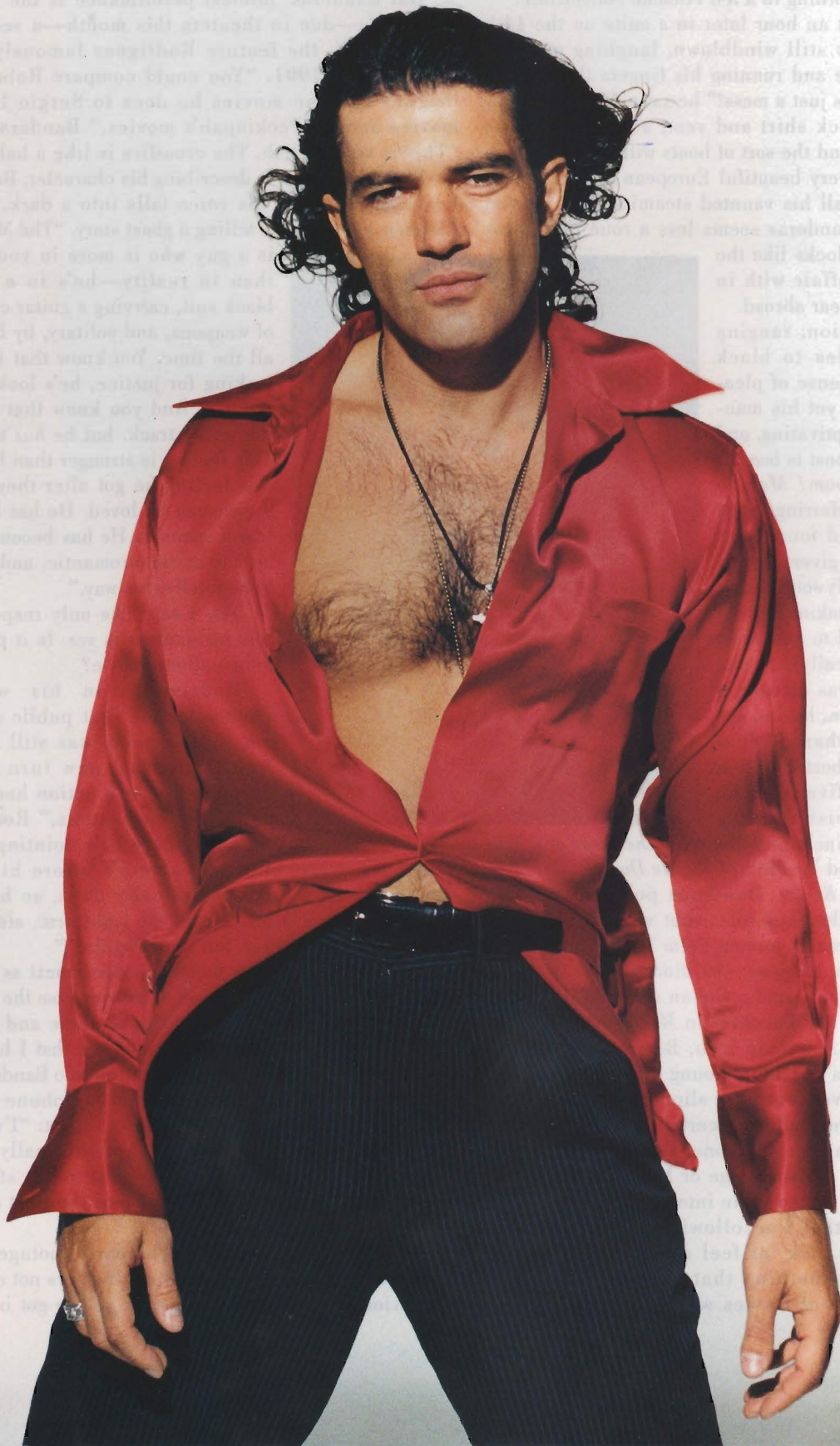


My Antonio

Hillary Johnson talks with the thinking woman's new favorite action hero. Photographed by Peter Lindbergh



SHIRT, EQUIPMENT; PANTS, NIGEL CURTISS; BELT, J. M. WESTON.

I pick up the house phone at the front desk of the Four Seasons Hotel in Los Angeles and ask for Hedy Lamarr. Antonio Banderas' assistant answers. "Nathan Detroit is running late," she says. The Spanish actor has just flown in for the weekend from Seattle, where he is filming *Assassins* with Sylvester Stallone and Julianne Moore, and he has been whipping around town all morning in a red Porsche convertible.

When we meet an hour later in a suite on the 14th floor, Banderas is still windblown, laughing over his goofy alias routine and running his fingers through his hair. "Hollywood is just a mess!" he says. He has on too-tight jeans, a black shirt and vest, a pair of crosses around his neck, and the sort of boots with stacked heels that only certain very beautiful European men can wear with dignity. For all his vaunted steaminess, in person the 34-year-old Banderas seems less a roué than a romantic youth: He looks like the guy you had an affair with in Paris your junior year abroad.

His conversation, ranging from Orson Welles to black holes, conveys a sense of pleasurable brooding, yet his manner is light and captivating, and the word he uses most is *boom!*

"Suddenly, *boom! Mambo Kings!*" he says, referring to the shock he received four years ago when he was given a starring role in a Hollywood movie despite hardly speaking a word of English (he had to memorize his lines phonetically). At the time, Banderas was already a movie idol in Spain, having appeared in more than 30 features. And he was best known in America for the five films he acted in for Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar, including *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* and *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*

After *Mambo Kings*, Banderas polished his English and began choosing roles that were smaller, but notable for their reach, among them Tom Hanks' lover in *Philadelphia*, a 400-year-old bloodsucker in *Interview with the Vampire*, and a Cuban nurse who sweetly seduces a mother and daughter in *Miami Rhapsody*.

As a budding American icon, Banderas is hard to bracket: He's not a succulent young "himbo" like Brad Pitt or Keanu Reeves, nor is he slippery-suave like any number of Baldwins, and he is certainly no testosterone factory in the manner of Stallone. Onscreen, Banderas is more the young Nicolas Cage or Malcolm McDowell, frenetic energy all bound up in intelligence.

"I am happy that I'm following a direction that doesn't make me look, or feel even, like a *boom!*" he says. "Like something that appeared here and in the first couple of movies wants to eat the whole

cake at once—*aaargh!* I prefer to be like a little ant."

Banderas now wants to talk about the projects he has already completed this year: the thriller *Never Talk to Strangers*, with Rebecca De Mornay, the romantic comedy *Two Much*, costarring Melanie Griffith and Daryl Hannah, and Robert Rodriguez's segment of *Four Rooms*, a quartet of interwoven stories by different directors.

But Banderas' juiciest performance is the lead in *Desperado*—due in theaters this month—a sequel to *El Mariachi*, the feature Rodriguez famously made for \$7000 in 1991. "You could compare Robert Rodriguez and the movies he does to Sergio Leone's movies or Sam Peckinpah's movies," Banderas says. "This is very stylish. The crossfire is like a ballet."

When he comes to describing his character, Banderas leans forward, and his voice falls into a dark, urgent whisper, as if he were telling a ghost story. "The Mariachi

is a guy who is more in your mind than in reality—he's in a black, black suit, carrying a guitar case full of weapons, and solitary, by himself, all the time. You know that he's not looking for justice, he's looking for *revenge*. And you know that he's on the wrong track, but he *has* to do it. This feeling is stronger than himself, this feeling he got after they killed the woman he loved. He has become like a samurai. He has become epic, he has become romantic, and he has to be totally this way."

Yes, I say. The only response to this incantation is *yes*. Is it possible to lust after a movie?

Rodriguez, on his way to Cannes for the first public screening of *Desperado*, was still reeling from Banderas' new turn as the thinking woman's action hero. "He did all his own stunts," Rodriguez

says, "except for one shot where he's pointing a gun with both arms, and the camera's where his head should be. He couldn't physically do it, so he said, 'Okay, Robert, I'll let you be the right arm, since you made up the character, but never again!'"

So why on earth does Banderas appear next as a hired hit man in *Assassins*? I have yet to recover from the greasy-lensed shower scene between Sly Stallone and Sharon Stone in *The Specialist*, and I'm not sure that I have the heart to witness the Stallonization of Antonio Banderas.

Julianne Moore calls from her car phone on the way to the set in Seattle with a rosy report: "I've seen some footage for *Assassins*, and Antonio really jumps out. His appeal is insidious. The best movie stars are those people that you can almost feel the heat coming off of, and Antonio does that."

Banderas is pleased with the early footage of the movie as well. "It looks fascinating. It shows not only exterior violence but inside, too, what you've got in ► 193



Ralph Lauren Gloves, about \$200. At Polo/Ralph Lauren, NYC. **Page 159:** Anne Klein satin slingbacks (dyed brown), about \$170. At Bergdorf Goodman, NYC; David's Shoe Salon, Beverly Hills. Anya Hindmarch satin bag, about \$144. At Barneys New York, NYC; Bergdorf Goodman, NYC; Saks Fifth Avenue, NYC. LaCrasia evening gloves, about \$25. At LaCrasia's Glove Street, NYC. **Page 160:** Givenchy dress at Givenchy boutiques nationwide; Saks Fifth Avenue, select stores. Lejaby lace bra and panties at Bergdorf Goodman, NYC; Saks Fifth Avenue, NYC. Leather evening gloves, Polo Ralph Lauren Gloves. At Polo/Ralph Lauren, NYC. **Page 161:** Bill Blass Collection dress at Bergdorf Goodman, NYC (special order); Saks Fifth Avenue, NYC. Patrick Cox slingbacks, about \$175. At Patrick Cox, NYC. Leather evening gloves, Polo Ralph Lauren Gloves. At Polo/Ralph Lauren, NYC. **Page 169:** Christian Louboutin peach sandals, about \$350. At Christian Louboutin, NYC. **Page 170:** Istante by Gianni Versace dress at Abiti, Miami, FL; Gitobet, Edgewater, NJ. Miu Miu blush loafers, about \$250. At Barneys New York; Chuckies, Brooklyn; Fred Segal Feet, Los Angeles and Santa Monica, CA. Anne Klein for Sutton Time watch, about \$110. Available at fine stores nationwide. Givenchy fawn hose, about \$8. At Saks Fifth Avenue, nationwide. *On him:* Double RL by Ralph Lauren cotton turtleneck, about \$165. At Polo Sport Store, NYC; Polo/Ralph Lauren, Beverly Hills. New Republic by Thomas Oatman moleskin trousers, about \$185. At New Republic Clothier, NYC; Barneys New York, NYC. Calvin Klein Eyewear tortoise eyeglasses. For information, call 800-544-1336. **Page 171:** Ralph Lauren Collection jacket and dress at Polo/Ralph Lauren in San Francisco, Chicago, and NYC. Anne Klein for Sutton Time watch, about \$110. Available at fine stores nationwide. **Page 172:** Alberta Ferretti camel jacket at Toby Lerner, Philadelphia; Betsy Bunky Nini, NYC; Neiman Marcus, select stores. Anne Klein for Sutton Time watch, about \$110. Available at fine stores nationwide. Christian Roth for Optical Affairs eyeglasses, about \$168. At Frame Up Eyewear, Snyder, NY; Earnhardt Optical, Greensboro, NC; Optica, Costa Mesa, CA. **Page 173:** Michael Kors coat, shell, and skirt at Neiman Marcus, White Plains, NY; Barbara Jean Ltd., Little Rock, AR; Henri Bendel, NYC. Miu Miu boots at Tootsi Plohound, NYC; Madison, Los Angeles; Nida, San Francisco. Louis Vuitton briefcase, about \$1140. Call 800-458-7390 for information. Christian Roth for Optical Affairs sunglasses, about \$168. At Myoptics, NYC; Cunningham Optical, Fort Wayne, IN; Optical Designs, Santa Monica, CA. *On him:* Calvin Klein jacket, about \$795. At Calvin Klein stores; Saks Fifth Avenue, select stores; Barneys

New York. TSE turtleneck, about \$595. At TSE, Madison Avenue, NYC. Calvin Klein trousers, about \$225. At Calvin Klein stores. **Page 174:** Dolce & Gabbana dress at Barneys New York; Fred Segal Couture; Neiman Marcus. Jacket at Henri Bendel, NYC; Barneys New York; Fred Segal Couture. Miu Miu slingbacks at Laura Urbinati, Los Angeles; Gregory's, Dallas; Anica, North Miami, FL. Hermès briefcase, about \$3385. Hermès stores nationwide. Call 800-441-4488 for information. Hanes Silk Reflections hose, about \$5.50. At fine department and specialty stores. **Page 175:** Calvin Klein Collection dress and jacket at Calvin Klein, Dallas; Neiman Marcus; Bergdorf Goodman, NYC. Louis Vuitton envelope bag, about \$435. Call 800-458-7390 for information. **Page 176:** Versus by Gianni Versace dress and coat at Versus boutiques in Houston, San Francisco, and Los Angeles; Saks Fifth Avenue, NYC. Calvin Klein boots, about \$485. At Saks Fifth Avenue, select stores. Gucci briefcase, about \$795. At all Gucci stores. Christian Roth for Optical Affairs sunglasses, about \$168. At 10/10 Optics, NYC; Squirrel Hill Eyetique, Pittsburgh; Summer Shades, Edgartown, MA; Hosiery by No Nonsense, available at department stores nationwide. *On him:* Polo Ralph Lauren suit, about \$1395. At Polo/Ralph Lauren, NYC and Chicago. J. M. Weston oxfords, about \$465. At J. M. Weston, NYC; Wilkes Bashford, San Francisco. **Page 177:** Calvin Klein Collection dress at Calvin Klein, Boston. Chanel velvet attaché, about \$1795. At Chanel boutiques, NYC and San Francisco. **Page 179:** Paul Smith Watch, about \$430. At Paul Smith, NYC. Maximal Art, about \$130. At One World Gallery, Las Vegas, NV; Chachkas, Vancouver, CAN; Artworks, Edmonton, CAN; Medici, NYC. Swatch watch, about \$40. At Macy's, NYC; Swatch stores, Fifth Avenue and South Street Seaport, NYC. Vintage Sheffield, about \$350. At Time Will Tell, NYC. Guess, about \$55. At fine department stores. Robert Lee Morris, about \$595. At Robert Lee Morris, NYC; Neiman Marcus, nationwide. M & Co., about \$175. At M & Co. Labs. Call 212-343-2408 for information. Cartier watch at all Cartier boutiques. Call 800-CARTIER for information. Guess, about \$48. At fine department stores. Noblia Sapphire Collection, about \$325. Call 800-321-3173 for information. Royal Copenhagen/Georg Jensen, about \$895. Available nationwide. Call 914-428-8222 for stores. Movado, about \$695. At Tourneau; Macy's, all stores. Timex, sold with black leather band, about \$30. Call 800-367-8643 for information. **Page 189:** Logo chain-link necklace by Anne Klein Jewelry, about \$75. At fine department stores. ***Retail prices are approximate and may vary in different regions of the country.

OKLAHOMA CITY (continued from page 191)

will be covered by donations.

"God has truly been watching over us," LaVerne says.

In this Bible Belt city, where there are twice as many churches as dentists, religion has provided both comfort and guidance.

Ever since the Murrah building was blown to bits, the people of Oklahoma City have been debating what should be put in its place. Almost all agree that some sort of memorial should be built. Some want an elaborate monument or a bronze statue of a fireman carrying a baby. The Very Reverend George Back hopes the site will be turned into a park, a place for quiet reflection, nestled between the restored United Methodist and Catholic churches that were once overshadowed by the federal tower, and in view of his own reborn cathedral.

"It's sacred ground now, consecrated by blood," he says. "It can never be approached in the same way again." ■

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your mind, how you can use your power, how you can possess people." It's reassuring that Banderas still thinks of violence in the intimate terms of sexual possession after his experience with *Assassins*—\$75 million worth of all-American firepower. "You have to overcome situations here very fast," Banderas says, "because things are fast, practical, like *that*. In Spain probably we have more content"—the way he pronounces the word he could mean either depth of meaning or happiness—"but at the same time our sort of culture is very heavy. It's a weight on the shoulders. The chain is bigger, so just to pull the chariot is more heavy. Here things are more light."

Light, yes; one could even say fluffy. Banderas smiles benignly. "If you can rescue five or 10 movies a year from Hollywood, that's enough," he says. "Hollywood is very confusing. But if you've got personality, and you study

and you read and you do all the things in your life, and you are able to determine what is good and bad as far as art, then I think that you will have possibilities available to you. The rest is just production. *Vrrrrrr!* It's like doing sausages. *Vrrrrrr! Vrrrrrr! Vrrrrrrrr!*"

I at last bring up the subject of Banderas and sex appeal. He blushes and stammers, genuinely perplexed. "It's true that ... it's ridiculous to think I am not ... I don't feel like ... people try to put a label, like this: 'You are a Latin lover'—*boom!*" He appears not so much aggrieved as mystified. "I don't feel I have played so much Latin lovers here. Even in *Mambo Kings*, my character is really tortured. He has not the expansion that a Latin lover has or the security that a Latin lover has to have. The guy is just dying every second, sensitive and very introverted."

A few days after our interview, Banderas is all over the gossip columns and *Hard Copy* because he and his Spanish wife of many years have split up, and he has entered into a very public liaison with Melanie Griffith, his costar in *Two Much*. My heart sinks. What has happened? There's an overbudget puffiness to the idea of Banderas and Griffith as a couple. It's too easy, too Hollywood.

At one point in our interview, I'd asked Banderas what he likes about America, and he'd quoted the Nike slogan: Just do it. In light of his recent exploits, that comment seems particularly frightening. On the other hand, in a more reflective moment he also said, "Hollywood is a city without judgment. It's a little bit fake and a little bit real, like the star on a Christmas tree—very shiny on the front but paper on the back."

In the end I trust Banderas' breathtaking simplicity: Here is an exuberant, thoughtful, guileless man. I hope he stays that way, but for the moment it's enough to think of Antonio Banderas, art-house idol, blasting through Hollywood in a red convertible, a fake Kalashnikov rifle in one hand and the Mariachi's guitar in the other.

Oh, and he's in the driver's seat. ■