

# Evan Handler

## Californicates All Over the Place

words by Susan Michals, photos by Robert Todd Williamson



**really wanted Evan Handler to be Harry Goldenblatt.** We've all conjured up images of those we do not know. We hope – in our drummed-up fantasies, that in real life, Amy Adams is exactly like Giselle in *Enchanted*. Or that John Malkovich does feel remorse, like his character in *Dangerous Liaisons*. To us, it makes them human; it makes them *real*.

Compound this with the numerous stories of actors 'becoming' their characters, not wanting to let go of a role even after a director has yelled *cut*. Do they just totally identify with their role? Or is it the ultimate challenge to lose oneself completely and inhabit that of another? Stories of immersion can be infinitely amusing, like the supposed interaction between Sir Laurence Olivier and Dustin Hoffman on the set of *Marathon Man*. Mr. Hoffman, as the story goes, tells Sir Laurence he went to the dentist and had him drill his teeth without Novocain, so he could really understand what his character was going to go through in a torture scene the two men were about to perform. Olivier eloquently responds, "Next time, my dear boy, why don't you try *acting*?"

So even though I know Evan Handler is a very seasoned thespian, I'm unsure of what I might discover. We sit together in a loft on the cusp of downtown Los Angeles - facing each other, lounging on two ridiculously white couches, with a glass coffee table much too big separating us. At first, we are the silence in a hub of activity, surrounded by the token mascot cat passing by, and the hum of a mercurial editorial staff in the throes of a looming deadline. Handler is at arm's length – both physically and mentally, as we begin. I am slightly reticent – do I really want to know the truth? What if he's not like Harry? We start. It is stilted; bumpy at first. Very quickly I realize, this man is not Harry Goldenblatt at all. Harry, with all his wondrous *Sex and the City* qualities – really is fantasy; and Evan Handler, is reality.

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With the end of *Sex and the City* came an artistic 180 for the actor – the role of Charlie Runkle, uber agent to David Duchovny's reckless Hank Moody on *Californication*. Showtime's hit series is a true Southern California tale; life on the inside of the Hollywood machine, from the writer's point of view. Hank is the central character, a man on the precipice of midlife crisis. He has writer's block, and a slew of female conquests that run the length of the Third Street Promenade to prove it. He yearns for what he cannot have – a happy, normal family life with former flame Karen (Natasha McElhone) and daughter Becca (Madeleine Martin). Charlie is much more than Hank's agent; he is his partner in crime and trusted confidante. "I think classically Hank, (Duchovny) is the guy you think leads a certain life from the minute you see him and wears it on the outside; Charlie has similar inclinations and leads a similar life but you would never peg him that way." Charlie is married to Marcy (Pam Adlon) a pint-sized elfin waxer with a mouth that's half sailor, half Auntie Mame. In a way, these two are a foul-mouthed Ozzie and Harriett; they are the symbiotic Hollywood couple. While the show's main sexual thrust is Hank's myriad of sexual conquests, it is Charlie's dalliance with his Suicide Girl assistant (Macaulay's ex, Rachel Miner) that proves to be the most raucous and intense of the season.

Season two kicks off September 28 on Showtime, and if the last round was any indication, all hopes of catching even an inkling of Harry Goldenblatt goes right out the window. After witnessing just the first two episodes of this new season, it would suffice to say audiences will see *a lot more* of Charlie this time around. "There's a constant chronic masturbation theme going through Charlie's storyline," Handler says with a smile. "During the table read of the last episode, David turned to me and said 'Wow, your guy really has a problem, doesn't he?'"



Randy Tepper/Showtime

Maybe it was that occasionally verboten topic of self-pleasuring that makes the mood a bit more relaxed...regardless, Handler gives me a copy of his latest book, "It's Only Temporary: The Good News and Bad News of Being Alive" which was originally dubbed 'You Don't Know Where You Are Until You're Somewhere Else' (which ends up being the title of one of his chapters). The book is a collection of Handler's learning experiences; the trials and tribulations of growing up and discovering one's self. For example, the love quotient: 27 breakups – but with only 10 women. "I averaged 2.7 breakups per relationship," muses the author.

Then there's his now infamous run-in with fellow actor Nicol Williamson in the Broadway production of "I Hate Hamlet" back in 1991. According to *The New York Times*, "Mr. Williamson has been a historically difficult performer. In the 1976 Broadway production of "Rex", in which he starred, he struck an actor during a curtain call one night because he had spoken to someone next to him during Mr. Williamson's bow." Handler was at the end of yet another belligerent Williamson tirade – this time in the middle of a performance. Williamson whacked Handler with his sword and Handler walked offstage – and straight out of the production. "I'd managed to escape in a rather high-profile way," he says. "I try not to get into those kinds of situations – I'm not very gifted in a street fight, which I would equate working with Nicolas."

Handler also recounts the occasion when an agent suggested his first book, "Time on Fire: My Comedy of Terrors", could work as an amusement park ride. Usually this is what every budding writer dreams of - but not when your book is a painstaking memoir of your near fatal bout with leukemia. All these tales – both positive and negative – are poignant studies in self-introspection – tales of a man who now truly understands himself. "The book is largely an attempt to study perspective as well as tell a story...of how things change. (It's about) meeting my wife and the incredible happiness that I've found, a whole life's worth of regret and wanting to do things over...how it was instantly transformed in retrospect, into a series of rather clever choices."

The interview is winding down. We talk about marriage and children, and switching from reading Christopher Hitchens to books on toddler behavior.



Now I have a better picture of the man sitting across from me. He is much more dimensional than the beloved Harry, or the circuitous Charlie. He loves the gig - to be sure – but keeps it at bay to live his life, thus defying standard Hollywood categorization. He is that surprising gift we don't often come across – the man defining the role, not the other way around. **11**