

KNIGHT IN SHINING HUMOR

*Newly married, fresh off a successful Broadway run,
ruling Twitter and starring in the new film X-Men:
Days of Future Past, Sir Patrick Stewart is having
the time of his life*

*By JOSHUA DAVID STEIN
Photography by NIGEL PARRY
Styling by JOHN MOORE*





PREVIOUS PAGE

DOLCE&GABBANA *Hat*,
\$375
JOHN VARVATOS *Black
linen jacket*, \$1,298;
shirt, \$248 BURBERRY
LONDON *Trousers*, \$350
REISS *Belt*, \$85

OPPOSITE PAGE

TZEGNA *Charcoal suit*,
\$1,495; *shirt*, \$345
JOHN VARVATOS *Oxford
lace-up shoes*, \$598

T WAS an epic powder day early last year, with sky so blue and snow so white that Alpine Meadows, Calif., looked like a full-size watercolor map of itself. Sir Patrick Stewart, at best an intermediate skier, stood at the top of a black diamond run, terrified and feeling unequal to the task. His eyes narrowed behind his ski goggles. Peering down at the steep descent, his trademark bald pate shook slowly in its helmet.

His then fiancée and now wife, Sunny Ozell—a Brooklyn-based musician and singer who was 35 at the time—stood beside him. She had been a competitive downhill racer since childhood but Stewart, then 72, had begun to ski only a few years earlier. He had instead spent his youth and adulthood playing space captains, flawed kings, paraplegic sages and tortured Shakespearean souls. None of them had skied and so neither had he.

“Here’s the plan,” explained Ozell to comfort him. “We’re going to stop halfway down the run. OK?”

But when she turned to hear his response, Stewart was a quickly receding blur, caroming through the snow with a rooster tail rising behind him.

“Patrick!” cried Ozell. “Wait!”

T'S NEARLY a year later, a few hours before Stewart will have to make his way to call time at Broadway’s Cort Theatre, where the actor is starring opposite his good friend Sir Ian McKellen in not one but two emotionally draining and linguistically daunting plays—“No Man’s Land” by Harold

Pinter and “Waiting for Godot” by Samuel Beckett, both playwrights masters of pathos and patter. Stewart settles into his seat at a cozy lunch cafe in Park Slope, Brooklyn. Wearing a black leather jacket, black fedora and a zip-up sweater, he looks much more quinquagenarian than septuagenarian. He’s a regular here—he and Ozell live around the corner—so no one is freaking out that one of the best actors of the 20th century and an Officer of the Order of the British Empire is about to dine in their midst. Stewart himself is pleasantly informal, just another English sir hanging out in Brooklyn.

“Can you hang this up for me?” he asks the tattooed waiter, handing him his hat. “I have nowhere to put it.” It is the most ordinary of phrases, but such is the power of Stewart’s voice that it seems to portend an existential crisis.

“Sure,” says the waiter, taking the hat and, just perhaps, providing a mote of metaphysical solace.

Hat hung, prerequisite English apologies made (for momentary lateness, for appearance, etc.), Stewart soon takes me back to that day in California. Explaining his rash headlong rush down the mountain, he says, “I knew if I stayed at the top for another ten seconds, I wouldn’t go down. So I just went for it.” As he picked up speed and struggled to find his skis’ edges, Stewart recalls, “I gave myself the same cues I do when I panic on stage: Don’t let the fear take over. Don’t let it possess you.”

To look upon Stewart’s distinguished profile—jaw set like a marble bust of a Roman emperor—and to hear his >

voice—so deep, resonant and sure it adds about 50 tons of gravitas to anything he says (you should hear him order a cobb salad and a glass of sauvignon blanc; it's moving)—it's hard to believe that beneath so placid and stoic a surface is a vascular system of cracks, crevices and self-doubt. But if you want to understand Stewart and his work, you must understand his relationship to fear. And to understand his relationship to fear, you must go beyond the mountaintop, back more than three decades to the evening of June 30, 1981, opening night of Shakespeare's psycho-tragedy "The Winter's Tale" at England's Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

By then an associate artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company for 14 years, an accomplished but not A-list actor, Stewart had clung to the security of safe terrain.

"I had worked eyeball to eyeball with really great actors who could truly expose themselves," he says, spearing the panko-crust-ed poached egg in his salad. "But I couldn't. I didn't know how, for I felt I had something to protect." The bright yellow yolk disappeared into the frisée.

But as King Leontes, one of Shakespeare's least likable characters, a psychotic misanthrope driven to carnage from mad jealousy, Stewart "couldn't fake it anymore."

At first, he was terrified.

"I told a few people about the role and they said, 'Oh my god, no. You don't want to do this.' They said, 'The audience will hate you. There's no empathy towards you. Actors can't wait to finish a run of this play.' The role is known as the actor's graveyard."

When Stewart told the play's director, Ronald Eyre—who was also a practicing psychologist—that he didn't want the crown, the actor says Eyre replied, "Here's why you should take it, Patrick: The most important elements of this man are actually already inside you. You have the murderousness, the hate, the anger, the rage, the horrible personal insecurity. They're all there. All you have to do is just let them out. And if you do, I will never leave your side."

"I still get emotional speaking about it," Stewart says. "It made me realize I had been good, but I could have been so much better. I could have been much more brave, done so much more. All I had to do was let it all go."

Twenty years after opening night, Sir Alec Guinness wrote in his autobiography that Stewart's Leontes was "easily the finest performance of the part I have ever seen. There was a man who had actually stepped into the jaws of hell of jealousy." Following the performance, one of Stewart's friends told him, "What was happening on stage was far too personal for public consumption." Stewart had finally faced his fear and was therefore freed. Call it catharsis-upon-Avon.

"I spent years holding that stuff in," says Stewart. "After that, there was no going back."

THIS COURTING of and mastery over fear is pretty much Stewart's signature. A good part of his career has been played out in the theatrical borderlands, a not-entirely-welcoming landscape where panic and potential ruin lurk. He had started as one thing (a >

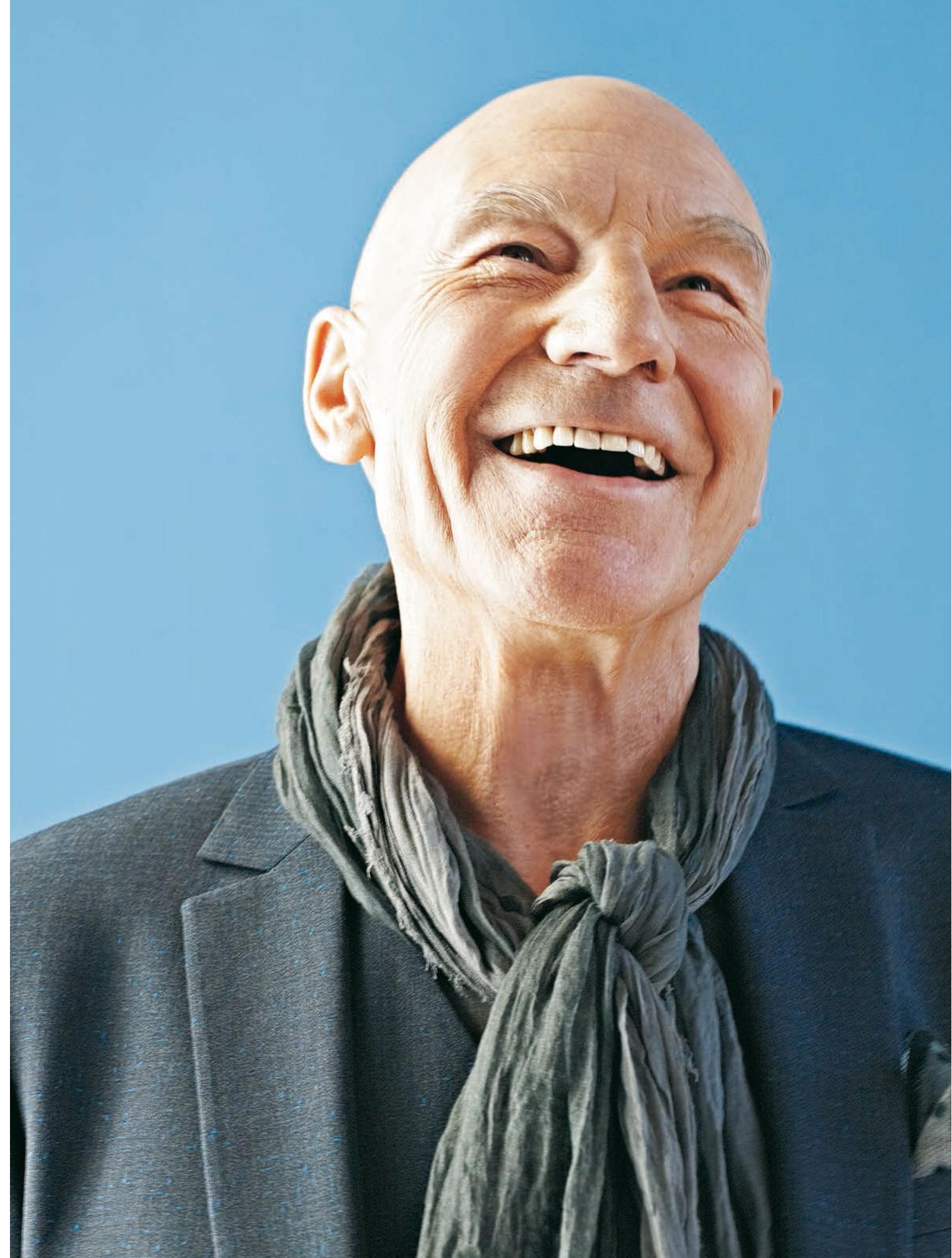
OPPOSITE PAGE

JOHN VARVATOS *Suit, price upon request; henley, \$198; shirt, \$248; ombre scarf, \$328*
ERMENEGILDO ZEGNA COUTURE *Pocket square, \$100*

PHOTOGRAPHER *Nigel Parry*
FASHION STYLIST *John Moore/
Bernstein & Andriulli*
GROOMER *Joanna Pensinger/
Exclusive Artists Management*

LOCATION

*The Refectory at
The High Line Hotel,
New York City*



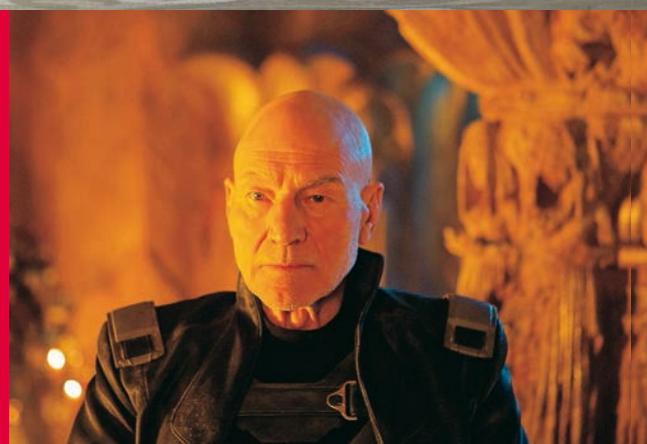


“THERE’S GREAT PERIL IN TAKING YOURSELF TOO SERIOUSLY.”

JOAN MARCUS (“NO MAN’S LAND”); ALAN MARKFIELD (X-MEN); EVERETT COLLECTION (“STAR TREK”); KRISTOPHER LONG/COMEDY CENTRAL (“THE COLBERT REPORT”)



TO SIR, WITH LOVE
Clockwise from above: Stewart and Ian McKellen in “No Man’s Land” at Broadway’s Cort Theatre, 2013; as Professor Charles Xavier in *X-Men: Days of Future Past*; as Captain Jean-Luc Picard in “*Star Trek: The Next Generation*”; making a cameo on “*The Colbert Report*” in March 2014



journeyman Shakespearean player at the Royal Shakespeare Company); became something else entirely (a science-fiction icon as an intergalactic captain in the *Star Trek* franchise); and now ... well, now he’s all over the place: on Broadway; in summer blockbuster films, including this month’s *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, where he reprises his role as the telepathic geneticist Professor Charles Xavier; in indie flicks like Stephen Belber’s *Match*, which recently premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival; on “The Colbert Report” for a hilarious cameo; and in a viral photo sending up British Prime Minister David Cameron’s Twitter release of a more-earnest-than-thou picture of himself supposedly talking on the phone with President Barack Obama.

At 73, when many former leading men are relegated to playing waning nursing-home patients or patiently waiting for their lifetime achievement Oscar—the Hollywood equivalent of a gold watch send-off—Stewart’s career seems ever more varied, ever more energetic, ever more daring.

“At this point in my life,” he says, “I’m looking for the challenges to get bigger, not smaller.”

That gutsiness extends to his personal life. In 2008, while in New York City playing *Macbeth* in a Brooklyn Academy of Music production, Stewart met Ozell at Franny’s, a neighborhood pizzeria where she was moonlighting as a waitress. Things moved quickly. But even as the romance blossomed, Stewart faced that old Leontine specter: fear.

“I had a real sense of failure,” says the actor, who had been married twice before. “Was I willing to take the risk of screwing it up again?”

Yet take the risk he did, wedding Ozell in a September ceremony officiated by McKellen, who had become a minister for the occasion.

Stewart’s joy over the decision is plainly evident. Even more than his bald head, what’s most noticeable about him in person is a delightful jauntiness to his step. He seems genuinely to be having a blast lately. His epic Twitter silliness (as @SirPatStew, he’s amassed more than 1 million followers) along with his classic self-parodying cameo on Ricky Gervais’ series “Extras” have made him something of a folk hero, à la Bill Murray, but with the added stature of knighthood.

“There’s great peril,” he says, “in taking yourself too seriously.”

After his Broadway run, Stewart and Ozell would be off on a long-delayed honeymoon to Stewart’s house in the Cotswolds.

“With a bit of luck,” he says, excitedly, “the daffodils will still be out, in the gardens and in the lanes.” He pauses, eyes twinkling. “Everywhere.”

As he fetches his fedora and zips up his jacket, Stewart’s body is in bitter-cold Brooklyn, but in his mind, it is a bright and sunny spring day in the English countryside. Patrick Stewart is happy, in love and fearless as ever. ☺