

NATIONAL TREASURE

*'It's a weird thing to say, but I don't want to have to act.' No, Nicolas Cage isn't bemoaning his professional raison d'être, he's redefining it. In an exclusive interview with **THE RAKE**, the Oscar winner talks to **NICK SCOTT** about tripping with felines, Las Vegas's tragic night, and drinking on the job...**

photography **simon emmett** fashion direction **jo grzeszczuk**

Produced by **Flower Avenue**

**O.K., only once, but we're talking really, really drinking here.*

Opposite page:
Denim cotton jacket, **Tom Ford at Harrods**; blue cotton denim shirt, **Emma Willis**; airforce blue wool travel trousers, **Richard James**; brown wool twill, small tile print tie, **Drake's**; charcoal grey wool and yak pocket handkerchief, **Anderson & Sheppard Haberdashery**; black ceramic Royal Oak perpetual calendar timepiece, **Audemars Piguet**.

Bracelets, property of **Nicolas Cage**.

“I didn’t know he had the eight-ball of cocaine strapped to his leg! That was news to me! And if I had known that, I never would have grabbed the intercom and told everybody I was the captain and that I was losing control of the aircraft because I wasn’t feeling well...”

At 53, Nicolas Cage’s voice still takes on a mischievous cadence when he talks about his youthful follies. This particular yarn concerns the time he and Charlie Sheen pulled off a stunt that today would see them quickly swapping their civvies for orange jumpsuits. “It was just kids goofing off — I was in my early twenties and so was Charlie,” Cage says. “But yeah, I did that, and the plane was not losing control — it was perfectly steady — and understandably the captain was very angry with me. And when we landed there were airport police there to greet us at the door, and I talked us out of it and they finally let us go. But when I got into the car with Charlie in San Francisco, and he showed me what was wrapped around his ankle with a rubber band...”

Another of Cage’s memorable anecdotes today begins, ominously enough, with Tom Waits, for reasons Cage has never quite ascertained, giving him a bag of hallucinogenic mushrooms. “Tom was one of my best friends for many years — we had one of those relationships that was full of mischief — and for some reason he gave me a bag of mushrooms and I didn’t even know what to do with these things. So they were in my refrigerator and they were dried out, but my cat, Lewis, whenever I opened the refrigerator, would jump in and try to grab them. I don’t know why he was so attracted to them — it was like catnip! He really wanted those mushrooms. One time he got some and got into them, and I chased him, but he grabbed some with his mouth and started eating them. So I thought, ‘Well, I’d better do them with him, I guess’. So we did that and it was kind of an amazing experience. I remember I was in bed and he was on the nightstand staring at me, and I was staring back at him, and we could not stop looking at each other. We had this, like, deep connection like we were brothers or something. I haven’t done it again since — it was a one-off.”

Cage is no closed book. Later he’ll tell me, under precisely zero journalistic pressure, in relation to his decision to move to Las Vegas in 2012, “At the time I was digging myself out of a rabbit hole and there was no state tax there, so that helped”. But there’s something more than just candour going on here. A glimpse of the open floodgate that straddles Cage’s torrent of consciousness is offered by the commentary he gives when scouring the darker crannies of his memory, even when he’s

There have been phases during which the public, mistakenly, has assumed him not to be in on the joke.

relating his most embarrassing moment to strangers. The story in question takes place on the night of his high school prom. “My date was a beautiful girl. She was my next-door neighbour. And I think her name was... A... er... She changed her name, but it was A...” [Sighs] “...At first I think her name was Elizabeth Ashley... not Elizabeth Ashley, it was Ashley Trimble or Trimbley or Ashley or...” Eventually he re-rails. “Anyway, she went on to become a model. I couldn’t believe she wanted me to take her to the prom. First of all she was a couple of grades older than me, and secondly she was the most beautiful girl I’d ever seen and I was a bit of a nerd. But I went, and I had to cash all my bonds — my grandmother had given me and my brothers bonds, and one of my elder brothers got a beautiful stereo, the other one got a

down payment on a car, but I needed mine to rent a tuxedo and rent a limousine and get a great pair of shoes, because I was going to take the most beautiful woman in the world out to the prom. And then later

she kissed me. And I got so excited that I actually threw up on my shoes, and then I ran away. Then the limousine said I couldn’t get in the car because I had vomit on my shoes, so I walked home about five miles, and that was the end of my prom night.”

The Rake’s meeting with Cage — at least, the business segment, before post-shoot drinks at a Sunset Boulevard hostelry charmingly called *The Pikey* — takes place in a small house in the Hollywood Hills, where Cage turns up in a long-sleeved Henley shirt, jeans, boots, and a couple more eye-catching additions, including a leopard-print Rolex Cosmograph Daytona. From the start he’s raucously sociable and consistently funny. And that’s intentionally funny, for the record, which is important to note, because there have been phases during which the public, mistakenly, has assumed him not to be in on the joke.

“For a while there, it was the three Cs — castles, comic books and cars,” he once said of a period during which the media fixated on his lavish spending. The first C refers to his quixotic accumulation of property, including Midford Castle in Somerset, England, and Schloss Neidstein Castle in Bavaria, not to mention mansions in New Orleans and Rhode Island and an entire island in the Bahamas. The second C refers to his stash of *Superman* comics that netted \$2.1m at auction in 2011 (Cage named his second son Kal-El in 2005 after Superman’s Kryptonian name). The third C was a hot topic in court during a 2007 counter-suit from his former business manager (whom Cage had accused of financial incompetence), who stated that 22 cars, including nine Rolls-Royces, featured in a wild shopping spree, along



Mocha brown cotton corduroy, double-breasted silk shawl collar sport coat and navy cotton silk Vail western shirt, both Ralph Lauren Purple Label; navy linen pocket handkerchief, Anderson & Sheppard Haberdashery.

Lock Hatters rabbit fur felt bespoke fedora with chiselled leather band; yellow gold special edition leopard Rolex Daytona timepiece with leopard print leather strap, property of Nicolas Cage.



Brown mélange wool western jacket, **Kingsman at Mr Porter**; slate grey modal and cotton shirt, **Tom Ford at Harrods**; black cotton denim jeans, **Acne at Mr Porter**; chocolate brown wool, paisley printed tie, **Anderson & Sheppard Haberdashery**; brown leather belt, **Harrods of London**.

Lock Hatters rabbit fur felt bespoke fedora with chiselled leather band for Mr. Nicolas Cage. Yellow gold special edition leopard Rolex Daytona timepiece with leopard print leather strap, property of Nicolas Cage.

with four yachts — one each for the Caribbean, Mediterranean, Newport Beach, California, and Rhode Island. The Shah of Iran's Lamborghini and a Gulfstream jet also count among Cage's purchases over the years. (Strictly speaking, the fourth C was 'cartilage' — in 2007, Cage outbid Leonardo DiCaprio for a 67-million-year-old skull of a Tyrannosaurus Bataar, paying \$270,000 for it: his most eccentric purchase, surely, even if his acquisition of a pair of albino King Cobras is just a rumour.)

But all of this — along with the 'Nicolas Cage freakout' montages on YouTube; more on which later — detracts from the fact that Cage, as well as being aware of the joke, and indeed in on it, is also extremely serious about the business of making movies. He has a curious habit, despite having only one

directorial credit to his name (2002's *Sonny*), of referring to himself as a filmmaker, which is fine: no different, when you think about it, to a bankable guitarist calling him- or herself a musician.

He's also a genuine movie scholar, something hinted at by the other conspicuous part of the ensemble he's arrived in today: the cowboy hat seen in the shots on these pages, produced — perhaps surprisingly — by Lock & Co. of London. The hat is made from rabbit-fur felt with a chiselled leather band and interior customised, embroidered sweatband. Their fellow royal warrant holders Hand & Lock embroidered the stitching.

"I've been going to Lock & Co. for a million years," Cage says. "Whenever I need a new hat and I'm in London, I go in and say hello. In the summer I like to wear a Panama-style straw hat, and they've always had wonderful examples of those." Today's headwear? "I'm a big Sergio Leone and Charles Bronson fan, and watch *Once Upon a Time in the West* annually," he says. "When I look at Bronson as Harmonica in that movie, the hat he wears is so perfectly balanced — many times you get a cowboy hat or a Western-style hat and it's just too big... You know, the silliness of the ten-gallon hat — where I live, in Nevada, there's a lot of those. Whereas what Bronson's wearing in that movie is beautifully balanced and quite elegant. So I said to Lock, 'Would you be willing to build me this hat?' and gave them references and pictures from the movie. They asked if I wanted the chips in it and I said, 'Absolutely! I want it to be Mr. Bronson's hat in that film.' I take it wherever I go, and it gives me a lot of joy and happiness to wear it because I'm such a fan."

What is it about the trammel-faced gunslinger he so admires? "I don't think anyone had more power, in stillness and silence on camera, than Bronson. The way he holds the screen without doing

much of anything — you just can't take your eyes off him. I've been a fan since I was a boy growing up in California in the early seventies and late sixties. Whenever his movies would come on I was always captivated. He had a big influence on me."

It was his father who first immersed the young Nicolas Kim Coppola — his uncle is Francis Ford Coppola, making Sofia his cousin, while Jason Schwartzman is another cousin — in the world of film. "That was definitely part of my formative experience," Cage says. "He'd been a university professor when he was still with us — he taught at Long Beach State and then became Dean of Creative Arts at San Francisco State. So I grew up with a professional in the house who was interested in the fine arts. He had a taste for experimental movies from all

cultures, so I grew up watching F.W. Murnau's *Metropolis*, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, Federico Fellini's *Juliet of the Spirits*. These movies really terrified me and also blew my mind and informed me. They

got into my psyche in my formative years, and I would have bad dreams about them. He also took me to the theatre. I remember seeing the very first *Planet of the Apes* in a drive-in theatre, and that really affected me, too. The end, with the Statue of Liberty and Charlton Heston, really freaked me out. And then he took me to see Bruce Lee, which was also a mind-blowing experience because it was really seeing a superhero come to life."

A career that began with him changing his surname from Coppola in order to separate his identity from that of his famous uncle (though the young Cage did appear in two of Coppola's films, *Rumble Fish* and *Peggy Sue Got Married*) has always been eclectic, and the forthcoming additions to his C.V. continue in that vein. There's *Mom and Dad*, a horror *The Independent* described as "*The Purge* meets *The Ice Storm*", which Cage says is his favourite film of those he's made in the past 10 years; *Primal* is a thriller he's due to start shooting soon ("We're going to Puerto Rico, to San Juan, to film that, but it's just been hit by the hurricane there, so that's going to be an experience in and of itself"); and the indie thriller *Between Worlds* is in the editing process.

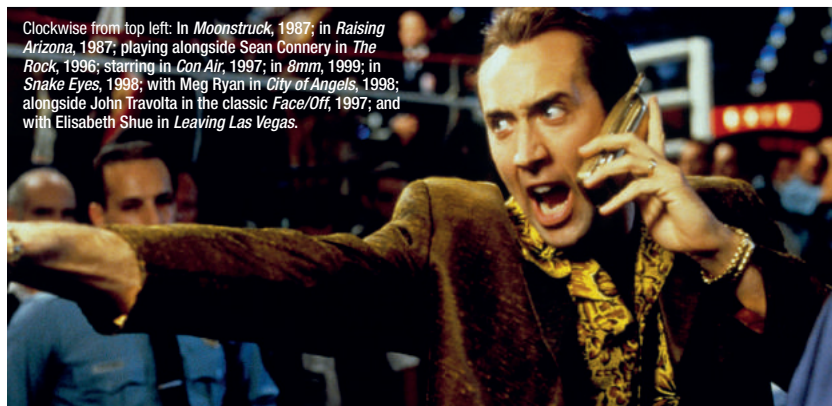
"I have another movie I'm very excited about, called *Mandy*, which I shot in Belgium with Panos Cosmatos directing," he says. "He's a very adventuresome filmmaker with an extraordinarily original approach. In that movie there are some Bronson influences as well. I'm excited about it primarily because of the director's vision. I'd seen a movie he made called *Beyond the Black Rainbow*, which absolutely terrified me. I couldn't sleep, it really got in my head. It's not easy for a film or any work of art to do that."



This page and opposite:
Black leather and
shearling coat, **Enlist**;
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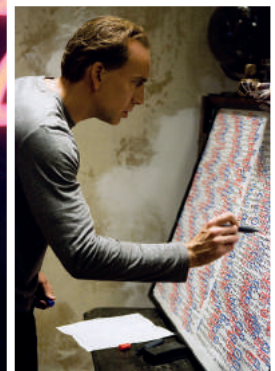
Lock Hatters rabbit fur
felt bespoke fedora with
chiselled leather band,
property of *Nicolas Cage*.





Clockwise from top left: In *Moonstruck*, 1987; in *Raising Arizona*, 1987; playing alongside Sean Connery in *The Rock*, 1996; starring in *Con Air*, 1997; in *8mm*, 1999; in *Snake Eyes*, 1998; with Meg Ryan in *City of Angels*, 1998; alongside John Travolta in the classic *Face/Off*, 1997; and with Elisabeth Shue in *Leaving Las Vegas*.

REX FEATURES



Clockwise from top left: With Angelina Jolie in *Gone in 60 Seconds*, 2000; starring in *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, 2001, with Penélope Cruz; playing twin brothers in *Adaptation*, 2002; in the blockbuster *National Treasure: Book of Secrets*, 2007; in Marvel's *Kick-Ass*, 2010; as Johnny Blaze in *Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance*, 2011; in *Season of the Witch*, 2011; in *Knowing*, 2009; in *Bangkok Dangerous*, 2008; in *The Wicker Man*, 2006.

Having been around now for 53 years, it takes a lot to rattle me, and he did. [*Mandy*] is a revenge story — my character, Red Miller, is madly in love with Mandy, who is a poetic woman who paints and is the love of his life. Then this religious cult burns her alive in front of me, so I go on a tear and go through all these different transformations. It should be unlike anything I've ever done before."

A lot of the movies Cage does are unlike anything he's done, at least recently if not ever. He is often criticised for his choices — 2006's *The Wicker Man*, 2008's *Bangkok Dangerous*, and 2009's *Knowing* to name three — but then he's also given us 1987's *Raising Arizona* and *Moonstruck*, David Lynch's unsettlingly brilliant *Wild at Heart*, the ridiculously brilliant *The Rock* (1996) and the brilliantly ridiculous *Face/Off* (1997), to name just a handful. And, while he

acknowledges that some less opportune choices have been made, he'll never regret the creative path he's trodden. "I've always been eclectic in terms of my tastes, and I always

see myself still as a student of film acting and film performance," he says. "And by that I mean I'm going to take risks and push myself in directions with the hope that I will learn something in the process, which is why you'll see me go from something like *Leaving Las Vegas* to a movie like *The Rock* — two entirely different genres. I'm always experimenting in trying to find different ways of expressing myself as a filmmaker. There's a willingness not necessarily to be irreverent but to be willing to take chances that may not always go to the beat of everybody else."

He's also the first to admit that even A-list Hollywood actors — the antitheses, one might think, of beggars — can't always be choosers. "There's always going to be the matter of, 'What is the best opportunity on the table at any time, in terms of the writing of the material and the auspices — who's directing it, who am I working with. Sometimes it can be as simple as, 'I enjoyed working with this person before'. I did *Primal* with Nicholas Powell and I had a great experience with him, so I want to work with him again. But by and large it has more to do with, Do I have the life experience and the emotional wisdom to play this part and not have to enforce it, but really just have that aura of the character without having to think too much about it? That's what I'm looking for, that's my main criterion when I choose a character to play in a film."

His current professional priorities were neatly fulfilled, he says, in the 2013 thriller *Joe*, in which he plays a troubled ex-con who becomes the unlikely protector of a 15-year-old boy (Tye Sheridan) with an abusive father — precisely

because of the "emotional nakedness", as he puts it, that the portrayal entailed. "When I read that script I knew right away. It's a weird thing to say, but I don't want to have to act. When people say 'best actor' that's kind of like 'best liar' because, as Olivier said, 'What is acting but lying and what is good lying but convincing lying?' I try to feel, I try to believe and channel and use my imagination so that I'm not really acting. With *Joe* I really wanted it to be as me as possible, and to try to put into the character my feelings of what my life has been like with my boys, and how I feel about family. The relationship *Joe* had with Tye Sheridan's character was really as close to me as I think anything I've done, so in that regard that's what I meant by emotional nakedness. I wasn't acting, really, I was recreating my true feelings."

Cage, you get the impression, wishes he could take in more of everyday life, in order that quotidian reality might, by osmosis, make that "emotional nakedness" more

informed, more nuanced. His personal narrative has a few twists. He was married to Patricia Arquette for six years, Lisa Marie Presley for 107 days; he has a 26-year-old son, Weston, with the model and actress Christina Fulton; there's been the odd scuffle, including a recent one with Mötley Crüe's lead singer, Vince Neil, whom he confronted for an alleged assault on a woman outside a Vegas casino. But these days he lives a simple life, he says, despite last year having separated from his third wife, Alice Kim, after 11 years of marriage. "I'm living in Las Vegas, and I'm not hidden behind a gate somewhere, I'm not on a yacht somewhere, and there's a lot of people that go through places and hotels and casinos. I'm not a gambler, but I live in a city where I'm going to meet people, maybe sometimes 300 people a day, and it's a different reaction every time, and some of the experiences are great experiences and some of them are not. I have to learn how to observe it and try to meet people well or otherwise just stay in my house."

As a surrogate to 'ordinary' life experience, he tries to absorb the world via voracious reading of newspapers. "I want to be a part of the zeitgeist, and I need to be current," he says. "In *Joe*, my life experience only went so far, and then I'm thinking about, What story did I just read about in the newspaper that will get me to a place where I can play this scene and really mean it? There's this scene in a bar where there's the bar brawl with the guy who's picking on the kid, and I go nuts on him and push his face into the bar. For that scene I thought about this little boy who fell into a pit of wild

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Brown mélange wool western jacket, **Kingsman at Mr Porter**; slate grey modal and cotton shirt, **Tom Ford at Harrods**; black cotton denim jeans, **Acne at Mr Porter**; chocolate brown wool, paisley printed tie, **Anderson & Sheppard Haberdashery**; black alligator leather boots, **Berluti**; brown leather belt, **Harrods of London**.

Lock Hatters rabbit fur felt bespoke fedora with chiselled leather band, *property of Nicolas Cage*.





This page and opposite:
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Yellow gold special edition leopard Rolex Daytona timepiece with leopard print leather strap. Lock Hatters rabbit fur felt bespoke fedora with chiselled leather band, all property of Nicolas Cage.

dogs at a zoo and nobody was there — that newspaper story really upset me. I even mentioned the story in the scene — that wasn't in the script. When I'm looking at the news I'm getting ideas and also staying current and being a member of the international community because I'm reading things about what's happening around the world and then putting it into my work, so I don't have to act — I can feel it instead."

At the time of our conversation, Cage hasn't had to look far from his own doorstep for emotional stimulus, and there's something distinctly American about the way his introduction of the topic — the Las Vegas shooting in October — assumes no knowledge of it outside the U.S. "We had a horrible thing just happen in Vegas. I'd been away working, and just got home and that night I'm pulling into my house and this whole thing has happened. I find it interesting what people say about it, because it really affected the whole community. I don't think it's too difficult to understand what's going on there. I think everyone's looking for a motive — was he politically involved, was he insane — and the bottom line is he was a gambler, a rich guy who was making a million dollars a year playing cards or video poker or whatever it was, looking for the next high. Not all but some of these gamblers can really, like, take extraordinary risks and do atrocious things just to see if they can get away with it."

As well as life's obstinate narrative, Cage draws inspiration from avid observation of others' acting performances. A prime example is the movie that would be the first to roll off the tongue of people with a passing knowledge of his career.

"With *Leaving Las Vegas*, I looked at all the great alcoholic performances — *Days of Wine and Roses* with Jack Lemmon, *The Lost Weekend* with Ray Milland, Kris Kristofferson in *A Star is Born*, Dudley Moore in *Arthur*. They were all excellent and I got a little something from each of them, always something different. Kristofferson was always so positive in that movie, even though he was suicidal and alcoholic; with Dudley Moore it was the issue of not being able to control your volume when you're speaking, and being overly loud. They're all things I put into it. But then I saw Albert Finney in John Huston's *Under the Volcano*... In the first two minutes of that movie, I knew that guy was really drunk — I was like, wow, that is totally believable."

Cage won the 1996 Best Actor Oscar for the film, and there was a clue as to how he added extra authenticity to the part in his acceptance speech. Having thanked director Mike Figgis and co-star Elisabeth Shue, and between acknowledging the author who wrote the novel on which the film is based, John O'Brien, and the producer Annie Stewart, Cage slips in the name Tony Dingman, a man who had spent some time working in an unexplained capacity for the Coppola family and whom Cage describes as having been, at the time, "a drunk and a poet".

Cage's unofficial 'acting coach' throughout the movie, Dingman supplied him with relevant literature to read — Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, Charles Bukowski's less lucid ramblings, William Holden bios — but also prodded him to take 'method' to new heights. "I knew I was going to cherry-pick my moments where I wanted to have maybe a little

bit of alcohol,” Cage says. “It was only a four-week shoot, and I knew I couldn’t drink a lot or every day because I’d blow up my ability to memorise my lines, but Tony Dingman was always with me and I’d watch him and study him and then occasionally say, ‘Well, maybe for this one scene I’ll have a shot of bourbon and see what happens’. And it was very effective. It gave the performance an enormous level of authenticity.”

Just a shot of bourbon? “Well, there is one scene in the movie where I’m going ballistic, and I’m throwing the blackjack table over in the casino, and for that one I was really out of my head — I mean, well gone. In fact, Tony and I were crawling upstairs on all fours afterwards trying to get up to the hotel rooms, and passed out without even getting inside the hotel rooms, so we really took it to another level.”

Does that fit into a carefully acquired acting technique — “operatic styles, larger-than-life” — that Cage has dubbed “Western kabuki”? He says: “It could fall under

the Western kabuki umbrella, but it was very method. I mean, the real deal. You’re basically seeing a real blackout on film with that, which is where I wanted to get to, but it’s not the sort of thing you can do every day when you’re filming. You have to be in control as to when you want to choose to be out of control. One thing about that particular movie that I’ve noticed is that there are two responses to it: some people watch it and want to have a martini, other people watch it and never want to drink again. I’ve been both those people, and had my own troubles and demons I’ve contended with throughout my life. When I’m between movies I can be a little self-destructive — not with hard drugs or anything, but I’ve had too much to drink at times, and with that movie I think I went through a process of videotaping myself in that condition so that I could recall and refer to that sort of behaviour.”

That scene is one of many that has made Cage subject to another running joke — another on which he is most certainly ‘in’: internet clip compilations along the lines of ‘Nicolas Cage Losing His Shit’. It’s a phenomenon he calls the “meme-ification” of public life. “There have been so many different lifetimes for me already as a filmmaker. When I started out with *Raising Arizona* and *Birdy*, you know, it was one personality the public had, and then when I got into *The Rock* and *Con Air* it was another personality the public had, but then when the internet happened, then it became somebody else entirely. I can’t say that I could even begin to understand really why there’s this sort of fascination with me on the internet, except that maybe on some level people are getting off vicariously watching me do

the things I think we all feel we’d like to do at the office, but we have the ability to control ourselves and filter. A lot of my work speaks to that id release where people may want to scream at the top of their lungs or make crazy eyes or faces. When you look at it on an internet meme, it looks like something else entirely, but if you look at the whole movie leading up to it there’s a lot of thought gone into how the character got there.”

Does, at the risk of sounding like an armchair psychiatrist, he feel a personal need to express this stuff? “To be totally blunt, my childhood was pretty intense. My mother was in and out of hospitals, and sometimes I felt a bit lost, but it gave me a depth — it gave me a story to tell, and that’s a story I can apply myself to in many different kinds of characters, because there’s an emotional weight there that I can utilise and express and hopefully get some relief from. That’s part of the reason why I chose to become a film actor — I needed to put the destructive and negative into a productive and positive place.”

Does that explain why Cage’s IMDb profile takes an eternity to scroll down? “I need the structure of work,” he says. “Actors need a camera. Actors need a director. Actors need a cast and a crew in order to do their work, and that means we have to travel and travel again. It’s not as simple as just going to work nine-to-five and applying yourself and getting home from work and having a scotch or a bourbon. The issue is when you’re filmmaking and then you get off work there’s this vacuum. A month can go by and before you know it it’s a bottle of red wine at noon and then it’s just like, ‘Well, what’s next?’ The kids are in school so they’re not there... That’s something I need to work on in terms of getting more books in my life, and getting back to reading, getting back to some sort of yoga or something, because the work is what keeps me in balance, in harmony, otherwise it can get self-destructive. It’s a little hard on me in terms of having to be away from my kids, which I didn’t have to be as often when they’re in kindergarten, but now my youngest son is in seventh grade it’s not as easy to travel with them.”

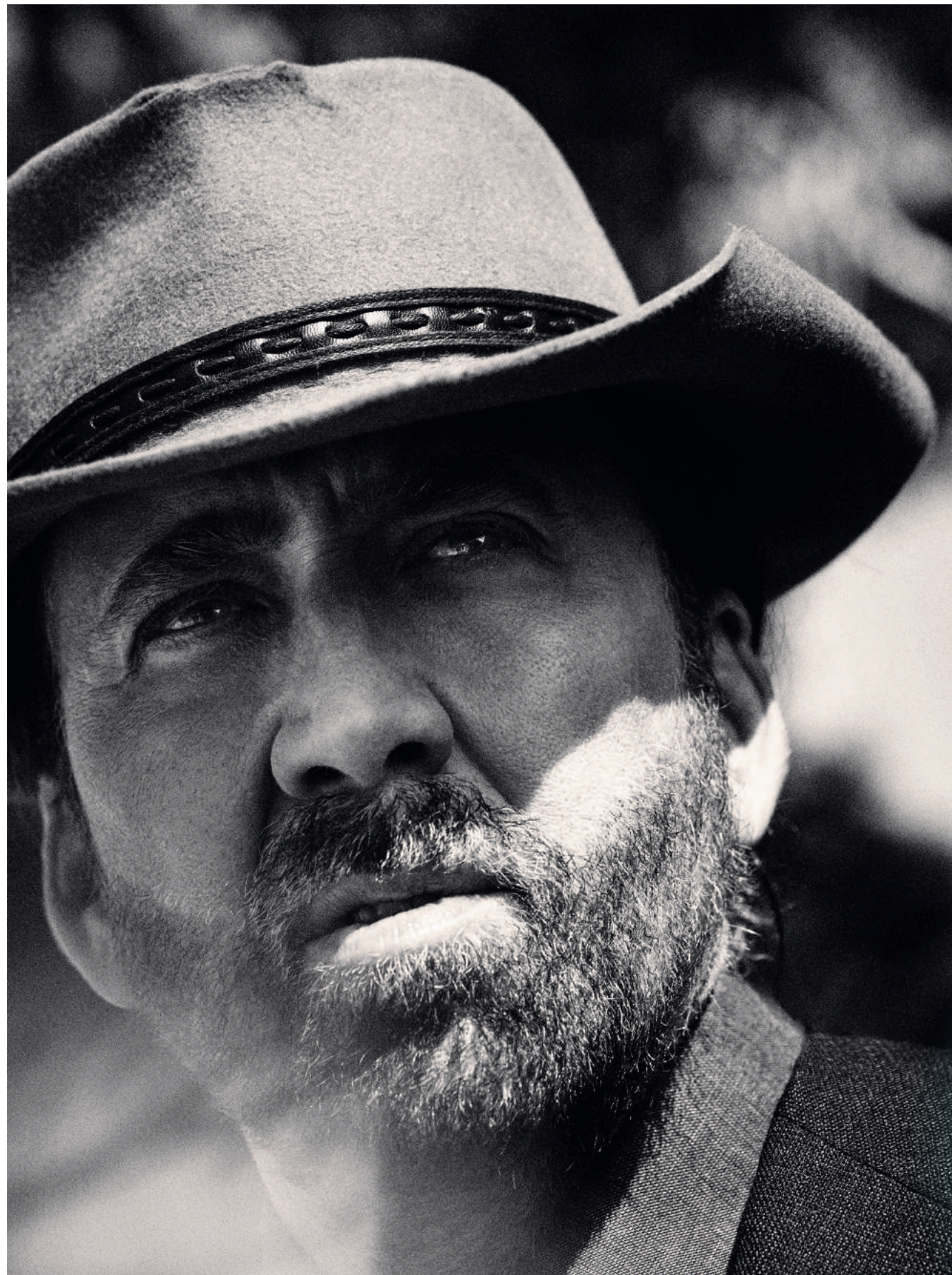
Will his prodigious output continue indefinitely? “Yeah, I think so, I don’t think I’m going to stop. I think this is it for me — I’m going to keep going. I worked with Christopher Lee on *Season of the Witch* and he was well into his eighties. I think I would aspire to get there, to keep working.” If, somewhere in Cage’s to-be-unfurled movie portfolio, some kind of re-enactment of that aircraft moment with Charlie Sheen could be worked in, we’ll be very grateful indeed. ■

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PRODUCTION: MICHAEL POWER / FLOWER AVE.
PHOTOGRAPHER'S ASSISTANT: SAM FORD
FASHION ASSISTANT: VERONICA PEREZ
GROOMING: CHERI KEATING @THE WALL GROUP