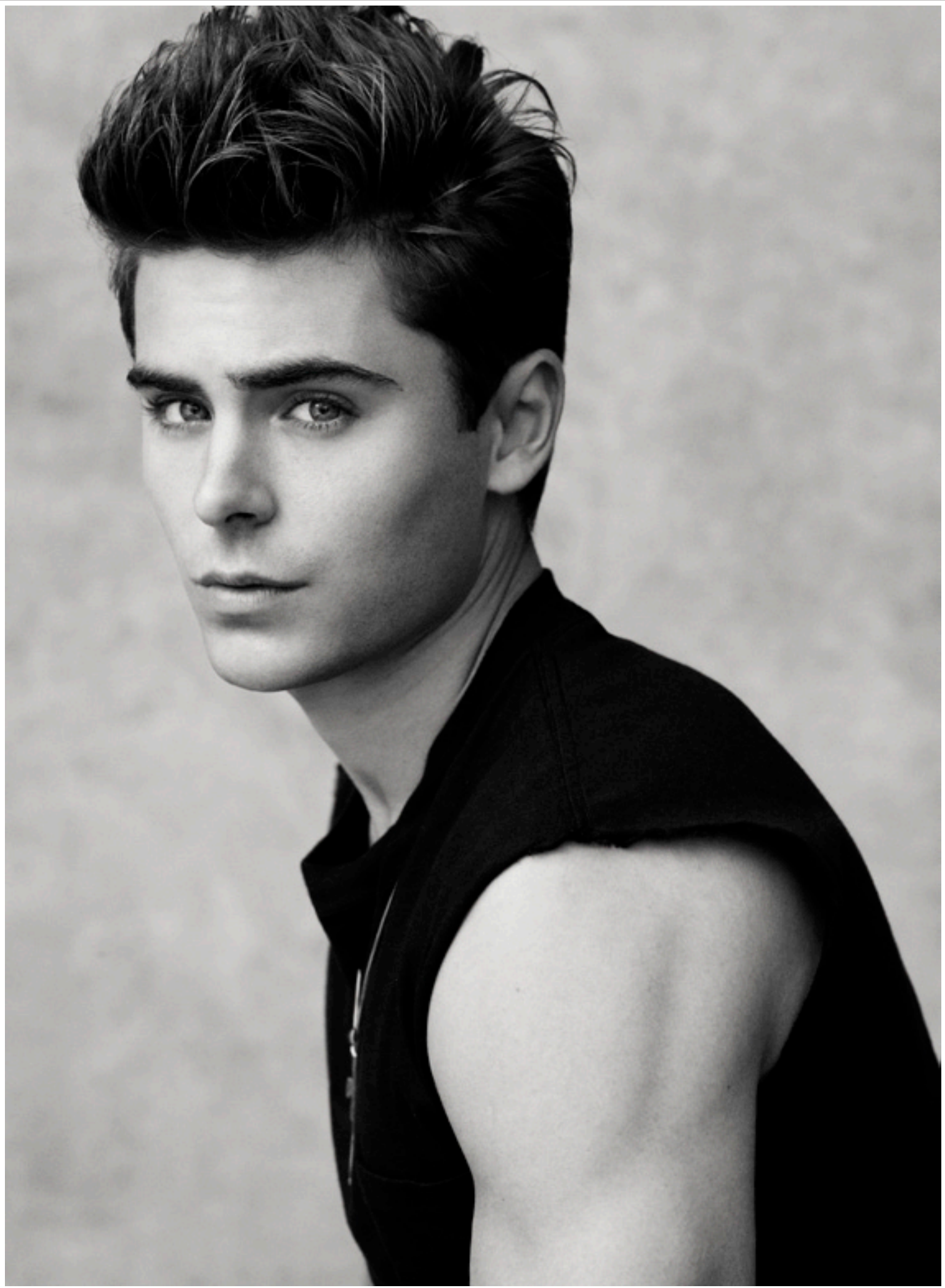
No, I didn’t turn down *Footloose* because the grass was greener on the other side. You have to follow your heart in those situations and one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to do is turn that down.

Because you said yes and then changed your mind...?

Yeah, we were working on it, we were set to go and then something about it... after watching Kevin Bacon’s performance so many times and every time finding something new and

T-shirt by HANES





incredible about it, you have to ask yourself, ‘Why are you making the movie?’ He obviously knew but I couldn’t figure it out for myself. And it wasn’t because there was something better right then, or cos I had *Charlie*. Honestly, I was back at square one. Which was also exciting... it was the first time I had ever done anything like that – you know, ‘I don’t need it.’ It was a cool feeling.

Was part of it wanting to redefine your career?

I’m not too worried about perception at this point. It’s more about where I feel like I can come alive. As fun as *Footloose* would have been, there was something inside me that wanted to stretch a little further. There’s elements of *Footloose* that I had already done – would it have been a bit redundant?

Do you feel like there’s too much focus on the career moves you’re making right now?

Well, it’s just that everyone wants to know what the answer is but the problem is, I don’t know. Nobody knows. All you can really do is follow your heart. I want to find things that I can bring something to, that are different, that are cool – for an audience today that’s so intelligent. I know this audience, I’ve grown up with them. I’m a product of this generation and I know how smart we are, I know the material that we crave in movies today – we’re not seeing a lot of it. It’s unfortunate. We need to not be afraid to take risks in film, take cool concepts that might not be commercial but find a way to make them mainstream.

Is this the next step then – taking a stronger hand in your own career?

Yeah absolutely, I’ve just started my own production company

“I’VE ALWAYS FELT MUSICAL – MY BIGGEST EXPENSES IS MY ITUNES ACCOUNT”

[called Ninjas Runnin’ Wild] and something that I’m working on right now is finding cool young directors. There’s so much young talent out there and these guys aren’t afraid to try new things. The whole producing thing is very new to me but I find it fascinating. You know, finding things to develop and not just waiting for scripts to come in because they don’t.

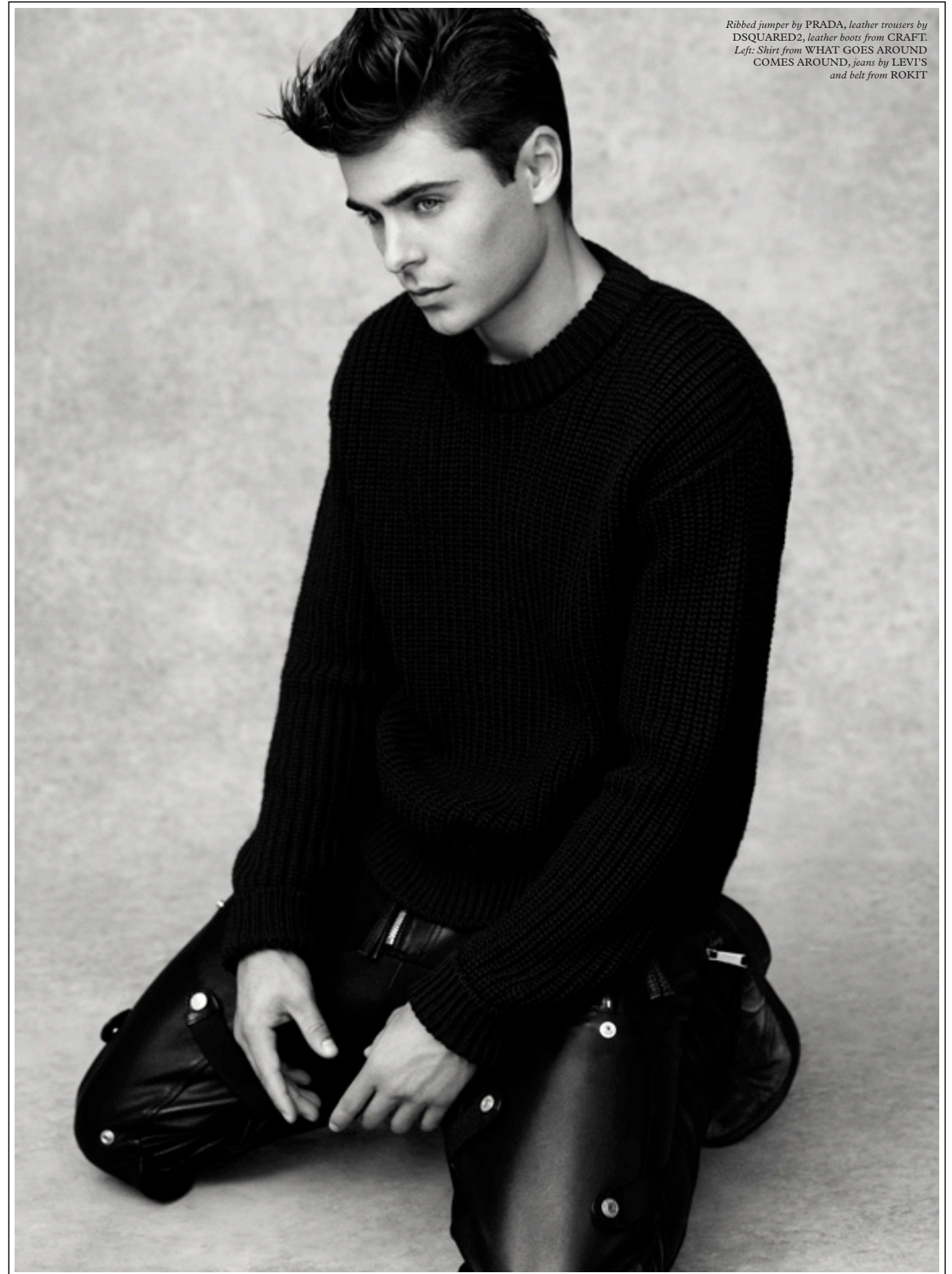
So let’s rewind back a bit... apparently, the first time your parents noticed you had talent was when you were singing in the car when you were 11. Were you aware of being interested in singing or performing at that age?

I’m not sure, but music’s in my blood. I’ve always felt musical. When I first moved into my house, I wasn’t comfortable in the space. It was already weird having my own place, but it felt empty for about a year. Finally I realised I didn’t have a decent sound system. As soon as I filled up the space with music, it became home, and now I’ve come to realise that I have to have a soundtrack to my life, constantly. Music is the way that I divide my life into chapters: if I hear a song, it brings me right back to specific moments and the few weeks of my life when it was on repeat on my iPod.

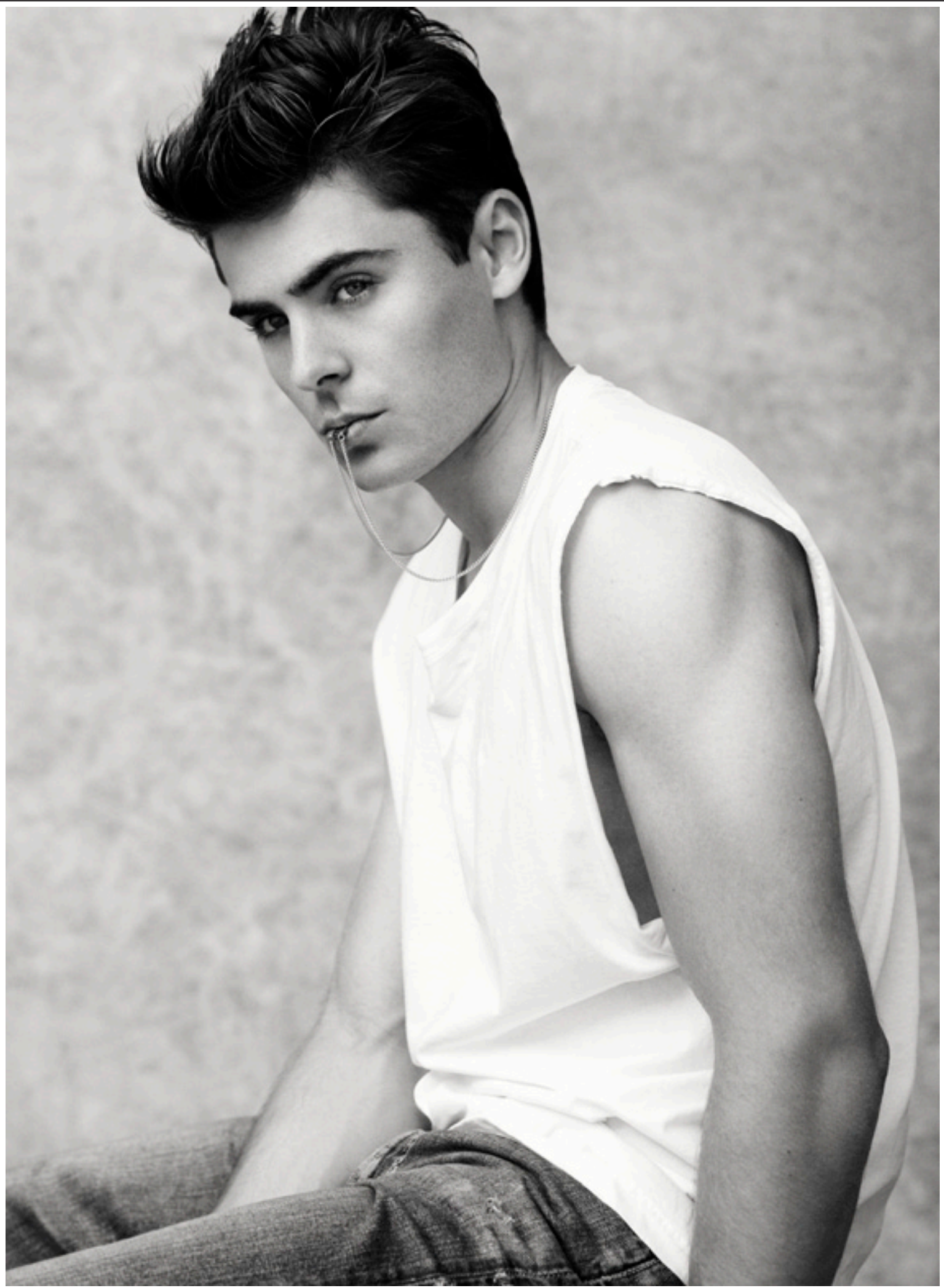
What’s soundtracking your life right now?

I just got back from Hawaii so we were listening to a lot of reggae out there. Rebelution [a California-based reggae band] is pretty popular out there, and I’ve been listening to a lot of Kid Cudi, Kanye West, L’il Wayne, the Yeah You’s, MGMT... anything and everything, constantly. It’s so funny, my biggest expense in my house is not my utilities, it’s actually my iTunes account.

T-shirt by HANES



*Ribbed jumper by PRADA, leather trousers by
DSQUARED2, leather boots from CRAFT.
Left: Shirt from WHAT GOES AROUND
COMES AROUND, jeans by LEVI'S
and belt from ROKIT*



From singing along to the car radio to performing in musical theatre – that was a quick leap, wasn’t it?

Everyone’s trying to find themselves at that age, that’s a real confusing time in your life – you don’t know what’s going on, suddenly girls are cool, you’re trying to figure out who you want to be, who do you identify with, who are your friends, what is your thing? And I just gravitated towards these creative people in this environment that I was put in, doing community theatre. I was working with people much older than me and they were all professional performers, you know, very driven people. They could sing, dance, act, play an instrument, breakdance, some were classically trained ballerinas. I was like, “I want to be like that, I want to be able to do everything.”

Were you also aware that you had a charisma that people responded to, that you were a cute kid?

It was weird – when I was a kid, I was the smallest kid in school. So every ounce of confidence I may have gotten out of the lady at the checkout counter saying, “You’ve got pretty eyes...” was balanced out when kids at school could just push me over. I didn’t really grow until I was in high school, when I luckily got to about 5ft 9in –5ft 10in with shoes on [laughs]. If there was one thing I was aware of, it was that I had a great family foundation. That’s one thing I’m very grateful for. My dad and mom were very smart and they kept me focused. They were always very constructive with me so I knew that, while I may not have had the abilities that some of the other kids did in sports, there’s nothing that I couldn’t learn.

Did you get a lot of grief from your peers?

Yeah, I mean, it wasn’t cool but I kind of thrived on that. I liked going against the grain. Most of those guys were so afraid... it’s

Jeans by LEVI’S, White sleeveless T-shirt by HANES

like, you can make fun of me all you want but deep down you're too afraid to get up there.

Sounds like your parents were supportive. Are you still very close?

Yeah, I just went home last weekend. Me, my dad and my little brother did a six-mile hike along the beach to this super-secluded... here, I can show you [grabs his iPhone]. We did this crazy-ass hike to this beach that no one knows about [leans over to show me photos of a beautiful stretch of California coastline]. We hiked along these cliffs – the perspective is lost on the iPhone but if you fell, you'd roll straight down to your death. I'm making it more dramatic than it really was but it was six miles in and six miles out – I got home and literally passed out. We did that for my dad's birthday cos he just turned 50.

What characteristics do you think your parents have passed to you?

My dad's really left-brained, logical. He's an engineer so I got that mathematical sense from him. And my mom's much more spiritual and happy-go-lucky – she's got that free-spirit thing going on about her; she's very adventurous and is all about her friends. So I got that love of adventure and lust for life from her. It's a good combination cos I'm constantly fighting myself. I'm like, "I know what I should be doing but fuck that, I want to have fun." [Laughs] When you're working, you get so sucked out of life that I tend to overcompensate by making up for those times with fun. I travel and soak up as much as I can between movies and then I don't feel as bad when I turn my phone off for a couple months on a film.

"I ALWAYS LIKE TO HANG OUT WITH VANESSA. WE READ SCRIPTS AT NIGHT – WE'RE KIND OF DORKS LIKE THAT"

***High School Musical* gave you your career but what was the reality of being part of that Disney star-making machine... Did you find it stifling or did you embrace it?**

Dude, it was a dream come true. [But] not like fame was the goal, and that was what I got; it was not about that at all. It was a life experience, an enrichment, and the stories that we were telling... *High School Musical* is very much a representation of who I was at that moment, all of my beliefs. It was like my story was being told – I can't deny it, that's sort of what I was going through. At the centre of it, it was, 'Follow your heart, follow your dreams, don't let anyone hold you back – you can accomplish anything.' That's a great message to feel like you're spreading to the world and to kids. Every once in a while, a fan will come up and say, 'Hey man, I just want to tell you how much *High School Musical* meant to me...' and they might tell me an anecdote about something that they did differently as a result of seeing those movies. Then they don't ask for a picture, they just wanted to say it and they walk away. And I tell you what, man, those are the nights when I go home and fall asleep with a smile on my face.

Are those *High School Musical* ideals still important in your life?

I'm not saying that you have to be that way. It's just how I am. It's the way that I can live with myself. I get this sort of deep-seated guilt if I don't follow those guidelines...

*Leather jacket from WHAT COMES AROUND GOES AROUND,
T-shirt by HANES , necklace by DUFFY.
Grooming JAMAL HAMMADI for HAMADI BEAUTY and ARCONNA,
Photographic Assistance JAMIE HAWKESWORTH and BOOKLIN ROSENSTOCK ,
Fashion Assistance MATILDA GOAD and YASMIN HED, Digital TRAVIS FARRELL,
Shot at MILK STUDIOS in LA.
For our ZAC EFRON cover and story, the WONDERLAND team stayed at MONDRIAN, LA*



Do you follow them strictly or do you deviate?
In LA, with how crazy things get, you can’t help but deviate once in a while. But I’d like to look back on my life and say that I’d stayed true to those ideals for the most part.

When you look at guys who you admire – Depp, DiCaprio, Brad Pitt – is it inspiring that you can be seen as both a heartthrob and a decent actor?
Yeah, it’s like there’s hope. There *is* hope. [Laughs]

Aren’t you friends with DiCaprio?
He’s been nice enough to hang out with me a few times. I wish I could say we were close friends... he’s a cool guy.

Early in his career, he was playing 19th-century gay poets and heroin addicts. Is that a step too far for you right now?
It’s a different time right now. Not to blame it on that. Of course I’d love to go and do that kind of stuff but it’s harder to get those things made now. It’s about finding those roles but I wouldn’t do it just to do it, you know, I have to feel it in here [puts fist to chest]. Leo’s strengths are, I’d say, different... He carved out his own path and found those roles and they were all unique to him. I’m not gonna try and copy him, I’ve gotta find my own path, whatever that is. I don’t know what it is, I’m still exploring – just, every day, figuring it out.

So where are you living? Did you buy your house recently?
About two years ago. I’m still there...

Is this the place with the cement floors so you can skate-board?
It wasn’t for that purpose that I bought it! It just happened to work out that way. But it’s a cool house. It’s like an art space, it’s almost like a loft in New York. Just white walls for hanging art... I like to paint, so I’m trying to cover all my walls with art, whether it’s my own or just cool stuff that I come across.

You never get caught stumbling out of nightclubs... Do you deliberately avoid that hard-partying LA club scene?
I just don’t have fun at clubs. I don’t know how people do that stuff. It’s a bunch of people you don’t know, a lot of intoxicated people running around that are sort of obnoxious or want something from you. I don’t know how people have fun in those scenarios. Me and my friends, we all have girlfriends so we do couples’ stuff – like we all went camping a couple weeks ago, us and our girls. There were six of us, three buddies and three girlfriends, and we went out to the middle of nowhere, to this small campground with no running water. Bear Grylls-ing it, ya know? Trying to catch food – really hard. We were running around trying to set traps, to no avail of course.

So what would be a great night out for you?
Probably a good concert. I really enjoy going to concerts. Coachella [music festival] was really fun. It was three nights in a row of all my favourite bands – mind-blowing.

And what about a great night in?
Have a bunch of friends over and play ping-pong, videogames... chill, relax. I always like to hang out with Vanessa. We always read scripts at night, we’re kind of dorks like that.

Do like having your own space? You and Vanessa don’t live together, do you...
No, we don’t.

Are your houses nearby?
We’re definitely not far. We’ve timed it out now... if there’s no stop lights and if you take the back streets, you can get there in seven and a half minutes. [Laughs] Yeah, it’s pretty funny. So we’re not living together but we spend a lot of time together.

More than not, you know? Her house is getting fixed up right now so she’s at my place.

You seem to have a strong emotional maturity, which is helpful when it comes to being in a relationship...
Yeah – I think so. What I will say is that there’s a lot of drama and distractions and, you know, bullshit at this age with women that I don’t have to put up with. But at the same time I’m getting to experience the amazingness and the beauty of women. So I’m foregoing all of the negative things and really just getting the positive, I think. And being in a relationship has definitely helped me stay focused. I think being in a relationship at this point has kept me out of a lot of things that could have distracted me, could have developed into those distractions. And I’m having every bit as much fun.

What about all the time you spend apart?
Yeah, when we’re filming... but that’s what keeps it fresh I think. Also when you’re working you really need to be focused. At least I like to be focused so that time away is important. Then when you come back it’s better than ever.

Is paparazzi intrusion a big problem in your life?
In the past two years, I kind of figured it out. It’s like, if you give them pictures, they’re going to keep coming back. There was this whole philosophy that everyone tried to tell me for a long time which was: Just give them the photos, just smile and do your thing. Then I realised it’s completely wrong, cos they get exactly what they want and they come back the next day. So if you really don’t want that kind of attention on your life, you just have to use discretion in everything you do and not reward them.

Is that possible when you live in LA?
It’s hard but I’m figuring it out. I use back entrances, know where I’m going before I leave the house, pull in parking garages, and I have a good getaway car, an Audi S6. I can lose them at will these days.

Do you go out in disguise?
Not really cos I don’t get hassled too much. Fans are not a big deal – I love talking to fans. They’re usually fun and they’re usually pretty girls to be honest [laughs]. It’s not the worst thing in the world.

You don’t have anything lined up right now – are you hoping your next project will come through your production company?
Hopefully – we’re finding cool new material. Also, it would just be great to meet a great director who is passionate about a project and has some kind of role [for me]. That’s the best way to get involved in a project. So cross your fingers for me that something like that will happen. [laughs]

Didn’t you discuss becoming the new Spider-Man?
Yeah, we definitely had meetings early on. It would have been such a cool role, so amazing, but you know what? I think [director] Andrew Webb is a very, very talented, super-cool guy and Spider-Man’s my favourite superhero, so I cannot wait to see what they do with that. It would have been awesome to be up there but... who knows?

How are you feeling at this stage of your career?
I’ve never been more excited. Right now, I feel like it’s just getting interesting. There’s always been a roadmap to follow up until now... there was always like the next best-case scenario and somehow I’d get lucky enough to get to where it would happen. But now it’s like anything’s possible... and that’s a really interesting place to be. It’s a harder place to be because you have to think for yourself, there’s no one pointing you in the right direction. You’ve got to find it for yourself. That’s unnerving but also very empowering. I don’t really have a concrete gameplan at this point but I’m gonna keep trying my hand at this for a while. See what happens...