



INTERVIEW

MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY

*It's hard to believe now, but for a while Matthew McConaughey made a lot of people nervous about where he might be bound. After his big-screen debut as a charismatic horn-dog stoner in the 1993 indie classic *Dazed and Confused*, McConaughey got the big Hollywood leading-man buildup with the 1996 legal thriller *A Time to Kill*, with Sandra Bullock, and the 1997 space drama *Contact*, opposite Jodie Foster. Inviting comparisons to golden-era golden boys Paul Newman, Steve McQueen and Robert Redford, the young Texas native got pegged by entertainment mavens as the new kid in town, out to crush the then hot movie crop of wafer-thin, feather-haired man-children. Then a 1999 police bust found him dancing naked and playing bongos while seemingly high.*

Meanwhile, better roles in better movies kept going to other guys. By the 2010s, despite the occasional prestige project (see *Amistad*, *The Newton Boys*, *We Are Marshall*), he had spent a decade charming Jennifer Lopez, Kate Hudson and Jennifer Garner in light romantic comedies including *The Wedding Planner*, *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* and *Ghosts of Girlfriends Past*. That's a way to make bank but not necessarily a way to get top movie-makers to chase you down. Worse, it raised the question: Had McConaughey reached his potential or squandered it?

The answer became obvious when he stepped away for around 18 months and came back with a career-redefining performance in *Dallas Buyers Club* as an AIDS-stricken rodeo cowboy, a part previously earmarked for Brad Pitt or Ryan Gosling. In addition to requiring him to bring his weight down to 135 pounds, the part earned him the 2014 best actor Oscar. That same year, he shape-shifted into nihilistic cop Rust Cohle on HBO's groundbreaking

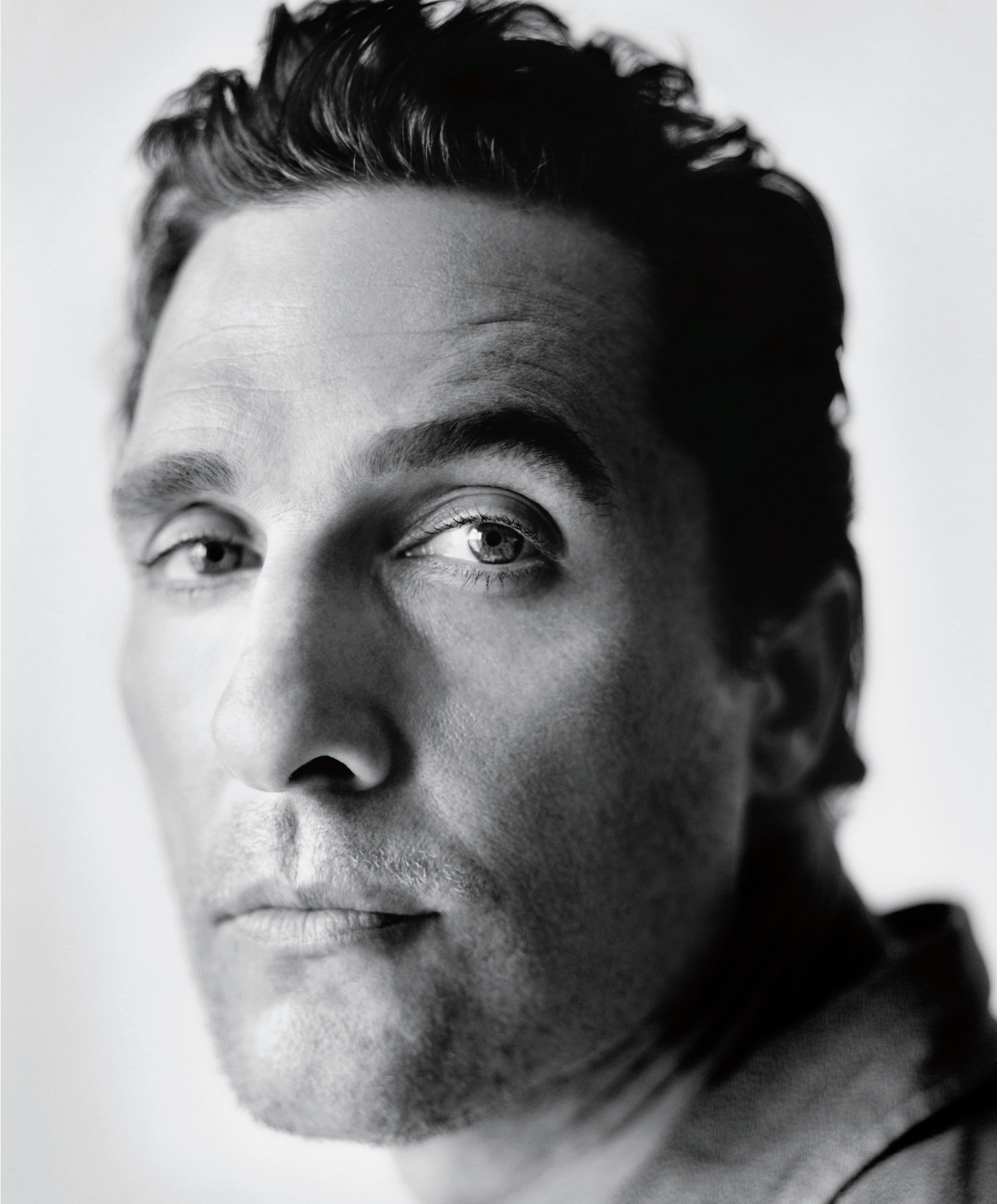
series *True Detective*. Capping these with a centerpiece stint in Christopher Nolan's sci-fi epic *Interstellar*, the actor had clearly pulled off a full-scale career resurrection, a turnaround that became known as "the McConaissance." He was so good, it made us wonder why we ever doubted him.

Born Matthew David McConaughey on November 4, 1969, in Uvalde, Texas, he is the youngest of three brothers. The oldest, Michael "Rooster" McConaughey, is a self-made millionaire and star of CNBC's *West Texas Investors Club*, and Patrick is in the drilling-pipe business. They're the kids of Trenton, New Jersey-born Mary Kay Kathleen McCabe ("KMac" to the family), a retired kindergarten teacher, and Mississippi-born oil-pipe-supply businessman James "Big Jim" Donald McConaughey, who was drafted to play pro ball for the Green Bay Packers. McConaughey's larger-than-life parents brought up their sons with strict adherence to Methodist principles, but according to the actor they were also "wild rebels,"

marrying each other three times and divorcing twice. The family moved in 1980 to Longview, Texas, where the youngest McConaughey cut a swath for himself as a strong student, athlete and ladies' man at Longview High School before spending a year in Australia as a Rotary exchange student in 1988. Vacillating between pursuing law or psychiatry, he instead enrolled in 1989 at the University of Texas at Austin, graduating with a radio-television-film degree in 1993. He had already booked several student films and TV commercials before landing, in 1992, that life-changing role in Richard Linklater's *Dazed and Confused*.

He was launched, spending more and more time in Hollywood making high-profile films while gaining a rep as a partyer with an eye for famous beauties including Ashley Judd, Sandra Bullock, Janet Jackson and Penélope Cruz. In 2006, well into his "healthy, fluent, single years," he met Brazilian model Camila Alves. They got married in a Catholic ceremony in 2012; today they have three kids, Levi (age

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ANDREAS LASZLO KONRATH**





eight), Vida (seven) and Livingston (four). The family divides its time between Malibu, California and a 10,000-square-foot Austin, Texas estate, which suggests that McConaughey's mantra, JKL—short for “Just keep livin’”—has served him pretty damn well.

Contributing Editor **Stephen Rebello**, who last interviewed Andy Samberg for *PLAYBOY*, spent an afternoon in Los Angeles with the actor. “Matthew McConaughey saunters into the room like he owns the place,” reports Rebello. “We were set up in a dimly lit private lounge in West Hollywood kitted out with low-slung black couches, arty photo blowups on the wall and cold beer on tap. The locale was just right for McConaughey and his singular vibe—that lived-in, uber-American cowboy thing with its undercurrent of danger, a timeless style that has helped make him worth watching for nearly 25 years in close to 50 films.

“Talking with Matthew is a study in Southern hospitality. Once he gets comfortable, he's enormously warm, with a booming laugh and hands that are always grabbing a shoulder or patting a leg for emphasis. Sometimes he bounces around the room, acting out his stories, and he's always fully alive in the moment—your coolest lifelong friend who turned out great, despite the odds, and who never forgets where he came from.”

PLAYBOY: Starting with your big-time leading-man breakthrough in *A Time to Kill* in 1996, up through your romantic-comedy stints throughout the 2000s, you've been famous and infamous for going shirtless. Audiences may have a hard time un-seeing the shirtless and pantsless Matthew McConaughey unveiled in your new movie, *Gold*, in which you play a flabby middle-aged prospector-hustler with a stomach that topples over his belt, a saggy posterior, a comb-over and funky teeth. **MCCONAUGHEY:** [*Laughs*] You mean the audience will be like, “Look at the walrus”?

PLAYBOY: Well, kind of. Without spoiling the surprises, you, Edgar Ramirez and Bryce Dallas Howard play characters caught up in the notorious real-life Bre-X gold-mining swindle of the 1990s. You play a beer-bellied, chain-smoking fictional character named Kenny Wells. Is the way you look in the movie a way of

winking at critics and journalists who knocked you for trading on your physique?

MCCONAUGHEY: I don't believe the way I look as Kenny is eccentric in any way. I wouldn't play to that. That's real weight, not prosthetics. My fighting weight is about 185, which is where I am now. I loved the scrappiness and vitality I felt when I was down at 135, the weight I was for *Dallas Buyers Club*. I'd gotten back to about 165 on *True Detective*, but with *Gold* it was, “This guy is a desirer. He fulfills. He's a *yes*.” That got me thinking about my dad. Oh, man, he loved to eat, drink and host. He was six-three or six-four and weighed about 260 at one point. This guy Kenny takes all of it in too. He's Cap-

I figured it out: What makes you tired when you're over- indulging is thinking about quitting.

tain Fun, acting like every day is Saturday even if he's at the bottom of the barrel. Before we started shooting, I had a few months to indulge. If there was anything I wanted to eat or drink, I said yes. If I second-guessed myself, I had to have twice as much. To this day, my kids' favorite daddy was when I was playing Kenny, because instead of having pizza just on Friday night, it was Tuesday night, any night.

PLAYBOY: What did your wife, Camila, think of Captain Fun?

MCCONAUGHEY: She loved it. I was so much fun. I was saying yes to every desire—without losing my marriage.

PLAYBOY: After decades of golfing, running and surfing, how did the months of bingeing make you feel?

MCCONAUGHEY: My body felt great. I slept great. My back and knees, everything felt physiologically better. Mind you, if you lived on the diet for four years, you would feel lethargic. I figured it out: What makes you tired when you're overindulging is thinking about quitting. What makes you tired is looking in the mirror on Monday morning and going, “You gotta clean yourself up, man.” I would wake up on Monday morning and go, “Let's have another beer and cheeseburger!” I really never got tired of cheeseburgers, so it was more fun getting there than to lose it all. But you just break a sweat for an hour a day, whether it's working out, dancing, running, whatever.

PLAYBOY: Can a transformation like that ever give you the freedom of public anonymity, at least temporarily? After all, isn't it part of an actor's arsenal to be able to quietly observe the mannerisms and behaviors of others?

MCCONAUGHEY: Damn right it is. For *Dallas Buyers Club*, I didn't leave the house. This time, I was up-front, head high, open with every stranger, any fan. But when you're a known, recognizable person and the world becomes a mirror, how do you observe?

PLAYBOY: When you were bulking up for *Gold*, did you experience any fat-shaming?

MCCONAUGHEY: Some people said I looked much healthier. My mom was very happy until I got close to 200 pounds, and then she was like, “All right, fat-ass, that's enough already. You look like you got two pigs wrestling in your trousers.” But my brother Rooster said, “It's Pop all over again.” He thought I was so loosey-goosey and fun, he didn't want me to take off the weight. I got nice and swollen all right, but I told Rooster, “I'm going to lose a little bit of the weight, but I'm going to keep the spirit of Kenny Wells alive.”

PLAYBOY: When did you feel the tide turning your way, the birth of what became labeled the McConaissance?

MCCONAUGHEY: After around a year and a half of my being off-screen, I got a call from William Friedkin, who wanted me for *Killer Joe*. I don't think he would've come two years earlier. Steven Soderbergh called with *Magic Mike*. He'd done plenty of things he could've had me in, but he'd never called before. Jeff



Nichols had written *Mud* and wanted me to do it. I did *The Paperboy* with Lee Daniels. It was like, Fuck the bucks, man, I'm going for the experience. Then we did *True Detective* and *Dallas Buyers Club*. The time away gave people a chance to remember work I'd done before, whether it was *Dazed and Confused* or whatever. I didn't rebrand in those 18 months; I unbranded. I became some people's good new idea. People bring up the romantic-comedy years as though I'm another person, another actor. It was the same car, same engine, same me. I just shifted to another gear.

PLAYBOY: How do you look back on *Dallas Buyers Club*?

MCCONAUGHEY: I had that one for years. The others, Friedkin calls, Soderbergh calls, Daniels calls, but this one I had. I wanted to get Ron Woodruff's story out there. I immersed myself in it for six months, five hours a day—transcripts, diaries. I know those people, their language, that anarchic humor. Ron even went about surviving in an anarchic way. There was no sentiment, nothing “nice” about the way the story is told. Ron was a black-market drug dealer—drugs the FDA hadn't approved that were keeping people alive. That was all there for me. We got 130 rejections over 20 years of trying to get it made. It was an independent movie with an antihero role, and it helped me change the way some saw me. You like it or not, it's got a real identity. An independent movie about HIV is going to be important. It didn't have to be very entertaining, but I think we managed to make it that too. It's got humor—shocking humor. And we did it for \$4.9 million in 25 days or so. It worked.

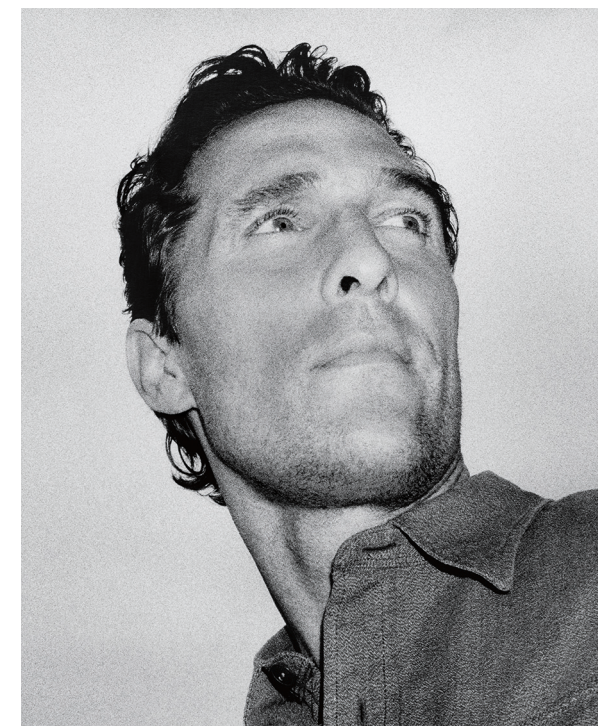
PLAYBOY: Clearly. It netted you an Oscar.

MCCONAUGHEY: That was never something that showed up on my bucket list. But a nomination, let alone a win, would have made me extremely proud of the work we did, and happy too. I liked the film a lot—the experience of making it. That was already a big win.

PLAYBOY: In 2008 you turned down a reported \$15 million to star in a big-screen reboot of the TV series *Magnum P.I.*, an intended franchise. More recently, you've been offered major superhero parts including the lead in *Doctor Strange* and the villain in *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*. There was talk of you playing

beach-bum detective Travis McGee in *The Deep Blue Good-By*, meant to be a big-screen adaptation based on John D. MacDonald's novels. But you've stepped up to *The Dark Tower*, based on Stephen King's series of novels, in which you play a sharply dressed destroyer of worlds.

MCCONAUGHEY: I like *Guardians of the Galaxy*, but what I saw was “It's successful, and now we've got room to make a colorful part for another big-name actor.” I'd feel like an amendment. The *Dark Tower* script was well written, I like the director and his take on it, and



I can be the creator, the author of the Man in Black—a.k.a. the Devil—in my version of this Stephen King novel. We've done the first one. It's a fantastic thriller that takes place in another realm, an alternate universe, but it's very much grounded. For instance, the gunslinger's weapon isn't a lightsaber or something; it's a pistol. I enjoyed approaching my character as if I were the Devil having a good time, getting turned on by exposing human hypocrisies wherever he finds them.

PLAYBOY: Although many critics thought you were the best thing about *Magic Mike*, you dodged playing Dallas in the sequel.

MCCONAUGHEY: I wanted to be a part of that, but the idea of Dallas 2.0 was not the way I wanted to go. A lot of times you bring a character back and there's an inherent apology about who they were. Dallas was too much of a lightning bolt to do that to. If I ever came back and did Wooderson from *Dazed and Confused*, there could be no apologies there either.

PLAYBOY: It's not surprising that this McConaissance has provoked some push-back. Some of your recent movies, such as *The Sea of Trees* and *Free State of Jones*, stumbled with audiences or critics. Your stylized ads for Lincoln—which helped boost sales by a reported 25 percent—have been parodied on TV by Ellen DeGeneres and Jim Carrey.

MCCONAUGHEY: I completely get that when you have a film come out people are going, “I'm going to pay my 10 bucks this weekend because I haven't seen him in a while and it's a special event.” I just don't want to work that hard to not get my kicks or do something I want to do. Some people ask, “What do you mean you went and did *True Detective* on the small screen after *Dallas Buyers Club*?” Fuck that. The writing's great, the character's great—that decision took me about eight seconds. I'm in the not-asking-permission vein. I want the experience. The Lincoln commercials? Good money, I think they're cool little pieces of art, and I enjoy doing them. We have a few more to go. Now I'm also the creative director for Wild Turkey. They came to me just to be the face of the campaign, but I directed the first one and I'm directing the whole campaign. It got me off in a new way, and I loved it.

PLAYBOY: But clearly your choice of projects has undergone a major shift. At what point after movies such as *Ghosts of Girlfriends Past* did you think, Enough with the rom-coms?

MCCONAUGHEY: I remember reading another rom-com script, laughing and going, “Fuck, I can do this tomorrow.” That's a fastball and it's here right now. Not to get all Hamlet about it, but I debated back and forth: You got something going. You like doing these movies. They pay good. Then it became, Well, what if instead of this fastball, I read something that scares me a little bit? I realized my life was more exciting than my work. I



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decided to try to get work that could at least compete with the vitality, excitement, joy, love, pain, hope, guilt and spirit I was feeling at that time. I had my epic in front of me: my new son Livingston. My wife and I got married that year, and that also gave me a sense of significance every day, something to work on, build and *be* there for the first time, with open eyes. I was back in Texas, not showing up on the screen and also no longer on Page Six with my shirt off on the beach. That stuff of “McConaughey’s a good-looking guy on the beach, surfing every day, and he’s got a hot girlfriend” got ladled in along with “He just does those light, fun rom-coms.” Now, some people thought all that was cool, and other people were like, “Fuck him.”

PLAYBOY: Let’s go back to your childhood. You were born in Uvalde, Texas and grew up with your parents and two older brothers in Longview, Texas. What about that experience would you most want to keep alive and what would you rather leave behind?
MCCONAUGHEY: So many things were great, like my older brother and my dad being best friends, which Dad loved. My mom and dad divorced twice and married three times. They were wild, and it was very physical and rocky waters, man. They went way past raising their voices. My mom’s middle fingers broke four times because of popping my dad on the forehead until he finally had to go snap. Mom to this day is the first one to say, “I asked for that. I needed that to communicate.” Dad was a barrel of a guy, but he also had these great hands. My mom would get migraines.

It didn’t matter what pill she took, Dad’s hands were what got rid of the migraine. I’d get earaches, and no matter what I took—drops or whatever—his hands rubbing my ear is what would release it. During my mom and dad’s second divorce, which I didn’t know was a divorce at the time, I was living in a trailer park with my dad. We had a pet cockatiel and came home one time and found it swirling around the bottom of the toilet, where it had fallen in. I remember Dad hitting his knees, tears coming down, and putting the bird’s head in his mouth and blowing his lungs up just enough. Damn if that bird didn’t flap back to life. He had that bird for another five years.

PLAYBOY: According to your mother’s 2008 book, *I Amaze Myself?*, when your dad died in

1992—while having sex with your mother—she insisted that his body be carried out of the house naked because she was “just so proud to show off my big old Jim McConaughey—and his gift.” What specific memories of your father got fed into *Gold*?

MCCONAUGHEY: I really based my character on my father and a guy named Chicago John. I’m 19, 20 years old in Houston, it’s the day before Christmas, and my father says, “Come on, let’s go get some stocking stuffers.” We drive behind this strip mall in southwest Houston where it’s Dumpsters, power lines and a white van flashing its lights through the mist as we pull up. My dad says, “Stay in the car, buddy.

I didn’t re-brand in those 18 months; I unbranded. I became some people’s good new idea.

That’s Chicago John,” and he gets out. Through the passenger window I see this guy get out of the van—about five-foot-five, black leather jacket, bald. He goes behind his van and opens the doors. There’s a washing machine, sinks, microwaves, knickknacks. This is exciting. Something’s up, and it’s shady. My dad’s and Chicago John’s backs fill up the open van door, and my dad’s shoulders are making this rolling, waving motion. I think, Whoa, what is it, a snake? All of a sudden I see my dad counting off money. He gets in the car, starts it, hands me this thing wrapped in paper and says, “Here, put that in the glove box.” We pull out, no good-bye to Chicago John, get back on Route 59, and not a word gets said until, “Hey, buddy, check the glove box to see if it’s still there.” I open

the glove box. What the fuck is it? I unwrap the paper, and there’s this big silver watch. My dad goes, “Goddamn, man, that’s a \$17,000 titanium Rolex, and I just got it for three grand. Put it away.” Beats going to Kmart for stocking stuffers, right? My dad loved a shady deal. It’s like he almost wanted to be a gangster but wasn’t. That’s my guy from *Gold*.

PLAYBOY: And the watch?

MCCONAUGHEY: Oh, that wasn’t a titanium Rolex. He overpaid for it by three grand, but goddamn, I just loved him counting off the money and that “Hey, check if it’s still there”—not to mess with me but just “We’re getting away with something.” That was who Kenny Wells was to me. My father did die making love to my mother, by the way. That captures a lot of who my mom is.

PLAYBOY: Did she warn you and your brothers that she was going to write about that stuff in her book?

MCCONAUGHEY: We all looked at it and said, “Pipe along, girl. Go for it. Don’t hold back.” She and my dad were wild rebels but with a very structured, disciplined family. My mom’s wilder now. To this day, when we party, she’s up an hour later than me and up in the morning an hour earlier. She’s 84 and has cancer. She didn’t tell us for two years. She’s a mind-over-matter son of a gun. We talked her into going to a doctor. She did her chemo—*bam*—it’s gone.

PLAYBOY: It sounds as though the McConaugheys never lacked for swagger or confidence. Did having older brothers give you any insights into women or life?

MCCONAUGHEY: I’ll share this with you. I was 11 and my brother Pat was in his late teens. One day his Z/28 Camaro was broken down. My mom and I were picking him up after school. I’m in the backseat of the station wagon, and I see this figure in silhouette leaning up against a brick wall, smoking. My mother’s like, “Where is he?” I almost went, “He’s right there,” but I shut up because he’d get his butt whipped if he got busted smoking. I thought he was seven feet tall. I thought his Z/28 was the fastest in the world. That romanticized version of him is who I based David Wooderson on when I did *Dazed and Confused* years later.

PLAYBOY: Can you recall your first celebrity crushes?

MCCONAUGHEY: Lisa Bonet, *Angel Heart*.



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MCCONAUGHEY: No, because all I’d ever seen was *PLAYBOY* photos of women standing up that I had hidden in the barn across the neighborhood. They never exposed labia and stuff, so I always thought the vagina faced east-west. I got there and I’m like, Where is it? The next four inches down took me longer than the first hour, because now I’m going, Uh-oh, have I skipped it? Three hours later, I learned that it faces north-south and she was like, “Come on, come on.” I was wonderfully, innocently misinformed.



PLAYBOY: When did you go much further?

MCCONAUGHEY: When did I lose my virginity? I think I was 15, 16. It’s a great story but one I’m going to keep for myself. I came out of high school catching green lights. I made all my grades, mainly to make my mom and dad happy, so then I had the freedom to do what I wanted. I had a job that lined my back pocket. I hit all my curfews, had two great girlfriends, got a car and paid for it. I took care of business in high school. Mom and Dad were happy, and I took care of them too. I had some money put away, all this stuff. I was thinking about becoming a lawyer.

The white dress, barefoot on that road, that sequence of them making love, blood dripping from the walls, ejaculation. That was one of the first posters I had. Another was Cher. I remember unrolling the poster of Farrah Fawcett in the backseat of the car with my brother and I was like, “Pat, you know the nipple shows through,” and our mom caught me doing that, took it from me and wouldn’t let me hang it. Oh, Jessica Lange in the second *King Kong*, getting off the boat in those short-shorts. Wow. There was also a moment with Sarah Jessica Parker in *Honey-moon in Vegas*.

PLAYBOY: Did your mother contribute to your education in love and marriage?

MCCONAUGHEY: When my middle brother and I were growing up, she tried to find us girls. She’d say, “I think you’re really going to like this girl,” but it was more like, “No, Mom, *you* like that girl. We don’t want to marry someone like you.”

PLAYBOY: How did you first learn about sex?

MCCONAUGHEY: I think I was 14 when Dad and I had our birds-and-bees talk. He goes, “Hey, buddy, drop your pants. Let’s see what you got. Okay, now these right here? They’re what really make a baby. And this little guy is where the semen comes out. I’m sure the old shower head’s hit it a few times when you were playing with yourself and it felt great.” It was a man-to-man, son-to-dad talk. It was really cool and kind of took taboos off things.

PLAYBOY: What kind of advice did he give you about women?

MCCONAUGHEY: I remember him saying, “There’s going to come a time when you’re with a girl and your hands are going to start up here and then they’re going to move down to the lower parts. Anywhere along that line you feel the smallest resistance, any tension, go no further, which is when the girl is probably going to want you to go a little further. Don’t. The next time you get together, if you still like each other, you’re both comfortable with it and don’t feel that resistance, it’s okay to go a little further.” My first time getting with a girl below the waist, it took me about an hour to get from up here to down there.

PLAYBOY: Because you got resistance?

PLAYBOY: Not about acting or working in commercials?

MCCONAUGHEY: No. In 1988 I went to Australia as an exchange student. I got picked up at the airport in Sydney and got in the car of this family that had written one letter to me and I’d written one letter to them. We drive two hours to a town, population 205. I became a very unhealthy vegetarian. I started running six miles a day. I lost a lot of weight. I became celibate and concerned about racism, bigotry. I actually thought that I should become a monk. I had two albums I just wore out, INXS and a Maxi Priest album. I began doing a lot of writing. I was in a prison of my own mind. In hindsight, I was creating those disciplines to keep my sanity.

PLAYBOY: What was going on with you at the time?

MCCONAUGHEY: It was almost as though you weren’t allowed a wintertime in our family. It was always about summertime. If it’s bright out, you’re outside. Anything in life that brings you down, you just turn the page and get over it. In Australia, I was having my first winter, my time to ask the whys and hows, deal with questions of life, existence, time—things that some people skip their entire lives. I don’t believe I’d be sitting here today if I hadn’t had that year.

PLAYBOY: How did friends and family react when you returned to the States and began attending the communication school at the University of Texas at Austin?

MCCONAUGHEY: I couldn’t have a light conversation. I had to go deep, deep, deep. People were like, “Dude, you’re exhausting me. Where’s the

McConaughey we used to hang with and have a good time?” I even ran into a girl who had waited on me. She couldn’t handle me, and I don’t blame her. I didn’t know if I was going to come out of it. I didn’t know if I should. Then I started hanging with some guys. We’d go to the arcade, get high and play this racing game. We started being recruited by Delta Tau Delta. I lightened up. I was a big grade guy. I would take off on a Thursday night and go to the library from five to 11. I was thinking about being a psychiatrist. By the way, for about a year, I let everyone believe I was Australian.

PLAYBOY: You did what?



MCCONAUGHEY: I was still having fun with my Australian accent. Girls thought I was cute, and obviously I was getting my sense of humor back. When I stopped, it was like, “What happened to your accent?” School was great. There were sororities, guy friends, parties and football. I was making my grades. It was time to get a little bit of summer back again.

PLAYBOY: Did you finally end your celibacy?

MCCONAUGHEY: I held on to that for probably another year after I got back. It was about focus. It was partially religious. It was also about not seeking to go outside of oneself for confidence or affirmation of an identity, like Emerson says.

PLAYBOY: But you got an agent and started auditioning, even landing a TV commercial for the Austin daily newspaper that advertised your college team, the Texas Longhorns. Not long after that, casting director and producer Don Phillips, who worked on *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* and *Dog Day Afternoon*, met you in a bar and brought you to the attention of director Richard Linklater for *Dazed and Confused*. You didn’t have much on-camera experience.

MCCONAUGHEY: I was in an honors film course, staying behind the camera, but I had a pager and told my teachers, “Look, if I have to leave class and drive to Dallas to audition, I’m going to do that because I’ve got this opportunity to get some gigs and make a little money. I promise I’ll be here on test days.”

When I went in to audition for Rick, to me it was a job interview. I shaved, brushed my hair, pressed my shirt and pants with an iron, went in and said, “How are you, Mr. Linklater?” He’s like, “This guy is reading for Wooderson?” I sat down, read and just went. When I finished, Rick said, “You’re not this guy.” I said, “No, but I know who he is.” The first night on the set, when I came out of the trailer after hair, makeup and costume with those peach-colored pants, I wasn’t supposed to shoot anything, but Rick started lobbing ideas and questions at me, and I answered them as Wooderson. So we just shot the scene where he pulls up in the car, playing music on the eight-track. I’d been listening to a lot of 1970s music to prepare, and one of them

was the live Doors album where Jim Morrison barks to the crowd, “All right, all right, all right, all right, all right, *all right!*” So I’m sitting in the car, not thinking of that song but thinking, Who’s my man? He’s about getting high, rock and roll and picking up chicks. The first words I ever said on film, and just shot it. I don’t know where it came from. Instinctually, I knew where it came from.

PLAYBOY: Your father died while you were making the movie, right?

MCCONAUGHEY: Six days in. There’s where “Just keep livin’” came from. I put that in Wooderson’s mouth the first night back on the set. There’s a real grace to the fact that my

My first time getting with a girl below the waist, it took me about an hour to get from up here to down there.

father was alive for the start of what would become my career.

PLAYBOY: After that, you did *Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Next Generation*, *Boys on the Side* and *Lone Star* before being anointed the next Paul Newman in *A Time to Kill* opposite Sandra Bullock. The chemistry between you two was pretty evident.

MCCONAUGHEY: We dated for a while after *A Time to Kill*, and we’re still friends. She and I have another version of our relationship to put on film, and we’re looking for something. She’s not a little girl. She’s a woman. She could run a country.

PLAYBOY: What’s the smartest thing you did after *A Time to Kill*?

MCCONAUGHEY: I went off the grid. I

headed off to Peru, floated by myself down the Amazon for 21 days. I found a remote monastery, made the 13.5-mile walk to get there and rang the bell at seven that night. The next day, I walked with one of the brothers for five hours, unloading the monkeys off my back—things I was feeling guilty about, sins of the mind and choices of roles I’d made. We ended up coming back to the chapel, and I was crying. He hadn’t said a word in all this time but then said, “Me too.” He told me, “If you’re doing what you love and telling stories of humanity, it’s not for you to judge yourself on whether this is a perfect Christian role. I’m supposed to be a monk, leading my life to see God in every natural, living thing. That’s not what you’re supposed to be doing.” I let out a big sigh of relief.

PLAYBOY: Your rep took a hit in 1999 when Austin police were called to your home and reportedly saw you dancing naked and playing bongos while another man danced and clapped. You were booked on suspicion of possession of marijuana, possession of drug paraphernalia and resisting transportation.

MCCONAUGHEY: I saw the cop’s eyes get big when he identified me, and it became, “Oh, look what we’ve got here.” My first call was to my mother. I was feeling guilty because I was not raised to be in jail. What’s wrong with beating on your drums in your birthday suit? I have no regrets about the way I got there. But what’s the lesson? Shut the

window that has the beautiful scent of jasmine blowing in because it’s two in the morning and you might wake a neighbor.

PLAYBOY: You had a very active Hollywood bachelorhood before you met Brazil-born Camila Alves in 2006 and got married six years later. Did your success make relationships tricky?

MCCONAUGHEY: I had a time in my life when I was fine going from here to there, *bam-bam-bam*—healthy, fluent, single years. I had a pretty good spidey sense and got out of it without sleeping with any witches who, if I got up to take a shower, I’d be concerned they’d look through my phone or wallet—women who weren’t good enough to get away with their moves because I’d be catching

them out of the corner of my eye. When I saw the woman who is now my wife, I was at a club making margaritas at my table with friends. When she walked in wearing this aqua dress, I went, “Whoa, what is that?” I didn’t say, “Who is that?” Grace, identity, constitution, beauty—where’s that from? *What is that?* As soon as she caught my eye, a little voice goes in my head: “This is not the kind of woman you call across the room. Boy, get your ass out of that chair.” That was a big moment. The second big moment was the morning after that night. I got her to stay in the guest bedroom of my house. She kicked me out twice when I snuck down there. I came down the stairs about 10:15 A.M., and there she was in that aqua dress, holding court, laughing and talking with my hungover, shirtless guy friends we were out with the night before, while our housekeeper dished out pancakes and eggs. From there, I drove her an hour and 10 minutes to pick up her car and never once did I feel the need to inject conversation. You can’t dial up that kind of woman. I have been very faithful with my wife, very selfishly. I like being under her spell. I don’t want to break that spell.

PLAYBOY: Since the good money started pouring in, what have you been most likely to spend it on?

MCCONAUGHEY: I customize my Airstreams, but what’s great about those is that there’s not enough square footage to blow too much money. I’ve got the Canoe, the Tee-pee and the best tricked-out one, the Smithsonian, and I’ve designed every single inch. That’s my set trailer. It can do just about everything but fly.

PLAYBOY: Are there TV shows you can’t miss?

MCCONAUGHEY: The last TV show I needed to see was the first season of *True Detective*. I watched it once a week like everybody else. I didn’t see all of them. HBO’s got my favorite stuff on Sunday night, and my measure is, when is that first Monday that I go, “Oh, I forgot to watch last night”? *True Detective* season one, I couldn’t wait to get the kids to bed and go watch it with my wife. I still didn’t know what was happening—I was like, “Whoa!” I was taking the ride with everybody else.

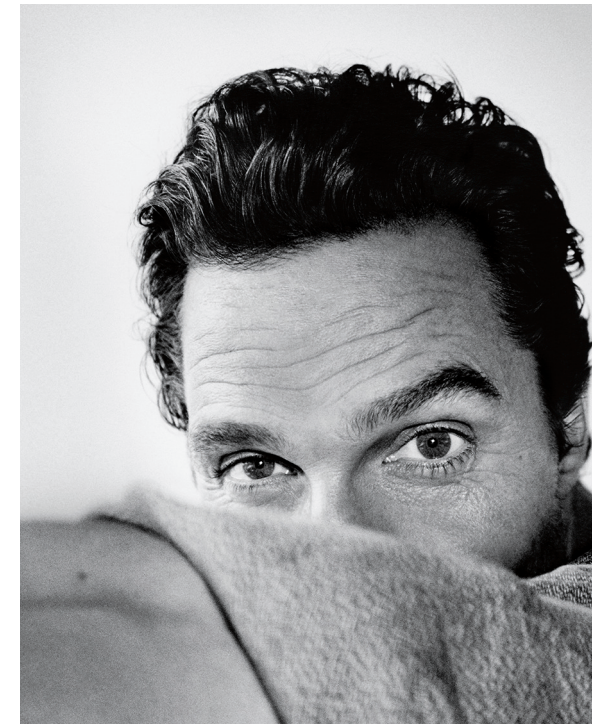


PLAYBOY: What’s the most out-there thing a fan ever sent you?

MCCONAUGHEY: This is not a funny story, but I got sent diaries from a girl writing me and me writing her back, but she wrote *as me*. It turned out to be a stalker situation.

PLAYBOY: Oh, that’s heartbreaking.

MCCONAUGHEY: She had completely created her own world. That was one of those times that was like, Whoa, wait a minute. I’ve gotten too important to somebody; they’ve created a fictional reality. That’s pretty



spooky. I think she’s better now.

PLAYBOY: Ever felt the need to carry a gun?

MCCONAUGHEY: Nuh-uh. No. I’ve felt the need to carry a bat quite a few times when I was living on my own. And I’ve camped out in places where I noticed that, when I got to my spot, I needed to get out and stand tall. I’m setting up things and making sure I set my bat right out there—because I know eyes are on me—to make them go, “Maybe we’ll pick the next guy.” That’s all. Just to make them say, “Maybe he shouldn’t be our first choice to jump.”

PLAYBOY: Ever felt guilty about your success?

MCCONAUGHEY: It never bothered me, but a

lot of the perception of me is “Oh, he just rolls out of bed and does it.”

PLAYBOY: It’s tough to imagine anyone saying that after seeing *Gold*, *Dallas Buyers Club* or *True Detective*. But plenty of people may have said it during the 2000s, when *People* named you the sexiest man alive and you often starred in romantic comedies and action comedies.

MCCONAUGHEY: People say, “The dramas you do now have to be so much harder,” but that’s not true. In a romantic comedy, you can laugh but not too loud or the audience may think you’re crazy. You can love hard, but hey, just a little less tongue. You can get angry, but don’t get too angry because you’ll sink the ship and won’t make it back when the characters get back together in the third act. I also dove into some dramas when I was doing romantic comedies—*We Are Marshall*, *Two for the Money*—but I had to take a major pay cut and fight for them. There were 10 guys ahead of me who could have taken those roles. No one was looking for me to do dramas.

PLAYBOY: According to rumor, you barely missed out on doing *Titanic*.

MCCONAUGHEY: That’s been a very apparent rumor for a long time, but I don’t think it’s true. It was one of those auditions where I left and thought I had it. I really enjoyed it. Kate Winslet really enjoyed it. That was a huge opportunity. But Cameron liked Leonardo DiCaprio better.

PLAYBOY: Did you ever turn down a drama you wished you hadn’t?

MCCONAUGHEY: Just once: *L.A. Confidential*. Before *A Time to Kill*,

out of the 100 scripts I would have done, I was being offered one. Now I had a choice. When it came to choosing scripts, I realized I had to be less impressed and more involved. I even carved that into a tree.

PLAYBOY: How satisfying is it to be Matthew McConaughey these days?

MCCONAUGHEY: I ask myself that too. I go into every situation—every film, every meeting—with incredibly high reverence for what I want to do. A lot of times, I don’t reach it, but I’m still going, “All right, that was good, though.” I’ve still got some room to go. Ceilings? They’re man-made, you know. ■